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Visual Soliloquy
the Anti-Social of Design

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Visual Soliloquy contributes to the discussion of how graphic and information design contributes to social through design. In linking the work to notions as self-branding, micro celebrities and self-branding in defining social value for individuals. The use of the soliloquy concept is aligned with both the anti-social undertaking and social endeavor of design as praxis within the field of communication design. As evidence, the concept is supported through examples of design work and their material explorations.

#Anti-Social

#Soliloquy

#Branding

#Self

#Logo

Visual Soliloquy

'soliloquy'

An act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play.

Origins, Middle English, from late Latin soliloquium, *from Latin* solus *menaing 'alone' and* loqui *menaing to 'speak'.*

(Oxford Dictionary Online 2017)

Branding as the self

Self-branding and the creation of micro-celebrities, have become a popular marketing tool through a number of social platforms during the last decade alone (Page 2012), yet Allessandro Gandini (2016) postulates the continued misunderstanding of the mere extent to which self-branding recounts for social relationships in the making of *socialised value for individuals*. As a proactive approach, designers need to pre-emptively strategise and favorably position themselves by treating oneself as a project or as a brand through a set of tangible and intangible values and, from a market's point of view, try to become an object of desire. This is exactly what, for example, product designers aim for when they design with a new product, whereas the product in this case refers to designers themselves (Labrecque, et al. 2011).

In most instances, visual and graphic design requires professional designers to internalise the social through their continued search for difference or distinction from the expanding design market. For the outcome to work properly it ought to be authentic, truthful, deeply personal, and self-satisfying form of *visual confession,* or an expression of an inner monologue translated to shapes and lines (see Brown et al. 2014).

As an authentic internal quest, soliloquy searches beyond the obvious skills, beliefs, traits or passions that designers share. This is because belonging to a group inherently carries a number of shared qualities that define it. Mimicry of these values, clearly does not suffice to differentiate oneself since these values often mature into shared commonalities. They long became firmly positioned axioms that negate the need of further definition, explanation, debate, perusal, or any requirement that further seeks approval within any given context. As statements, soliloquy needs to surpass them.

Contemporary designers advocate self-promotion, which is radically different from prior generations.[1] We currently find ourselves in a very complex and *inconsistent* reality with many possible futures, singular or in terms of parallel forms of existence, convoluted with competing voices thanks to social media and digital platforms. More specifically, the practice of designers in the future will unavoidably become a somewhat *over-saturated* condition based on the mere number of designers. The continued effort in the search for differentiation, within oneself and in terms of how the self is positioned against the *other*, in a curiosity-invoking yet susceptible manner to wider audiences, remains a key concern.

Soliloquy, the inner social of design

The visualisation of this *inner monologue* and the challenges put forward by the design of a personal *logotype*,[2] capture the essence of such a process by materialising the soliloquy. With the usual criteria required for a logo design, in its readability, recognisability, memorability, and

originality remaining valid, each monologue, which varies case-by-case, prioritises personal relevance as defined by each *inverted* monologue.

The specific requirements of a logo design include: a) *the technical layer*, which refers to a logo's usability and ease of its application in various situations; b) *a communicative layer,* which describes the relevance of the story that is being told, and whether or not the communicated message aligns with its perception); and c) *the aesthetical layer* articulates the appropriateness of logo appearance and sophistication of its execution. The ultimate test of each soliloquy remains how this inner world finds expression within a designer's context. Each designer has a creative license to prioritise. To lean towards one of these three aspects that are judged most relevant for a particular design direction is achieved by striking a balance between the other two aspects in a possible compromise. On another level, particularly relevant in the applied arts, the creator ultimately needs to be able to move away from himself and take into account how the product will be perceived from the outside, in order to objectively evaluate the outcome, which is a challenge when working on something personal.

