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Introduction

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1. Design | Writing

Web Pages That Suck (<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com>) originally launched in 1996 and has, every year since, sought out the worst designed sites on the web for its annual competition of the “worst websites” of the year. The site is an archive of awfulness—overly busy pages with flashing lights and little attention to directing a visitor’s attention to navigation. While website design handbooks and online guides have proliferated since the mid-90s, Web Pages That Suck served as an early useful guide for those of us working with students on fledgling web pages. It also introduced to us the concept of web *design*, primarily by showing us examples of when such design clearly fails. The site offers lots of advice for “good” web design but seems to hold to its maxim that “Bad web design is like pornography—you know it when you see it. Unless the bad design is on your web site.” Our argument in this special issue is that our field’s conceptualization and consideration of “design” as an intrinsic part of composing processes, particularly in multimedia writing environments, is much more robust than “knowing it when you see it” might suggest.

Indeed, Walter Benjamin’s prescient figure of the “author as producer” has given way to the “author as designer,” at once a wordsmith, a typesetter, and a marketer who is expected to demonstrate some fluency with fonts and layouts as well as branding and publishing platforms. In 1996, designer Michael Rock published an influential essay entitled “Designer as Author,” which uses Foucault’s critique of authorship to consider what is at stake in calling the designer an author. In graphic design, the answer ranges from “readerly” tissues of decentered quotations that read theory’s darker themes as an excuse for expressivity to the transfer of “auteur” status from film directors to the type studio. Like film, graphic design is largely market-driven and collaborative; it is also acutely service-sensitive and client-accountable, conditions that make signature *auteur*-ship more difficult to establish for designers than for poets or fiction writers. (Do you

know who “authored” your  cup or the  logo?) To expand the designer-as-author canon, Rock includes designers who write about design, such as Paul Rand, William Morris, and Neville Brody, as well as outstanding illustrators, book designers, and graphic novelists. (Chip Kidd and Chris Ware come to mind.) Rock’s essay ends by suggesting alternative models, such as *designer as translator*, *designer as performer*, and *designer as director*.

Designer and design writer Ellen Lupton responded to Rock’s manifesto with her 1998 Benjamin-inspired “Designer as Producer.”² Production, she argues, “belongs to the physical activity of the base, the factory floor: it is the traditional domain of the paste-up artist, the stripper, the letterer, the typesetter.” Whereas the “designer as author” paradigm elevates the authority and professional status of the vocation, the “designer as

producer” paradigm emphasizes the material, proletarian and team-based elements of the field. The producer template invites designers to
seize control—intellectually and economically—of the means of production, and to share that control with the reading public, empowering them to become producers as well as consumers of meaning. As Benjamin phrased it in 1934, the goal is to turn “readers or spectators into collaborators” (233). His words resonate in current educational models, which encourage students to view the reader as a participant in the construction of meaning.

Lupton’s manifesto resonates with many contemporary composition classrooms, especially those which emphasize public writing, the role of readers in determining meaning, and the part played by digital platforms in shaping the style, length, timing, and impact of written exchanges.³

Such resonances should not surprise us. Design and writing share a long and intimate history.⁴ Because graphic design concerns typography, including book history as well as signage systems and single-surface forms such as posters, billboards and business cards, the appearance of the word stands at the heart of most graphic projects. And indeed, in this issue, Kristie Fleckenstein’s essay “Designing the New Negro” addresses graphic design as part of book history. Yet design and writing have also developed in tension with each other. Modernist design movements, coming out of the Bauhaus and related institutions, tended to stress universal principles of legibility, iconicity and abstraction over semantic, historicist and cultural resonances, although counter-strains (in the montages of Constructivism, for example) enriched the impulse towards machine-age functionalism with borrowings from mass media. Meanwhile, “commercial art” -- graphic design in its less avant-garde professional formation -- continued to churn out vast quantities of ephemera: baseball cards, gum wrappers, panty hose packages, airsickness bags. In the 1960s, the soft power of the pop movement flooded the modernist status quo with its buoyant swoosh of vernacular brands, comic book graphics, and countercultural vanguardism. Since the 1980s, post-modern impulses in graphic design have emphasized the writerly and readerly aspects of typographic invention while archly borrowing techniques from commercial and historical graphic styles, such as ornamental display fonts and hand-drawn and illustrative elements.

