

Positions through iterating – Written response

My enquiry has its origin during my final feedback of the Methods of iterating brief. Initially my aim was to enhance how screen printing challenged the identity and the uniqueness of a portrait by completely hijacking the tool. The technique used was to paint by hand on the screen rather than using a stencil. Choosing quality over quantity. But during a conversation with my peers a new prompt and an interesting new enquiry turned up: the conception of beauty. Since I purposely choose to show not only the final iterations but also the several bad attempts that I made, I took for granted that they just looked bad but surprisingly not everyone in the room agreed with me.

For this new brief – Positions through iterating – I started experimenting different ways of seeing and perceiving forms, colours and consequently beauty. Moreover, since I worked exclusively on screen printing, I chose to make my portraits digital and work on different software to see what my new iterations could reveal.

I believe that different enquiries formed through my practice and it all started with the previous brief – Methods of iterating. My struggle and my discomfort during the making helped me push my boundaries and explore critically different ways of communicating this feeling, reflected on my work. I started asking different questions trying not to judge myself, like how much can I stay in this type of feelings? And aside from the negative and unsettled emotions that originate, what can I transform in energy = making?

I picked some references that helped me recognise myself into it and into my iterations.

Benjamin Walter (1935), *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, New York: Schocken Books.

While Walter Benjamin in his book chose to put into writing certain positive and negative effects that technology impacted on art and its authenticity, I unconsciously based my practice on some of his theories and then I compared what he stated with my new iterations. This helped me challenge my practice and it created different positions about this theme. Turning my portraits into digital made me reflect firstly about time. Yes, the making was definitely faster but at the same time after the 50th iteration I started feeling mentally tired, a bit unsettled, almost losing interest. That didn't happen when I was in the screen printing lab. While I remember feeling exhausted and being there all day, it was always very exciting to see every portrait coming to life.

I agree with Benjamin about the concept of 'aura' that every original and unique artwork possesses. I think every portrait that I made had a personal 'aura'. What I disagree with is the criticism that the author makes about the capitalist system, implying that mechanical reproduction can strip artworks of their critical and emancipatory potential.

Considering that the book was published in 1935, I believe that things have evolved significantly since then. Nowadays, technology has made art more accessible to everyone, empowering people to form personal opinions and adopt a more critical approach towards everything.

Metahaven (2010), *Uncorporate Identity*, 'Sealand', Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers.

The Metahaven publication helped me form a new line of enquiry about my iterations. What really made me stop and reflect was the title of this book – Uncorporate Identity. During my previous brief, methods of iterating, I frequently mentioned concepts of identity and uniqueness, but I now realise that I didn't deeply consider what message I wanted to convey with those ideas, nor did I stop reflecting and

formulating critical thoughts about it. I felt drawn to this new notion because I had a feeling it was relevant for my experimentation and I decided to delve deeper into it to bring in missing perspectives in my understanding.

Personally, I think that defining identity is one of the most complex and difficult thing ever. Although I believe placing "uncorporate" before "identity" helps me define what I aimed to achieve with my work, even though it's not fully defined yet. I feel that leaving it indefinite is a part of my journey and perhaps it's something I'm not ready to discover yet. The unsettling feelings and uncertainty evoked by these various portraits have become part of the process, and I'm learning to embrace them and appreciate whatever emotions they bring. These emotions are *uncorporate*, as they don't have a corporate structure nor established norms.

Eco Umberto (2007), *On Ugliness*, Bompiani publishing house.

During my research about the perception of beauty, I came across this book called "Storia della bruttezza" – in English, "On Ugliness", but I think that the original title makes it more interesting because it's translated to "The story of ugliness", as if it was a fairytale. I learned that Umberto Eco, an Italian philosopher and novelist, published this companion volume to his earlier work titled "On Beauty," – or better, "The story of beauty".

The concept of ongoing unease that I was describing above, follows along the line of what it is addressed in this book. I liked how Eco conducted a proper research about this topic using not only words but also illustrations. Furthermore, aside from the analyses he conducted based on cultural and artistic expressions, I found it amusing how he explored the topic with a provocative tone, sometimes coming across as judgmental. I also think it was quite courageous of him to talk about something so personal and changeable with this confidence. I imagine some random influencer or social creator talking about this kind of topics nowadays, and I think I would find them almost arrogant.