On one hand, the premise of the soliloquy remains a process to effectively talk to oneself, and fundamentally define an anti-social undertaking. On the other hand, the necessity for the visual outcomes to be comprehensible to a wider audience renders the soliloquy a social endeavor. Communication design, and its core activity of branding and logo design, requires such complexities of expression from within the designer's mind-set. The imperative therefore remains to facilitate the expression of creative processes and to streamline a particular design from within the designer's flux, exaggeration, and sometimes confusion.

The visual outcome of a logo design is a few lines or solid surfaces that force the development of a product into a minimal state. As a process, to externalise inner monologues leaves no visual or material dissonance as camouflage or shelter. The soliloquy remains a creative expression that delivers complexity in a simple way, and thus negates any opportunity for *fake* reasoning.

The *Visual Soliloquy* collection represents a body of student work consisting of sixteen personal logotypes. In the design for *Give and Take* (Fig. 1), the author (KWAN Ming Sum Sam 2017) initially uses + and – signs as an obvious metaphor that refers to the processes of addition and subtraction. The plus sign represents added value, and mirrors the designer's role to designate functional and/or emotional values into his creations. Still, when the designer strives to create meaningful designs, excessive, unprovoked elements, also require recognition, even later subtracted from the overall design. The use of the minus sign in this design context embodies a negative space as balance between *full* and *void* spaces.

Play n' Pause (Fig. 2) by KWAN Siu Hei Lewis (2017) represents the balance between reflection and execution, learning and doing. The interplay between positive and negative masses connects all elements, and emphasises the intertwined linkages between each component with one another. In addition, the use of the play button can be interpreted literally as an invitation to *play*, which conceptually addresses the activity of freely exploring, and is part and parcel to the creative act of learning.[3]

Missing Piece (Fig. 3) by HUNG Yuen Ching Chelsey (2017) gives significance to negative space and is a resourceful design at its core. Its key aspects are a universal acceptance of a symbol and its blunt application. The ingenuity lies in what is missing. The letters *C* and *H* present the designer's initials,

where the *H* is the core aspect of the design. Closer scrutiny indicates the empty space to the left, where the missing *C* is to be found. This strategy offsets the visual balance of the logo from its expected center of gravity, since the *non-existing* half needs to be taken into consideration just as much as the *existing* portion in use to the right. The lack of immediate readability makes it all the worthier for observers to decode, making the puzzle complete in the discovery of the hidden values. This particular soliloquy is noteworthy in its fulfilment of two mandatory factors: a) the technical and communicative layers are obviously present; b) the aesthetical layer is completely absent and disregarded as a conscious choice. The audacious, bold manner in which this is done is why the message is carried across with success. As a result, the inner statement appears effortless and confident in true breach of basic design guidelines.

Watch It (Fig. 4) by NGAI Tsz Lam Jocelyn (2017) appears somewhat simplified and opportune at first glance, with the application of the author's initials in the design. However, the message is about observation. What makes it stand out is a different execution that harnesses the letters *J* and *N* to represent an object to the bottom left, and a person to the right. In the latter case, the person bows down in curiosity to observe an object. This clever positioning enables the author to tell an unpretentious narrative, and satisfy all three prerequisites of the design discourse.

From a different angle, the execution of *Flow* (Fig. 5) by HUI Yat Ching Amy (2017) addresses the streaming of choices and connections within an intertwined design. The logo's construction from the author's name represents a hybrid of free-flowing calligraphy and controlled geometric shapes. In this sense, the combination of craft and industrial precision delivers an alternative aesthetic to the branding process. Thin line

slashes appear as delicate and careful choices, with thick wavy strokes signifying strong and courageous instances of decision making.

In summary, in each instance, the soliloquy remains both material and immaterial, abstract and concrete. What is more, especially relevant for design, although the premise of the process remains internalised, anti-social as it where, the mere act of materialisation remains social. Social in the transformation from an inner state into a material form that remains a social process in its own right.

