UNCORPORATE IDENTITY

Intro Riff

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Metahaven

This book is about corporate identity. Uncorporate identity, to be precise. It mines its energy from a concatenation of voids and other polemical shapes which imperil the freestanding vectors of design, architecture, politics and economics.

Formatting a troubling absence is a central concern of this book. This is intertwined with design's ability to visualize that which is supposed to be there—but isn't—or is there, but goes unseen: uncorporate identity.

UNCORPORATE IDENTITY

Usually when we observe that something—a logo, a suit, a table, a pen, a car, a hotel room—looks *corporate*, this is not necessarily a compliment. But why is that?

Corporate objects do not seem to be very interesting. They are impersonal and cold. A corporate suit, a corporate jet, a corporate pen, or a corporate logo are all just proxies. They are the sales representatives and apologists for an organization. Even a 'brand personality'—supposed to humanize the abstractions of organization—has trouble closing the gap between itself and the intangible thing it stands for. The emblem or image that represents an organization is a surface to cover that void. Such an image may appeal to people's needs, desires, or expectations. It may also appeal to their fears.

If a corporate logo is to sit over the gap, its removal exposes the abstraction of organization. The same goes for a 'corporate personality.'[1]

There is representation because organizations (especially large ones) cannot be seen in their entirety. Neither the People, the State, nor the corporation fit within the frame of a photograph.[2] No one has ever seen 'the Roman Empire' or 'the United Kingdom.' Instead, we take government buildings, fortifications, lines drawn on a map, or a waving flag, to stand for them.[3] Every organization conceives of a cipher for its 'body politic': a corporate identity. Every organization—whether it is a centrally-led Stalinist state, or a distributed network of free software collaborators—has one.

Uncorporate Identity reckons with changes in the forms that organizations take, as well as with their operations. It goes a little further than the truism that everything and everyone is a brand, while it does not submit to the quaint stance that there should be no more brands. To unmask and construct, Uncorporate Identity deploys two strategies which, it suggests, are analytical as well as creative.

The first is 'iconoclasm,' or: 'Remove to Expose.' Beneath the cover is a void, some sort of abstraction, rather than the Real Thing. The second route is that of 'crisis'—the vanishing of an organization while its emblems and trademarks survive. Think of a failed bank's logo being still displayed on ATMs, or a palace that, by its form, size and style, keeps reminding us of the obsolete system that created it.

Uncorporate Identity concerns the relationship between an organization and its tangible forms as they exist in the world. For that reason, we consider transformations of political power and organizational form to have a major influence on corporate image. When organizations, thanks to communication technologies, begin to operate as networks, corporate identity does not

disappear. Instead, it becomes even more difficult to pinpoint what the organization is. The elusiveness of networked organizations appears to more structurally engage their fundamental abstraction. For example, it has so far been difficult to devise a compelling brand for the European Union, an organization which, from its inception as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), has set out to curb, balance and manage the power of nation-states. This 'power bloc' is too faceless and distributed to even have a central, singular identity to communicate.

Corporations such as Facebook, the online social networking platform, are standards rather than brands. They, too, amount to the construction of a corporate identity. Consequently, Facebook's organization does not end with its employees and representatives—its body politic extends into its millions of worldwide users. Facebook's logo can only ever be a rather insufficient account of this.

An organization dedicated to terrorism, such as al-Qaeda, may outlast severe counterstrikes with its distributed structure of sparse cells. Even though al-Qaeda obviously does not have a house style, it cannot exist entirely without representation. In 2007 in the UK, someone was sentenced to 16 years in prison for activities which included helping designing its logo.[4] Al-Qaeda, spreading its influence over much of the unstable areas and 'failed states' of the Middle East and Africa, is a multinational brand without a center. Osama bin Laden's rise to prominence mirrors 'the latest phase in the Information Age, the techniques of which he has in his own way proved a master.'[5] Al-Qaeda's activities thus thrive on the standards of the globalized networked communication whose ideology it rejects.

