

WRITTEN RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to translate the concept in Designer as Author using the writing approach found in Exercises in Style. By employing multiple perspectives, it interprets the designer's shifting roles in the creative process, including those of author, translator, director, and performer.

WRITING

The Fundamental Query

In graphic design, a traditional field focused on communication rather than content creation, what does it mean for a designer to play the role of 'author'? This idea suggests more than the translation of a client's vision; it implies creative originality and agency. Designers such as Jan van Toorn exemplify this approach by embedding sociopolitical perspectives in their work (Rock, 2013), suggesting that some designers shape projects with an 'authorial' perspective, similar to how an artist approaches a canvas.

Authorship as Identity

The parallel to design practice is useful. Like the film director, the art director or designer is often assigned his or her material and often works collaboratively in a role directing the activity of a number of other creative people. Here, authorship implies a voice—a unique, consistent perspective across the work (Rock, 2013). Just as a Hitchcock film has a distinctive style, a designer's work with a recognisable 'signature' can transcend mere functionality and become a distinctive authored creation.

Philosophical Debate

Is it really liberating to call designers "authors"? Authorship implies control and ownership, centralising meaning within the designer's intentions, which can limit open interpretation. Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes challenge this prioritisation of the authorial voice and instead advocate the reader or audience as the central interpreter. In this light, a designer who claims authorship may be reinforcing a conservative view of production that favours individual brilliance over open, readerdriven interpretations.

Whimsical Possibilities

What if designers were not rigid "authors" but "performers"? Like an actor interpreting a script, the designer could bring content to life, adding expression without "owning" it. Quentin Fiore's collaboration with McLuhan on *The Medium is the Massage* (McLuhan and Fiore, 2018) is an example of Fiore's visual style acting out McLuhan's ideas (Rock, 2013), enhancing his concepts without overshadowing them. This approach mirrors *Exercises in Style* (Queneau, 1981) in the sense that it emphasizes varied interpretations and perspectives over a single, rigid authorial intent.

Alternative Modes

If authorship feels restrictive, think of the designer as a 'translator'. Translation is adaptation, not simple replication; it reinterprets material for new contexts. Or the designer as 'director' of largescale projects (Rock, 2013)—exhibitions, campaigns—coordinating many elements to shape meaning collectively rather than through a single authorial voice.

Multiplicity of Authors

In practice, design often involves collaboration between clients, colleagues, and different voices, complicating the idea of a single author. Perhaps 'authorship' in design is both an aspiration and a myth, a way for designers to claim agency without rigid ownership. Barthes's notion of the 'death of the author' suggests that design might benefit from a decentralised approach that embraces interpretive diversity rather than singular authorship.

The MultiFaceted Designer

Ultimately, graphic design flourishes when it balances the author's vision with the audience's interpretation. A designer can be part author, part translator, part performer, and part director—a blend that fosters a multifaceted creative process. Design, then, is not simply a craft, but a fluid, multidimensional art that invites constant engagement and reinterpretation.

Reference

Rock, M. and 2X4 Design Studio (2013). *Multiple Signatures: On Designers, Authors, Readers, and Users*. New York: Rizzoli.

McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (2018). *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press.

Queneau, R. (1981). *Exercises in Style*. New York: New Directions Publishing.