However, back to my practice, this book challenged my idea of beauty and helped me reflect on the relationship between the beauty and the ugly, not only for me personally but also for the others. Another question that crossed my mind was whether there is a difference between what I perceive as "aesthetically pleasing" and "pretty," and how much I, as a designer, need to expand my understanding of these concepts to ensure my artwork is accessible to the audience.

Wharol Andy (1967), *Marylin Diptych*, silkscreen ink and acrylic paint on canvas, Factory Additions, New York.

Because my practice started with screen printing, I decided to pick as reference one of the most representative artworks in the silkscreen history. I think Wharol's work relates to my practice in terms of the relationship between industrial mass-production and uniqueness of a portrait. While Wharol used screen printing to address the society's obsession with fame and materialism by using an icon and a human-being, I did the opposite. I challenged screen printing's original use and I inverted the process. Taking the portrait "Girl with a pearl earring" by the artist Johannes Vermeer, I deconstructed the original portrait and its icon, but I used the same process (painting) on a tool destined for mass-produced artworks. This process helped me formulate an enquiry: What does it change? And how?

I think what I share with Wharol's process is the approach to the silkscreen technique and the way we both challenge art and reproducibility in terms of mass production, but in different ways. My method emphasizes uniqueness and handiwork, whereas Warhol embraced mechanical reproduction to critique the society. What I aimed to achieve was to push boundaries and invite the audience to reconsider the relationship between art and technology.

Arnheim Rudolf (1954), *Art & Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

The author Rudolf Arnheim with his book gave me a scientific perspective about how I could create different iterations and convey different perceptions of form and colour. At the beginning of my practice, I believed that having an objective and almost distant approach to my work would help me arise new prompts and thoughts about it. Since I was interested in knowing what and how I could stimulate the audience mind, I decided to incorporate some principles quoted in the book into my work, such as the Gestalt psychology, phenomena like grouping, similarity, proximity etc. I also made some research about the eye and the perception of colour (Colour blindness, Trichromatic theory, etc.). During my tutorial I was interested in discovering what my peers perceived in the different iterations and it was indeed very different to everyone what they felt about the different images. But I also believe that starting my practice with this type of approach was both safe and limited to my work. It definitely helped me collect data and information about people, but it didn't allow me to have a deep conversation about my point of view and my perspective of things. I think, for example, that Gestalt psychology is really fascinating to study but at the same time it contains norms of perception that we shouldn't really care about. It doesn't allow you to push boundaries and take an explorative method to your practice.

Taggart, Emma (2022), *Dieter Rams and the ten rules of good design*, Available at: <https://www.linearity.io/blog/dieter-rams/>

Being an international student often faced me with diverse difficulties during this first year and I struggled especially during the process of making, finding myself stuck and unable to come up with a specific concept. I think part of my way of operating through practice comes from my education in my home country – Italy. Being catapulted into a different reality made me realise how difficult it is to change your way of thinking and I'm still struggling with that. What I'm learning though is that this struggle doesn't need to be hidden but I noticed that it emerged organically in each of my projects – like the current one.

I frequently defined myself as an 'aesthete', but during this year I challenged this idea of myself several times and I'm learning to embrace what makes me uncomfortable. That's why I think this article is important to help me understand certain things about my practice. Perhaps a few months ago I would've agreed with the industrial designer Dieter Rams, who defined 'norms' about design and dictated how should be conducted. But today I don't agree especially with one rule which is "**Good** design is **aesthetic**". I'm interested in delving into the meanings of good and aesthetic. What exactly constitutes 'good design'? And what does aesthetic entail? And why create ten rules about good design when it's such a subjective matter?

Moreover, what can be objective and subjective in design and communication? The difference between my previous brief and the current one is that initially I tried so hard to make something beautiful to my eyes but I didn't really think about the perception of the audience. This brief and consequently all the process that I went through helped me reflect on the diversity of beauty and how sometimes feeling a bit of discomfort can help you being more deep about things and formulate questions that can be relevant to your practice.