

Navigating Collective Identity Through Design

A Study of Metahaven's 'Uncorporate Identity' and Proverbial Significance

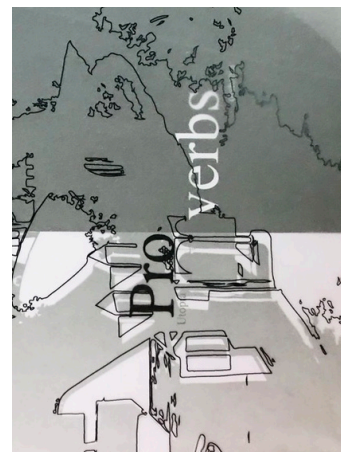
Introduction

The aim of this analysis is to explore a reference that challenges my prior studio practice and research centred around the iconographical depiction of proverbs, their cultural significance, and their inherent influence. This chosen reference was intended to provide a contextual lens for my ongoing exploration and a means to synthesise my findings.

After an extensive search, I chose to investigate Metahaven's 'Uncorporate Identity' (2010), a publication highly relevant to my past work. It talks about the intricate realm of collective identities and the relationship between organisations and their tangible manifestations in the world.

Metahaven's perspective emphasises the complexity of collective identities, which are multifaceted, open-ended, and often subjects of contention. They view collective identity as the product of a dynamic interplay between politics, culture, technology, and communication. It's not a static or uniform concept; rather, it's dynamic and fluid.

In contrast, my research had focused on the rigid and traditional representation of idioms and proverbs, primarily serving as instruments of instruction and manipulation. However, Metahaven introduces an innovative approach that challenges my preconceived notions of collective wisdom, revealing its multifaceted nature across different media. This contrast serves as a catalyst for exploring the intricate landscape of collective identity in relation to proverbs and their representations.



Description

In 2010, the Dutch design studio Metahaven unveiled "Uncorporate Identity," an exploration of the complex interplay between power and design within modern states. The book delves into the complexities of unacknowledged states, totalitarian structures, terrorism, and the profound impact of design on a state's identity.

Metahaven's approach to design often embraces ambiguity, subversion, and deconstruction, effectively challenging established narratives and encouraging critical inquiry into the construction of collective identities and the role of design in shaping them. They also delve into the political implications of design and visual communication, scrutinizing how design can be used for manipulation, propaganda, and control, as well as for promoting transparency, activism, and social change.

Analysis

I chose "Uncorporate Identity" as my reference because my research on proverbs had highlighted a gap between their cultural relevance at their origin and their resonance today. In the age of rapid digital information dissemination, this book challenges my creative practice to create work that remains pertinent in the contemporary landscape.

Metahaven's approach to the subject of collective identity through design is a fascinating way to illustrate the role of design in shaping nations. The publication is divided into non-linear chapters aiming to unpack different design practices on a national and international scale. Metahaven employs a rhizomatic approach, attempting to map out all interconnections and relations between states and design. By documenting their email history with governmental institutions and generating their own designs, they introduce a personal tone that captures the reader's attention.

However, "Uncorporate Identity" is incredibly ambitious. The complexity of the book may be experienced as an overload of information and visuals, with no clear storyline to navigate through the pages. It could be seen as an artifact of the information overload of the internet, accessible to some more than others.



Notably, "Uncorporate Identity" is not merely content-driven but also a visual and tactile experience. The book's design and printing reflect the innovative approach to its subject matter, creating an engaging and almost interactive publication. Innovative design choices include watermarks prompting reflection on issues of plagiarism and authorship, graffiti strokes symbolizing rebellion and critical thinking, print marks emphasizing the curation of the publication and the editorial role, the use of larger fonts enhancing readability without sacrificing the depth of challenging subjects, and still life visuals conveying simplicity infused with deeper meanings.