Beyond branding, design research encompasses acts of curation and exhibition, as in the upsurge of design shows at both major museums (MoMA, LACMA, and even the Met) and in specialized venues (airport corridors, Prada showrooms, pop-up galleries). The design writings of the Dutch group Metahaven (headed by design duo Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk) explore contemporary branding practices with the dialectical intelligence of critical theorists and the visual alertness of artists; their field work on place- and nation-branding, executed as both real-world consultants and speculative writers, represents the latest iteration of the design-writing-research triangle. The designers associated with the studio Project Projects (<http://projectprojects.com/>) write and design books, curate exhibitions, and promote design awareness through their innovative work for museums and architects. Design research has also grown to include ethnography and usability studies, which aim to test the lived and affective dimensions of

designed spaces and things through iterative prototyping, market research, empirical observation, and cultural analysis.⁵

On the production front, the rise of desktop computing encouraged the merging of design with research, writing, editing, and publishing. Today, designers increasingly create, curate, or massage content, while writers of all stripes, from students and teachers to communications professionals and literary authors, are expected to have basic design skills, whether this means distinguishing Helvetica from Comic Sans, mastering PowerPoint, building a website, creating print-on-demand prototypes, or serving as publicist and brand manager for book launches and food drives.

Indeed, the mediation of text through numerous contemporary digital platforms has sparked consideration among a range of scholars in English studies about the relationship between textuality and design. Scholars in multimedia studies and rhetoric and composition note how writing is often placed in robust relationships to images and other design elements in multimedia “texts,” as well as how text itself is frequently graphically altered for a variety of aesthetic and rhetorical effects. Theorists of literature note the many ways in which textual layouts might constitute ideological claims, arise out of ideological assumptions and values, or occupy a brand niche. Students of literary forms such as poetry trace the manipulation of textual forms as itself a powerful form of meaning making. Writing and design are entering into new relationships with each other in the age of blogging, Twitter, the graphic novel, indie publishing, brand communities, fan fiction, and DIY everything.

In the era variously described as “communicative capitalism” (Jodi Dean 2010), “information capitalism” (Adam Arvidsson 2006), and “post-Fordism” (Paolo Virno 1998), design shapes production, consumption, and the forms of work that support both.⁶ In post-Fordism manufacture is outsourced, disaggregated, and increasingly automated; its subjection to quality control measures, “just in time” production, and mass customization requires workers to master new social, informational and design skills and to deploy those turn-on-a-dime capacities in conditions in which “flexibility” (whether in hours, location, or skill sets) means increasing precarity and uncertainty. Whether employed in a service or communications job that uses affective labor to shape consumer experience, or called to manipulate multiple devices, platforms, and brands for purposes of communication and self-presentation, many workers in the contemporary economy are engaged directly or indirectly with design and its rhetorical demands.

Seemingly prescient of such developments, the New London Group’s (1996) “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” pivotally uses the word “design” to conceptualize a multilevel intervention into how we as literacy educators understand both increased globalization and technologization of communication and work lives. They argue that we must adapt our pedagogies to address fundamental changes in what it means to be “literate” as a result of such global and technological shifts. Design becomes the rubric to collect both a sense of the social, cultural, and political shifts they track as well as the possibility for rethinking pedagogies to prepare students to work with these shifts. As they put it,

The key concept we introduce is that of Design, in which we are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning. And, as designers of meaning, we are designers of social futures - workplace futures, public futures, and community futures.

For the New London Group, the design of social futures rests on six design elements that contribute to meaning-making: “Linguistic Meaning, Visual Meaning, Audio Meaning, Gestural Meaning, Spatial Meaning, and the Multimodal patterns of meaning that relate the first five modes of meaning to each other” (http://wwwstatic.kern.org/filer/blogWrite44ManilaWebsite/paul/articles/A_Pedagogy_of_Multiliteracies_Designing_Social_Futures.htm). Together, these design elements comprise a “multiliteracy” that students must learn— both to survive economically and to participate as agents in contemporary media-rich contexts.

This is our students’ world. Introducing them to the economic underpinnings as well as the aesthetic categories and logo-larded life forms promoted by post-Fordism is for many of us an increasingly urgent task of our writing courses. How, then, might we understand design more explicitly in terms of the work we do, as a part of the fundamental orientation to the teaching of writing in and for computer-rich environments?