The rise of corporate identity and branding as every other organization's business model is a tragicomedy of contemporary design practice. Although every organization conceives of a corporate identity, not every organization is a brand. Corporate representation in times of crisis brings about examples which are as hilarious as they are telling.

One entity which has undergone corporate refurbishment is the nation-state. In line with the valuable observations Wally Olins made about the ways in which corporations and states have assumed each other's roles,[6] *Uncorporate Identity* notes how they act out an equilibrium, or even, a costume drama. With the financial crisis in mind, we however arrive at a different conclusion regarding the legitimacy of this balancing act. Consequently, in geopolitical terms, the idea of 'public diplomacy' and nation branding as promoting a state's unique qualities and values, is only effective as long as it comes down to setting standards for others. The model of the US as an empire deploying 'soft power' cannot be appropriated by every state, and

the rebalancing of American power with other actors calls on us to consider 'network power'—rather than 'soft power'—as the main push and pull force in international politics today. All such forms of power, this book argues, are matters of design.

DESIGN AND POLITICS

Both the projection of power and the assumption of an image are ways to create a world and make it seem inevitable. The conjunction of the visible and speakable, the exhaustive self-reflexivity of every moment of aesthetic or commercial solicitation, results in both a hyper-visibility and total indiscernibility for contemporary design. The valorization of design as observed in the 1990s and in the New Economy, with architecture joining in, is sublimated into valorization at large, whether it is property development or social self-branding online. All these fields tend to become subsumed under the paradigm of creativity. As Yann Moulier Boutang observes, artistic creation 'furnishes a self-regenerating resource [...]. The form of exchange becomes the substance of value and the goods exchanged are the empty form of value.'[7] Anything that operates with intangible qualities to create value is also creating a world where that value can pursue happiness. 'Every lie creates a parallel world. The world in which it is true,' as Momus claims.[8] The cultural centrality of design means that its critical and affirmative functions become harder to keep apart. This tendency can be glimpsed via an expansive role for design, analogous to the emergence of conceptualism in art, when the borders between art and other social practices became porous. Design is intensely present, whether commercial or hypothetical, in a way that renders the idea of externality academic, and any form/content division obsolete.

As the anthropologist Michael Taussig notes in chapter 3, iconoclasm may be not so much a case of subverting a steadfast and moral image, but the bringing to the surface of a latent vice that was always there. This need not be a violent or singular act. Architect Pier Vittorio Aureli maintains that 'it is not a matter of instigating enmity, but to define what could be the possibilities of enmity.' Rather than the defamatory impulse of critique, defacement operates by showing that nothing can be hidden except in plain sight. It is design's role in the projection of what is plain sight that amplifies its potential.

CHAPTER 1

Are there any emergency exits on the world political map? The state, as a corporate entity, may be a legal disclaimer and an ideal vehicle for hidden agendas. The case studies examined here are the Principality of Sealand—a mini-state in the North Sea near the coast of Essex—and Transdniestria—a

breakaway region between Moldova and Ukraine. These examples share a certain lack of credibility in deploying the State 'format' with its set of corresponding symbols. There is room for the argument that the duality of state and corporation, central power and network, is one of balance and coordination, rather than pure difference. Each is free to use the other's name as a pretext.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter looks at large buildings and their political message. Two examples, the People's Palace in Bucharest, and the Ryugyong Hotel in Pyongyang, lead the way. Both these edifices exist in reality as well as in people's imaginations. Both are, in their own way, three-dimensional logos beyond demolition, occupying a particular role within geopolitical information space. They have become prime assets in a (positive or negative) branding of their host cities and countries: Romania as a EU member under precarious pradafication, North Korea as the insolvent Darth Vader of totalitarianism. Beyond the typologies of museum and monument, the discussion leads to the generic capacity of architectural form to divide space into categories. Architecture is space to be contested in conflict, even if its building is 'network architecture.' Chapter 2 seeks to reconcile the neoliberal idea of 'broadcasting architecture' with the political idea of contestation over a common space. It argues that inventive re-occupation may make large buildings more effective as icons.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 highlights a capacity of global terrorism: to produce contradiction and mystery within the media, inciting general paranoia about images. 'Netwar' (the type of conflict toyed with by terrorist networks and propaganda agencies alike) proliferates a distrust in the visible, and the incessant desire to unmask. In avoiding the depiction of ubiquities such as Osama bin Laden, George W. Bush, or the Twin Towers, we hope to shift attention to a secondary regime of sneakier—sometimes funnier—visual legacies. This chapter also has a science fiction narrative set in London, and an analysis of black metal music with its illegible logotypes—trying to arrive at cultural and political extremes from the fringes of the Scandinavian welfare state.