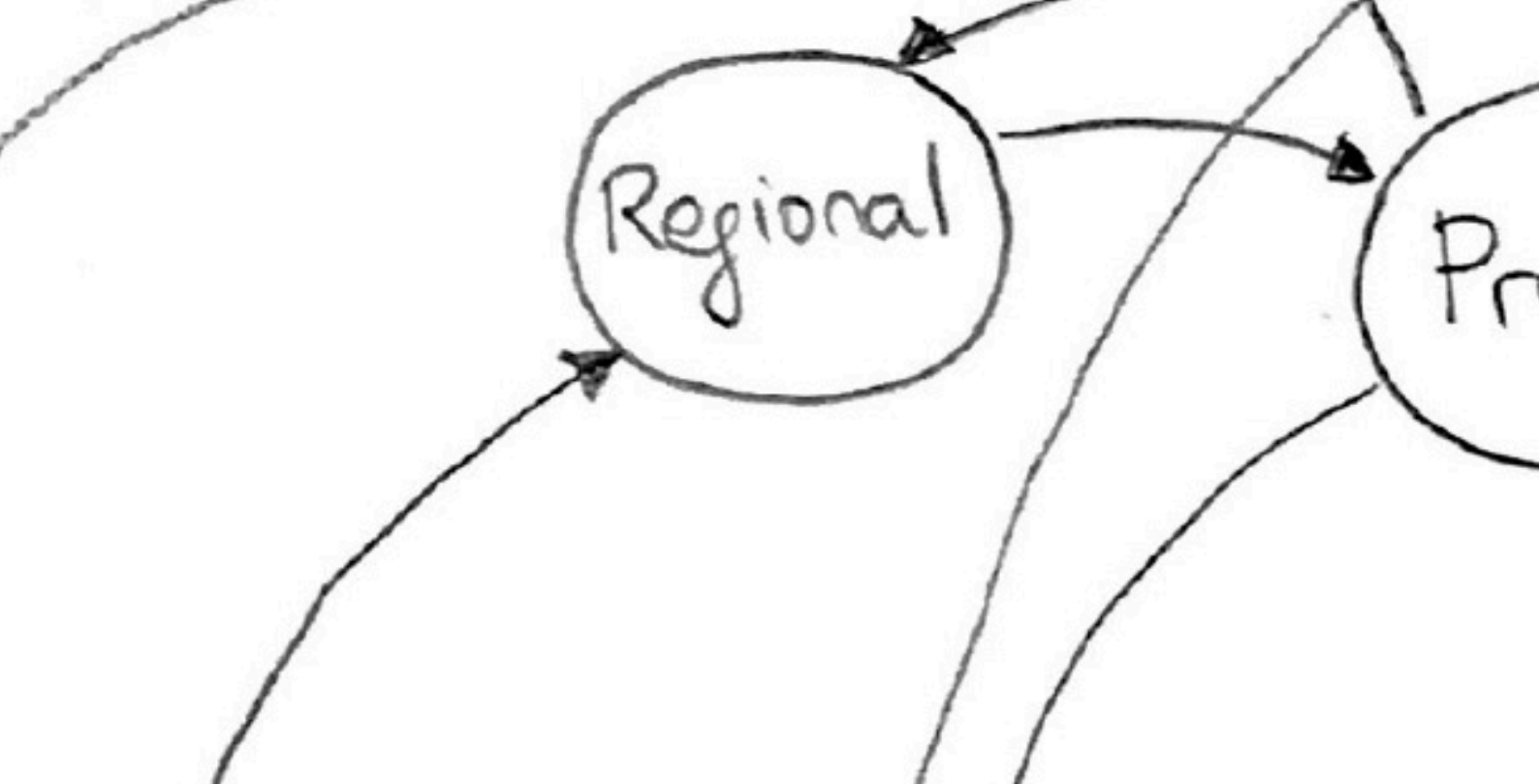
Metahaven underscores the power of visual communication and design in shaping collective identities. They believe that the design of symbols, imagery, and narratives plays a crucial role in influencing how individuals and groups perceive themselves and others. Design can create, reinforce, or challenge collective identities.

Metahaven explores how media and technology contribute to the construction of collective identities, analyzing how the digital age has transformed the way people create, share, and consume information. Their intention is to create awareness of possible propaganda methodologies and to help unpack the complexity of today's designed world.



Dialouge

In the course of my graphic communication design practice, I have increasingly focused on the portrayal of proverbs and their impact on people. I've come to understand that while these proverbs convey collective wisdom, they should also bear the responsibility of shaping the thoughts and behaviors of their audience for the better. However, the use of proverbs and idioms as visual mediums can quickly drift into a manipulative or propagandistic approach, where they aim to educate people about the ideal scenario according to the speaker, rather than considering their audience.