In this special issue, we and our contributors make a case for considering design as necessary not just to the delivery of ideas and information but to their invention, style, and arrangement as well. Certainly, many articles and books in our field point to the increasing need to consider design as a key, if not even fundamental dimension, of thinking and working rhetorically with multimodal texts and multimedia platforms. But numerous other fields, from art to business, consider design to be foundational to communicating effectively. We asked that our contributors think not just about design as it appears in the pages and sites of our discipline’s journals, but also how we might learn from design as it is considered interdisciplinarily. As such, our issue is less on the mechanics of design and more on the intervention of design in composition studies. So the ultimate thrust of this issue concerns not what computers allow us to do with design (which is, admittedly, a lot!), but rather how thinking about design capaciously, and from different disciplinary viewpoints, informs, perhaps even transforms, how we understand composing.

2. Thinking beyond analogies: Design in composition studies

In the next few pages, we look at how composition as a field has sometimes understood and handled design. Space limitations in this introduction do not allow us to be exhaustive, so we mean the following overview, however truncated, to be suggestive. Indeed, even the most cursory survey reveals that scholars and researchers in composition studies have certainly been paying increased attention to design, not just as a function of delivery but of conceptualization and composing processes. To be sure, the word itself appears variously in the literature of the field, signaling the “design” of curricula, the physical “design” of writing centers,⁷ teaching writing in conjunction with faculty who

teach “design,”⁸ and teaching web “design” in addition to writing. Our concern is more with how compositionists pick up design conceptually as part teaching rhetorical and composing processes.

In many ways, thinking about design is akin to thinking about delivery, the means through which information is rendered or embodied, the interface between rhetor and audience, as it were. Long associated just with oral presentation and largely neglected in print production, delivery is making a strong reappearance as a crucial component of the composing process, particularly when working in multimediated interfaces. James Porter makes a strong case for reconsidering delivery in his 2009 essay “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric,” which argues that delivery—in this case, the medium through which communication is “delivered”—is not the “finishing touch” that it once was in the rhetorical canons, the polishing of presentation after one’s consideration of invention, arrangement, and style had already occurred. Rather, Porter argues, “Technical knowledge about distribution options—i.e., how audiences are likely to access, engage, and interact with information—pertains in critical ways to rhetorical decisions about informational content, design, style, etc. In short, technical knowledge is integral to the art of rhetoric and to the canon of rhetorical delivery in the digital age” (208). The recovery of delivery continues in such works as Ben McCorkle’s *Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse*, which examines several moments in the history of rhetoric, from the ancients to the present, in which delivery emerged as a key component in thinking through new technological delivery systems, such as the move from orality to textuality in the early age of printing. While delivery is making an important comeback, enlivening considerations of how to understand the composing process in our digital age, design seems a term that has more floated around the edges of discussion, appearing frequently but perhaps without the same forcefulness as that accruing around delivery.

To be sure, design and rhetoric, while hardly interchangeable terms, overlap conceptually in many ways. If we switch our orientation away from compositions studies for a moment, we might note that practitioners in fields whose primary focus is design have begun to pick up rhetorical tropes, figures, and knowledges to help them do their work. David S. Kaufer and Brian S. Butler could note as early as 1996, in *Rhetoric and the Arts of Design*, that, “in an era that makes design the privileged site of prestige persuasion,” rhetoric is undergoing a “reemergence” as an important set of tools to think through how design choices are fundamentally rhetorical (5). Along such lines, Mike Sharples, Professor of Educational Technology at the University of Birmingham, UK, writes in *How We Write: Writing as Creative Design* (1999) that “writing is a design activity” that has much in common, if not *everything* in common, with design practices (61). Sharples works in some detail with the design philosophy of psychologist and architect Bryan Lawson, whose important book from 1990, *How Designers Think*, detailed design as a process of open-ended problem-solving. Sharples deduces from Lawson’s thinking about design that “writing (and design in general) is a conscious and creative communication *with* and *through* materials to achieve a human effect” (60, emphasis in original).

How have compositionists picked up design thinking as a concept, tool, strategy, and possibility for enlivening and enhancing communicative practices? Important work

considering design in this regard permeates much of the literature from technical, professional, and business writing. Erin Friess can note in a 2010 article, “Designing From Data: Rhetorical Appeals in Support of Design Decisions,” how “user-centered design (UCD), a discipline-altering concept just two decades ago has become so mainstream within the practice and pedagogy of design and technical communication that for designers or technical communicators to describe their work as user centered is almost superfluous” (404). Other recent texts in the field, such as *Design Discourse: Composing and Revising Programs in Professional and Technical Writing* (2010) might focus on *program* design, but the centrality of design as a concept is apparent throughout the essays included in the anthology. Be that as it may, the uptake of design as a concept in compositions studies more broadly, and the teaching of first-year writing specifically, seems less developed, more scattered.

