

Writing and Communication QuickTakes

Materializing Energy: Energy Humanities and First-Year Composition

Brittain Postdoctoral Fellows lead the way in Georgia Tech Writing and Communication Program by designing rhetorically based courses with a WOVEN (*written–oral–visual–electronic–nonverbal*) emphasis. Students use multimodality to explore cultural studies of science and technology in various communities and periods—past, present, and future. This poster spotlights a classroom project designed by Brittain Fellow Dr. Kent Linthicum.

English 1102 – Energy and Entropy in Anthropocene Cultures

Complex systems of fossil and other fuels underpin and shape modern human cultures. The rapid expansion of energy consumption in the 20th century is one argument for the designation of a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. This course explores the ways energy is represented in and shapes culture through 19th and 20th century science-fiction novels, and through projects which analyze the relationship between energy and culture.

Materializing bodies of energy “requires not only a conviction that bodies matter in social history and in the production of culture but also a willingness to accept that bodies can be made to *seem* to appear—in relation to other bodies, in partial view—but not made to appear fully in language” (Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil*, 2014, pg. 185).

“CrankToast” by Marc Minotto, Chitrita Saxena, & Jacob Varner

“Conscious” by Brian Feldman, Gabriel Krikorian, & Brooke Mckenzie

Inputs Project

A key impediment to understanding energy is its opacity: the fuels we burn are obscured from view by the infrastructure of production and containment. Yet, any action to grapple with our energy usage needs to start with recognition of how we burn.

- In order to analyze how energy is obscured from a user’s view and practice visual/electronic rhetoric, students created new devices and products in groups which attempted to “materialize” energy in the way that LeMenager suggests above.
- “CrankToast” attempts to make its users aware of the energy for toasting bread through labor juxtaposed with other energy, whereas “Conscious” tries to outline the energy required to create a single-use plastic water bottle on its packaging.

Teaching Philosophy

Resilience is a primary focus of my teaching: preparing students to move through fluid rhetorical situations, to respond to defeat positively, and giving them the humanistic tools they need to critique the complex systems that shape culture and environment.

Multimodality in this Class

W Write climate fiction using non-fiction genres like memos and peer reviewed articles.

O/N Debate policy solutions to climate change by recreating the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

V/E Create visuals and websites that make the energy we use visible.

CRANKTOAST

“What did you eat for breakfast today?”

Our decision to re-design a toaster was due to a toaster’s relative simplicity in the home environment as well as its popularity among every American household. A staple of the most important meal of the day. However, despite its prominence, a toaster is definitely not considered a necessity just to survive. Bearing this in mind, the usage of the “Crank Toaster” will allow users to make thoughtful decisions on their energy usage habits without stepping too far outside the limits of their comfort zone.

The first major feature of our toaster is the crank itself. Although we did not actually envision a crank in the design at first, we realized that to make an energy-savvy product, it must have more than one way to power it. So, the toaster can be powered through the hand crank, but it can of course be plugged into the wall for convenience. In order to power the 1200 watt toaster, there is a built in energy converter that converts the energy near 100 percent efficiency. As a result, consumers would be upgrading their toaster to a much more efficient toaster compared to their old inefficient toaster.

A map of the powerplant and you specified and drawn out to show the distance the consumer is from the powerplant.

Shows how much of a substance like coal or uranium it takes to produce the same amount of energy.

Depending on how toasty the consumer wants their toast, the toast will show how many cranks it would take to “crank” out a level of toastiness.

This side of the toast shows how much of a different activity would have to be done to produce toast.

How much energy went into making my water bottle?

PURE DRINKING WATER

Conscious

500 ML (ENERGY USED TO MAKE THIS WATER BOTTLE COULD POWER YOUR DESK LAMP FOR NEARLY 1 DAY AND 4 HOURS)

WASITWORTHIT.COM

The Story Behind Your Water Bottle

2000 TIMES THE ENERGY TO PRODUCE BOTTLED WATER OVER TAP WATER

33 BILLION BOTTLES USED IN U.S. IN 2007

1081 OLYMPIC SWIMMING POOLS OF OIL

28 HOURS OF POWER FOR YOUR DESK LAMP

Please recycle this bottle after using.



Kent Linthicum (PhD, Arizona State University) Research interests include environmental humanities and 19th century literature.

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