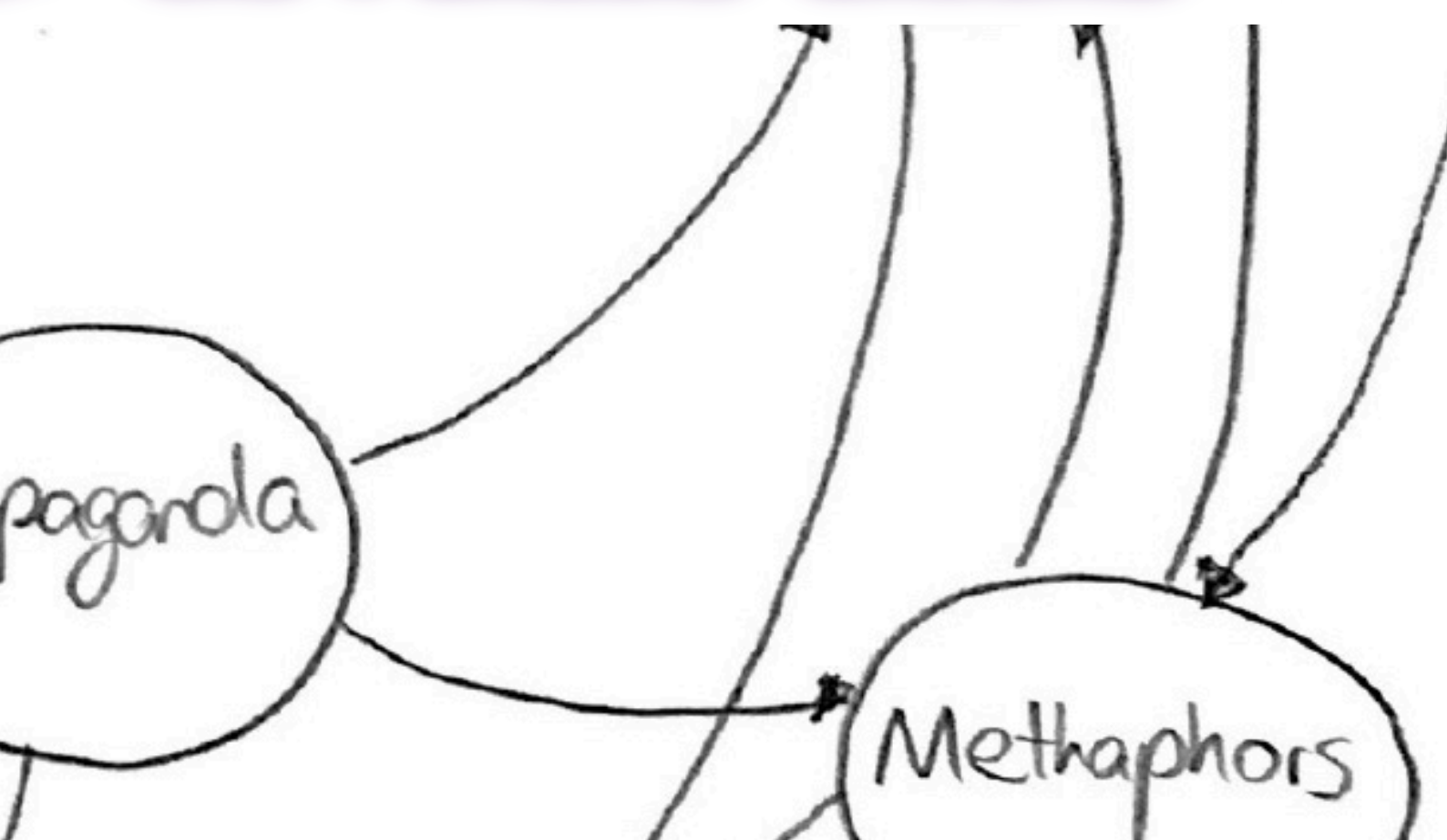


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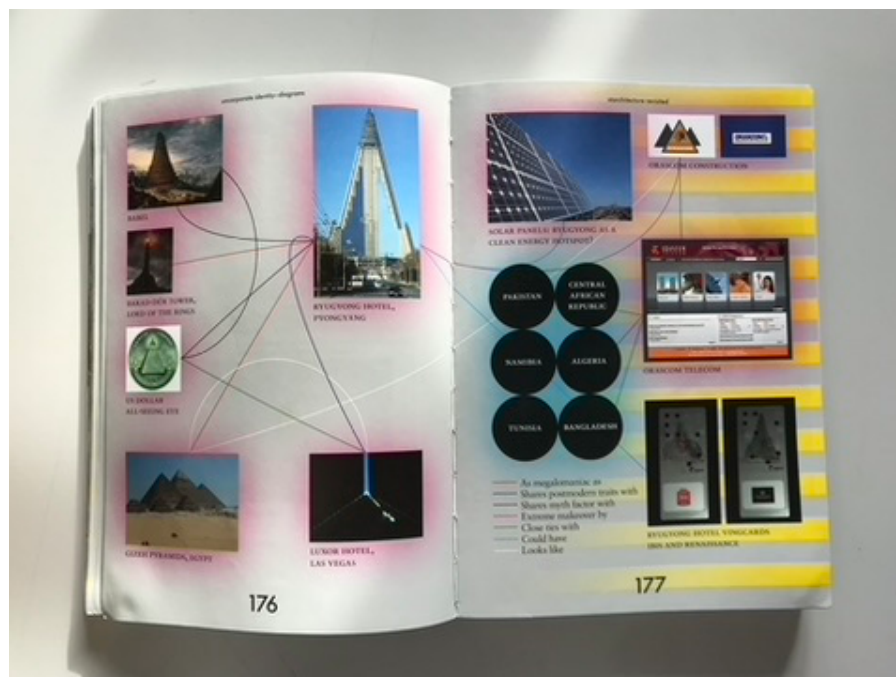
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Tension

My focus gradually shifted towards how proverbs contribute to the formation of a collective identity and address a broader community. Consequently, I transitioned from studying the works of Old Dutch Masters like Pieter Bruegel the Elder to examining the practices of states, particularly in times of crisis when they seek to control the people and establish a strong collective identity. My focus then centered on comparing the messages and design languages of propaganda posters and proverbial expressions.

The tension introduced by this reference to my studio-based practice lies in the fact that, while I had been exploring collective wisdom and regional identity through the iconography of proverbs in painting ("The Netherlandish Proverbs" by Pieter Bruegel) and in illustrations (as seen in propaganda posters), Metahaven argues that more modern media are relevant for creating an "Uncorporate Identity." This concept is also embodied in the way the publication itself is designed.



New Questions

The questions that have arisen from my research revolve around how I can discover a relevant perspective that imparts insights through the utilization of proverbs and their significance in contemporary politics and public affairs.

I intend to maintain my emphasis on the discussion of proverbs and aphorisms to elucidate broader societal points. These concise and universally relatable sayings shed light on human experiences or demonstrate their utilization in propaganda to advance specific ideologies or behaviors.