Design enters prominently into thinking about the teaching of writing when we consider composing for both textual *and* visual fields. Diana George (2002), for example, argues in “From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing,” that “it is important to point out that thinking of composition as *design* shifts attention, if only momentarily, from the product to the act of production” (18). Drawing on the work of the New London Group and their call for engagement with multimodal literacies, George is primarily concerned with the relationship between textual and visual fields and increased attention at the time amongst compositionists to teaching not just textual but also visual literacy. Along such lines, Melinda Turnley (2005) writes in the pages of this journal about “Contextualized Design: Teaching Critical Approaches to Web Authoring through Redesign Projects,” an article that understands design as central to web authoring. She offers case studies of students’ redesign of web projects to show the rhetorical choices that must be considered in composing for the web. In this vein, Victor Vitanza’s (1997) *Writing for the World Wide Web* was amongst the first of a veritable cottage industry of such textbooks, published primarily to serve the needs of composition instructors integrating web design into their writing courses. Another such popular text was Margaret Batschelet (2001) *Web Writing/Web Designing*.

George and Turnley offer important ways to begin thinking about textual, visual, and multimodal composing as rhetorical events, even if writing text and designing images and websites remain somewhat distinct processes. Thinking design and writing together becomes somewhat more pressing when compositionists work in consort with faculty who teach design, such as art and graphic design. In “Designing Your Writing/Writing Your Design: Art and Design Students Talk About the Process of Writing and the Process of Design,” Susan Orr, Margo Blythman, and Joan Mullin (2005) note, somewhat longingly, the engagement of art students with their subjects: “What is interesting is not only the lack of reliance on teachers for artistic ideas, but that students, at least in art, *willingly* seek stimuli for their production; furthermore, they intentionally mine these sources for their own purposes. This mindfulness and resourcefulness are not as large a part of their vocabularies about writing as they are in art and design.” The authors conclude that writing students’ engagement with their work might increase to the extent we begin to think of writing as a kind of designing: “instructors need to build a repertoire of visual metaphors to use when explaining writing so that we are making links between

the design process and the writing process. We need to use design metaphors to explain writing processes or compare writing with design processes” (http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/visual/orr_blythman_mullin.cfm).

But is design thinking useful only metaphorically? Jeff Bezemer and Gunther Kress (2008) write in their article “Writing in Multimodal Texts: A Social Semiotic Account of Designs for Learning” that, “[f]or scholars interested in writing, developments in contemporary communication sharply pose questions about the present role and the likely future development of writing. For those interested in contemporary forms of texts, the questions posed are about *designs*, that is, *principles of composition*” (167). For Bezemer and Kress, design assumes a central, pivotal role in most contemporary communicative acts:

From the designer’s perspective, design is the (intermediary) process of giving shape to the interests, purposes, and intentions of the rhetor in relation to the semiotic resources available for realizing/materializing these purposes as apt material, complex sign, texts for the assumed characteristics of a specific audience. (174)

The word “intermediary” signals both the positioning of design considerations “in the middle” of composing processes *and* the heightened attention to processes of mediation between rhetors and their audiences that a focus on design both enables and necessitates.

Such a call to think design as central to composing practices in composition studies has been picked up differently by scholars, with varying degrees of force. The concept of design in composition studies is perhaps most powerfully present in work that examines the intersections between writing pedagogy and computer and video game design. James Paul Gee (2003) had already thrown down the gauntlet, as it were, in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, in which he argued that “Learning about and coming to appreciate design and design principles is core to the learning experience” (207). For Gee, those design principles are most apparent in complex games that lead players to learn new skills and think critically about how to succeed within the game. Compositionists interested in gaming quickly picked up Gee’s call to think about the educational affordances of using games and began developing his ideas within writing courses. Craig McKenney (2007) argues in “Building the Labyrinth: Adapting Video Game Design Concepts for Writing Course Design” that “game design concepts consider, capture and engage the student more wholly than current composition instruction/practices.” In terms of writing pedagogy itself, McKenney analogizes game design and composing, suggesting that “Much like Elbow’s advocacy of freewriting as a low-risk push to writing (as seen in *Writing Without Teachers*), the internal design structure of a video game-multiple access points with multiple options for play that yield multiple outcomes for the endgame-empowers the player through non-linear or free, open, uncensored play.”