Acknowledgements

Figure 1 (this page and opposite page): Give and Take. Source: *Sam Kwan.*

Figure 2 (pages 142 - 143): Play n' Pause. Source: *Lewis Kwan.*

Figure 3 (pages 144 - 145): Missing Piece. Source: *Chelsey Hung.*

Figure 4 (pages 146 - 147): Watch it. Source: *Jocelyn Ngai.*

Figure 5 (pages 148 - 149): Flow. Source: *Amy Hui.*
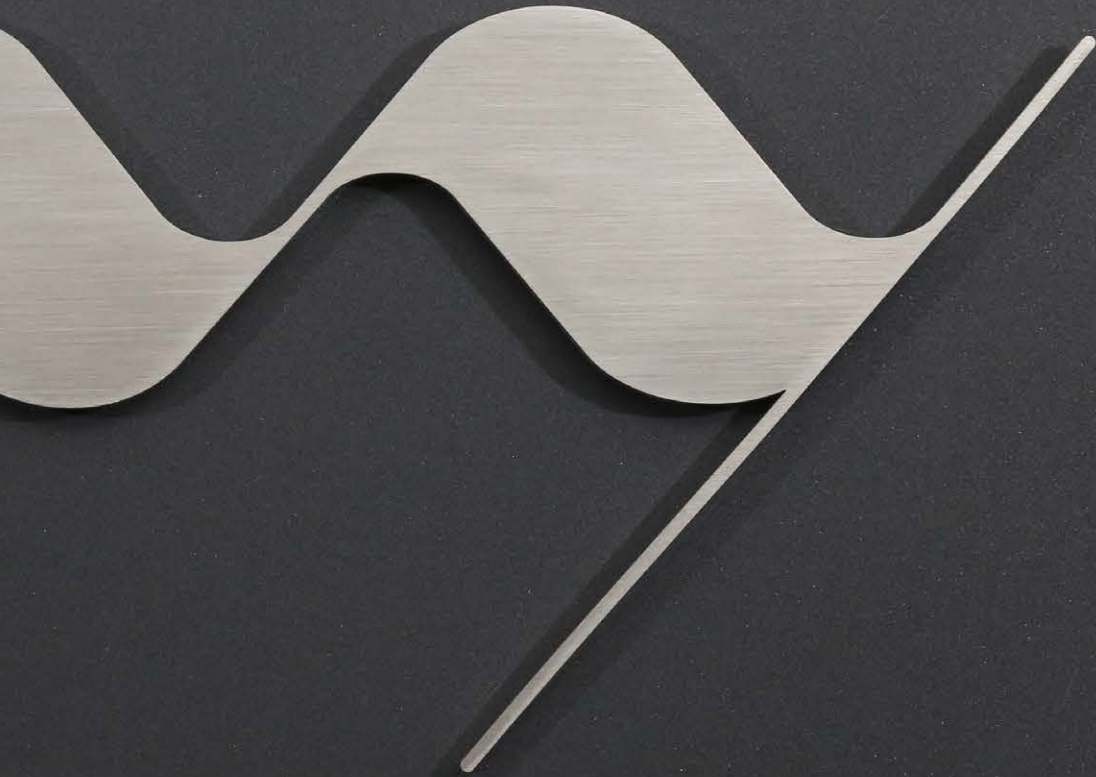
Notes

1. See Davis Marshalls (2010) argument of self-promotion and the influence of social media in creating a generation of self-promotion ethics.

2. A *logotype* is defined as a single 'type' that represents a logo, individual word or group of letters. Examples here include *Facebook* or *CocaCola's* iconic logos.

3. See: *The Man Who Plays,* Johan Huizinga, 1998, as a key resource for the playfulness of discovery and its relation to educational practices.

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Bio

Marko Stanojevic is a product designer who also branched off into the fields of graphic design, branding, and product-service system design. He runs Bureau Zero, based on more than twenty years of professional experience in Europe. He is currently a Lecturer in the School of Design, of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and a teaching fellow at The Hong Kong Design Institute, specialising in product and communication design. His approach to design is multidisciplinary, and combines mixed design theory with practice, which in time, has led to commonalities and differences within the creative processes as well as a more complex understanding to design. His current interests focus on non-lingual narration, message transferences, and the creation of appropriate communication across disciplinary entrenchment.