I aim to further explore the iconographic representation of proverbs and their use in propaganda, as they serve as an exemplar of how cultural myths, narratives, and shared beliefs have molded society's comprehension of history and reality, subsequently influencing societal values and norms. My objective is to incorporate elements of folklore and collective memory into my narrative and employ a non-linear, collage-like approach in my work, utilizing archival footage, interviews, and narration to craft a distinctive narrative.

Metahaven's work, particularly their book "Uncorporate Identity," has steered my research in a new direction, shifting my focus from a linear exploration of proverbs to an open-ended inquiry revolving around the regional and collective identity induced by the use of proverbs. Their collage-style publication serves as a significant source of inspiration for me to draw connections between seemingly unrelated historical events, cultural phenomena, and political ideologies, with the hope of encouraging viewers to think critically about the world they inhabit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of Metahaven's "Uncorporate Identity" has been a transformative journey that has fundamentally reshaped the direction of my research and creative practice. This exploration has unearthed several key findings that highlight the importance of considering different perspectives and sources in research.

Metahaven's work has illuminated the complexity and fluidity of collective identities, challenging my prior focus on the static representation of proverbs and idioms. Their approach underscores the dynamic interplay between politics, culture, technology, and communication in shaping collective identities. This realization has opened new avenues for my research, inspiring



Reference

Vishmidt, M. (Ed.), & Metahaven (Design studio) (Ed.). (2010). *Uncorporate Identity*. Baden: Lars Müller Publishers.

BBC (2016). *HyperNormalisation* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh2cDKyFdyU>

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