(http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/english/cconline/gaming_issue_2008/McKenney_Building/). Similarly, in an article from this journal, “The Design is the Game: Writing Games, Teaching Writing,” Alice J. Robinson (2008) argues that studying the design of

games provides useful analogies for studying and teaching composing processes: “video game designers and developers discuss and approach their design processes in many of the same ways writing teachers do” (359). Again, such analogizing, however useful, somewhat flattens Bezemer and Kress’s forceful repositioning of design as central to composing.

In contrast, Mark Mullen (2008) offers a more ambitious approach to writing and design in “Starter Cities: Simulation, Game Design, and the Writing Classroom.” In his complex web article, Mullen provocatively suggests that, “were college organized along the lines of a well-designed MMORPG, students would quest ceaselessly, level up, and emerge as pretty accomplished players in their respective fields.” Looking at a number of games, but particularly focusing on Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games such as World of Warcraft, Mullen ultimately argues that “it would be beneficial for writing teachers to begin to think of themselves not as writers and/or teachers, but to talk about both those domains in terms of design.” What’s the advantage to thinking writing through design? Mullen characterizes a design-oriented pedagogy this way:

[T]alking about writing in general as design has a couple of very important pedagogical advantages: design is the language of assessing needs, reflecting, shaping, tailoring. . . In other words, it establishes writing as a domain where students a) can make a difference, and b) can exert a measure of control. It is thus a far cry from the view that many students have of writing as a domain of talent, or an unchecked river of language that flows out of them and whose course can't be controlled.

(http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/english/cconline/gaming_issue_2008/Mullen_Starter_cities/index.htm)

To be sure, his characterization of students’ view of writing as a “domain of talent” or “unchecked river” may hardly be universally true. But the force of his point is well-taken: thinking writing as design is both metaphorically and materially useful in that it allows us a way to conceptualize writing as (1) a set of organizational tasks and opportunities and (2) a possibility for connecting those tasks and opportunities to the questions and concerns in which students are most invested. Design opens writing, perhaps returns it to application, to “assessing needs, reflecting, shaping, tailoring,” in Mullen’s words. We design things to *do* things, to work in the world. At the very least, design reinvigorates composing as at work in the world.

Such shifts in how design is situated vis-à-vis writing also maps onto textbooks written for writing students. As one might expect, design appears importantly in textbooks for courses in professional and technical writing. If we look at the seventh edition of Kitty O. Locker’s (2006) key textbook, *Business and Administrative Communication*, we see a chapter on “Designing Documents, Slides, and Screens,” which appears after chapters on “Business Communication, Management, and Success,” “Building Goodwill,” “Adapting Your Message to Your Audience,” “Making Your Writing Easy to Read,” and “Planning, Composing, and Revising.” Like the cannon of delivery, design is situated last. But should it be considered last in a robust process of composing? We should not read

Locker's placement as a valuation *about* design, a relegation of it to a late-considered after-thought. Locker quotes a business person, Susan Kleinman, who argues that "Document design is not about decoration but rather about guiding the reader through a task" (127).

Indeed, just a few years later, Anne Wysocki and Dennis Lynch's (2012) second edition of *Compose, Design, Advocate: A Rhetoric for Integrating Written, Oral, and Visual Communication* asks that students begin composing by thinking about "designing compositions rhetorically."⁹ Writing not just for emerging business professionals but for all first-year college writers, Wysocki and Lynch note the attraction of compositionists to design, particularly given the increasing ways in which text is visually displayed in digital environments. But they also emphasize how design is a "physically material process," "has a stronger tradition of creativity than composition and rhetoric," and "has a stronger tradition of testing its productions" (5). Regardless of how debatable such differences between composition and design might be, we are attracted to Wysocki and Lynch's ultimate claim: "because of the emphases design puts on materiality, creativity, and testing, designers tend to think hard about how what they make will function in the world, shaping and changing the lives of others" (6). Hence, Wysocki and Lynch push from composing and designing into advocacy, to inviting students to conceive of their compositions doing work in the world. Ultimately, the three—composing, designing, advocating—become productively mixed together as a set of interlocking processes. As you can see, in just a few scant years in the textbook market, design had moved from a relatively late stage consideration in professional writing and communication to a position in the forefront of the composing process. And Wysocki and Lynch, with their move from design to advocacy, seem to follow through on Mullen's call to connect composing and designing to issues and topics so students might feel that their work "can make a difference."

Another example might be useful here. Elizabeth Losh and Jonathan (2012) learned the importance of thinking about design as intrinsic to their composing process when working on their comic-style textbook, *Understanding Rhetoric: A Graphic Guide to Writing*. Initially, when composing the script to send to their artists, Losh and Alexander wrote panel descriptions that often foregrounded text-heavy captions. Used to writing articles and books, they were more comfortable generating narrative and expository text. After seeing some initial mock-ups and drawings of a sample chapter, however, they realized that they had to reconceive completely their composing process to consider the use of dialogue, the interaction of text and images, and the visual flow of information and ideas from panel to panel and across multiple pages. In a way, considering delivery, the medium of information exchange—in this case, the graphic book—was key. But just as important was developing a sense of *design*, a way to imagine the layout of multiple panels and pages in the creation of a narrative that relied on both textual and visual fields for communicative force.

3. Writing and design for life

So why design and design studies in the writing classroom today? Bruno Latour (2008) writes that to think of artefacts in terms of design means conceiving of them less as “objects” (discrete, contained, substantial) and more as “things,” gatherings in that double sense of assembly and assemblage that Latour derives from Martin Heidegger.¹⁰ In disciplinary terms, design runs through informatics, urbanism and planning, scenography and sound art, art history and material history, anthropology, business and marketing, and all forms of typography, printing and publishing. Design is a part of contemporary culture, an object of analysis, a way of thinking, and a form of communicative making. In all of these capacities, design has a role to play in contemporary writing pedagogy, from reading lists and field-based assignments to multi-modal composition.

Indeed, examples of design thinking and their impact on writing and communicating abound in the worlds of business. Jonathan has been studying how trade business books understand persuasion in marketing, branding, and advertising. He’s been particularly fascinated by the rhetorical dimensions of thinking about design in such texts. Garr Reynolds (2008) writes forcefully in *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery* that,

If you’re going to get up in front of a lot of people and say that the design of your strategy matters and that the design of your integrated software matters, then at the very least the visuals you use—right here and right now, at this moment in time with this particular audience—also need to be the result of thoughtful design, not hurried decoration. (106)

Reynolds contrasts Steve Jobs’ and Bill Gates’ presentations styles during their annual reports to shareholders, noting Jobs’ famous and compelling simplicity versus Gates’ cluttered and less successful showmanship.¹¹ Such comparisons and the inevitable suggestions stemming from them permeate business texts in marketing and advertising, particularly in the age of social media in which business people are as often as not marketing not just products but themselves. To that end, Blake Mycoskie (2012) argues in *Start Something That Matters* that “if someone is interested in hiring you, or consulting with you, or joining your business, or even dating you, he or she will go online and Google you. Your Facebook page or your Tumblr or your Flickr feed will appear, and if they’re not compelling, if they don’t offer opportunities for others to feel a connection to your story, it will be very hard to stand out” (40). The design of your personal social marketing brand will save—or damn—you.

And so for products. Phil Baker (2009) suggests that good design is nearly intuitive in his book, *From Concept to Consumer*:

Some companies don’t emphasize industrial design because they think consumers don’t care and are only interested in the lowest possible cost product. But I’ve always believed consumers are great judges of good industrial design and are usually out in front of the manufacturers. While consumers may not be able to describe what they want, they buy well-designed products when they see them

and use them more often. Good ID can provide the “wow” factor that can spark a customer’s interest like few other things can. (57)

More broadly in business, in the hands of some writers, design thinking rises to the level of wholesale salvation. Daniel Pink (2006), one of the bestselling general business authors, writes in *A Whole New Mind* that “it’s easy to dismiss design—to relegate it to mere ornament, the prettifying of places and objects to disguise their banality. But that is a serious misunderstanding of what design is and why it matters—especially now” (69). Indeed, for Pink, “design is a classic whole-minded aptitude. It is...a combination of utility and significance” (70). Embracing design “offers us a chance to bring pleasure, meaning, and beauty to our lives. But most important, cultivating a design sensibility can make our small planet a better place for us all” (86). The rhetoric is heady, but the centrality of design thinking is clear: from designing products and teams to personal sites and re-envisioning the planet, design is one of the key conceptual tools in the world of business.

Put another way, what employers are really asking their entry-level post-Fordists to be is *designers*: thinker-performer-communicators with the technical and social skills to manage processes, manufacture affect, and cultivate social capital. Paolo Virno (1998) writes that the task of the post-Fordist worker “consists no longer in the carrying out of a single particular objective, but in the modulating (as well as the varying and intensifying) of social cooperation, in other words, that ensemble of relations and systemic connections that ... take place through linguistic services ... and exhaust themselves in the communicative interaction that their own ‘performance’ brings about.”¹² We may feel queasy about training our undergraduates for squishy spots in the soft machinery of cognitive capitalism, but the same skills they develop for those workplaces might also aid them in various forms of what Paolo Virno calls “exodus”: “the alliance between general intellect and political Action, and a movement toward the public sphere of Intellect.”¹³ . Virno is associated with the group of Italian post-Marxists called “the autonomists,” who, by emphasizing the agency of smaller collective groups and actions, including the work of artists, mapped a landscape that allows for partial forms of “exodus,” of collective formations that counter capitalism with alternative forms of work and life within the interstices of the larger economic horizon. Media scholars such as Adam Arvidsson (2006) and Jack Bratich (2010) have further stretched and expanded these spaces of action in order to include more players in a heterogeneous and not completely coherent political economy, including DIY designers, members of brand communities and brand tribes, and writers of fan fiction. Both the entry-level job at Google and the organization of Occupy require that people “think in concert” about “matters of concern,” using the technical instruments of the General Intellect (twitter, CSS, RSS, html).

What might this look like on the ground, in an actual pedagogical situation? In a series of courses taught at the University of California, Irvine, Julia and her co-teachers C. J. Gordon and Jerome Christensen used the study of the contemporary designed world as the subject for student writing and research; the courses have their origin in earlier collaborations with Elizabeth Losh. Pinterest, Instagram, steampunk, cosplay, food trucks, mumblecore, anti-perfumes, and World of Warcraft, plus, typography and class

differentiation at the mall; Apple and value; *True Blood* and queer brand communities; and place-making and food ways in a Filipino restaurant chain: these are some of the topics that undergraduates developed in their final research papers, often engaging in transformative journeys of self- and world-discovery through acts of design writing. Our courses introduced students to design and marketing theory as well as architecture and urbanism and then invited them to analyze real and virtual places and branded objects as well as contemporary cinema and fiction as scenes of convergence among architectural, economic, theatrical, and narrative designs. The double aim of these courses was to cultivate critical distance between students and their stuff while also visiting the many contemporary scenes that put literary and rhetorical techniques to work in the building of retail environments, brand communities, social media platforms, and alternative economies.

Along such lines, how does this special issue forward design and writing as ways to “think in concert” about “matters of concern”?

Two terms that come up frequently in this issue that carry real impact for the conjunction of writing and design are *affordance* and *craft*. First developed by the environmental psychologist James J. Gibson to account for the way in which objects and settings cue behavior for human and nonhuman actors, affordances have been taken up by designers, especially in user-oriented product development and human-computer interaction (HCI). In an oft-cited passage Gibson defines affordance:

The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the word *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does.

It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment. (1986; 127)

Affordances reside in the environment, and in this sense they are objective, but they only exist in relation to particular users (carpenters, carpenter ants, squirrels, bots), and in this sense they are relational and transactional. Affordances invite rather than either determine or suffer the actions of agents; they thus participate in distributed, reciprocal and interactive scenes of causality. Affordances appear in tandem with the social routines and forms of enskillment that organize their employment, and they can be invented as well as discovered by users.

For compositionists, asking what particular platforms and genres afford the writer and the reader is a natural way of using design thinking to reconsider the writing process. In this issue, Kristie Fleckenstein cites the work of Gunther Kress, who describes modes as holding “specific potentials for representation, and at the same time bring[ing] certain limitations. Cultures work with these material affordances in ways which arise from and reflect their concerns, values and meanings.”¹⁴ Carrie Leverenz associates affordances with the New London Group’s phrase “Available Designs.” Liz Losh addresses “the general constraints and affordances of different types of digital design software packages.” Shannon Madden’s piece “Thinner Lighter Faster” critiques the waste involved in the search for ever more powerful affordances in the tools we use to write. Because of the strong impact of affordance theory on HCI, much work with affordances

in composition studies involves interfaces and platforms, but the term can also be used to understand what different spaces for pedagogy enable and constrain, as explored by Russell Carpenter in “Negotiating the Spaces of Design in Multi-Modal Classrooms.”

Another key term linking writing and design in this issue is craft.¹⁵ Historically, craft and design do not always mix; whereas modern industrial design separates the work of the designer from the work of manufacture, traditional handicrafts wedded the two acts together, with design itself often being an unconscious, inherited, or collaborative process rather than a distinct moment and vocation. The *disegni* – drawings, drafts, designs – of the great Renaissance artists were sketched by the master but often executed by a workshop of painters and further distributed as designs for imitation by engravers, tapestry makers, tile makers, and other artisans closer to the craft professions. Many contemporary designers have tried to bring craft and design back together, whether by incorporating hand drawing into typography (Lorraine Wilde¹⁶) or by creating furniture that merges modernist tenets with local knowledge and workshop production (the Campana brothers¹⁷). In his essay “Crafting Designs,” William Kurlinkus looks at the militant return to the virtues of craft in periods of rapid technological change. While he calls our attention to the dangers of nostalgia, he also suggests that craft’s emphasis on local process and cross-cultural exchange can become an emancipatory resource for both designers and writers. Using Adele Clarke and Joan Fuimora’s *The Right Tools for the Job* (1992), Elizabeth Losh discusses computer programming as a “craft skill.”

Thinking with and about design invites us to think constructively about how we can retool our writing curricula in a mode that encourages both ingress and exit in relation to post-Fordist communicative processes. Whether they are employees in a big business, stakeholders in a start-up, members of a movement, or managers of their own band or brand, students trained in the arts of rhetoric will be called upon to develop compelling narratives *about* the work they do, as *part of* the work they do. An ecumenical approach to the designed world as a scene for manifold forms of writing acknowledges a range of positive outcomes for our students, who might use their design-enhanced writing and research skills for consumer activism, for employment in design, marketing, and communications fields, or as tools for organization-building and social marketing in educational, non-profit, and community settings. Writing is equipment for living -- and so is design.

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¹ Seattle-based designer Terry Heckler designed the first Starbucks logo. The latest incarnation was engineered by Starbucks Global Creative and Lippincott, 2011. See Blauvelt and Lupton, eds., *Graphic Design: Now In Production*, 192. Pentagram principal Paula Scher combined the Citigroup logo with the Travelers logo to make a new mark for their merger in 1998.

<http://breezycreativedesign.com/2010/05/04/citi-logo-by-paula-scher/>.

² See also the classic collection by J. Abbott Miller and Ellen Lupton (1996), *Design Writing Research*, which set the stage for theoretical discussions of writing and design in the 1990s.

³ Later in this issue, Elizabeth Losh continues the discussion by asking what “authoring software” tells us about authorship in the age of social media.

⁴ For an overview of design theory from modernism to the contemporary moment, see Helen Armstrong (2009).

⁵ Important anthologies include Brenda Laurel (2003) and Audrey Bennett ed., (2006). See also the journals *Design Issues* and *Design Studies*.

⁶ Adam Arvidsson. Paolo Virno. *A Grammar of the Multitude*. New York: Semiotexte, 2004.

⁷ For instance, see Hadfield, Kinkead, et al, "An Ideal Writing Center: Re-Imagining Space and Design." *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*. Joyce Kinkead and Michael Pemberton. Logan, Utah: Utah State Univ. Press, 2003.

⁸ An example: Kaufer and Butler’s *Rhetoric and the Arts of Design*.

⁹ In an earlier article, Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola (1999) had already asked, in the subtitle of their essay, “Blinded by the Letter,” “Why are we using literacy as a metaphor for everything else?” While not directly about design per se, Wysocki was already laying good groundwork for thinking beyond textual composing to design elements of composing more broadly.

¹⁰ Bruno Latour. “A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Towards a Philosophy of Design.” Meeting of the Design History Society, 2008.

¹¹ For more on Jobs’ success through design, see *Ctrl, Alt, Delete* by Mitch Joel, who argues broadly about the value of simplicity in good design:

Steve Jobs often lamented that Apple “thinks a lot about how products should be made to look pure and seamless.” As great as he was, he was not the only one who knows this. Put the book down and look at the home screen of Google, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Wikipedia, What do you see? Not much. Why? What makes Google, Twitter, Facebook, and others work (and be successful) when compared with their competitors—or those who tried something similar (and failed miserably)—comes from a core philosophy of real simplicity. When someone asks you what makes Facebook (or whomever) so successful, simply smile and say, “The answer is simple: It’s simple.” They keep it clean and pristine with a laser focus. (132)

¹² 192.

¹³ Virno, 196.

¹⁴ Fleckenstein, citing Gunther Kress, 2003, p. 45.

¹⁵ See G Adamson, ed., (2010), for a comprehensive account of craft theories.

¹⁶ “The Macramé of Existence,” in Armstrong, ed., 84-6.

¹⁷ Fernando and Humberto Campana are furniture designers based in Brazil.

http://campanas.com.br/home_en.html Accessed 12/6/2013.