CHAPTER 3.5

The border of the European Union is a heavily guarded edifice which, however, many Europeans don't think about that much. In contrast to the EU's self-styled image of openness and diversity, in African countries Europe

promotes itself as a highly unpleasant and dangerous place to travel to and to be in. Chapter 3.5 involves sunny tourist brands, and surveillance footage from Ceuta—one of Spain's enclaves in Morocco at the EU's border. It also has an interview about the construction of European identity. Such an identity cannot exist when it is brought to an artificial standstill, and the provocative—if slightly mysterious—conclusion of this chapter is that freezing an identity equals losing it.

CHAPTER 4

Branded states are more than just the postmodern marriage between image management and governance. They present a shift in geopolitics towards standardization. The fourth chapter opens with an essay on this topic. Further on, via a provocative forecast of urban conditions in wealthy European cities under the economic downturn, a new type of state brand is outlined in which social networking and governance function together—self-management being one future scenario for social democracy. Interviews, analysis and speculation on the sheikhs in Dubai, languages and protocols, markets, networks, and democracy in Europe lead up to this chapter's final essay, which explores the EU as a distributed, rather than a centralized brand—including various historical examples of how the 'abstraction' of the common European organizational space has been dealt with since the 1950s.

DESIGN AND SPECULATION

A design approach deploying speculation and hypothesis as part of its method is putting a lot of weight on the conceptual, and, ostensibly, political, implications of such phenomena. In addition, it runs the constant risk of making wrong guesses. So a paramount question is what type of inquiry gets to 'inform' the speculative design process. Field notes, interviews, dialogues, theoretical background checks, may all be viable forms of information, but the most important aspect that design brings with it is an aesthetic sensibility—it being an antenna and a toolbox for the forms that manifest themselves in our world.

A design methodology deploying the speculative and hypothetical is taking some advantage of the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, while also raising a question about where design belongs, when this dissolution tends to produce a more flexible approach to servicing the needs of 'image capital.' We believe that speculative design, operating beyond the notion of 'critical practice,' can serve as a tool of both analysis and creative action, outlining scenarios and potential approaches in what appears as an increasingly dicey world.

When 'criticality' is compulsory, design can become doubly trapped—either in the functionality of marketing or the marketing of critique. Speculative design then, like speculative fiction ('science fiction') risks its status—or whatever is left of it—in order to engage.

NOTES

1 At a public speech during his 2008 campaign for US president, Republican senator John McCain invited a man called 'Joe the Plumber' to come onstage. After Barack Obama's chance encounter with Joe in the town of Holland, Ohio, this small business owner had become a prominent benchmark of average Americanism. Joe the Plumber was the *corporate persona* of the US. He turned out not to be present at that rally: the abstraction of an organization called 'the American People' was exposed. McCain covered the gap, telling the audience that 'you're all Joe the Plumber.'

2 The Principality of Sealand is the one exception to this general rule. This mini-state is discussed at length in chapter 1.

3 See Luuk van Middelaar, *De passage naar Europa: Geschiedenis van een begin*, Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2009, p. 49.

4 'Trio fuelled al-Qaeda propaganda,' BBC News, July 4, 2007, at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6264150.stm. Accessed December 1, 2009.

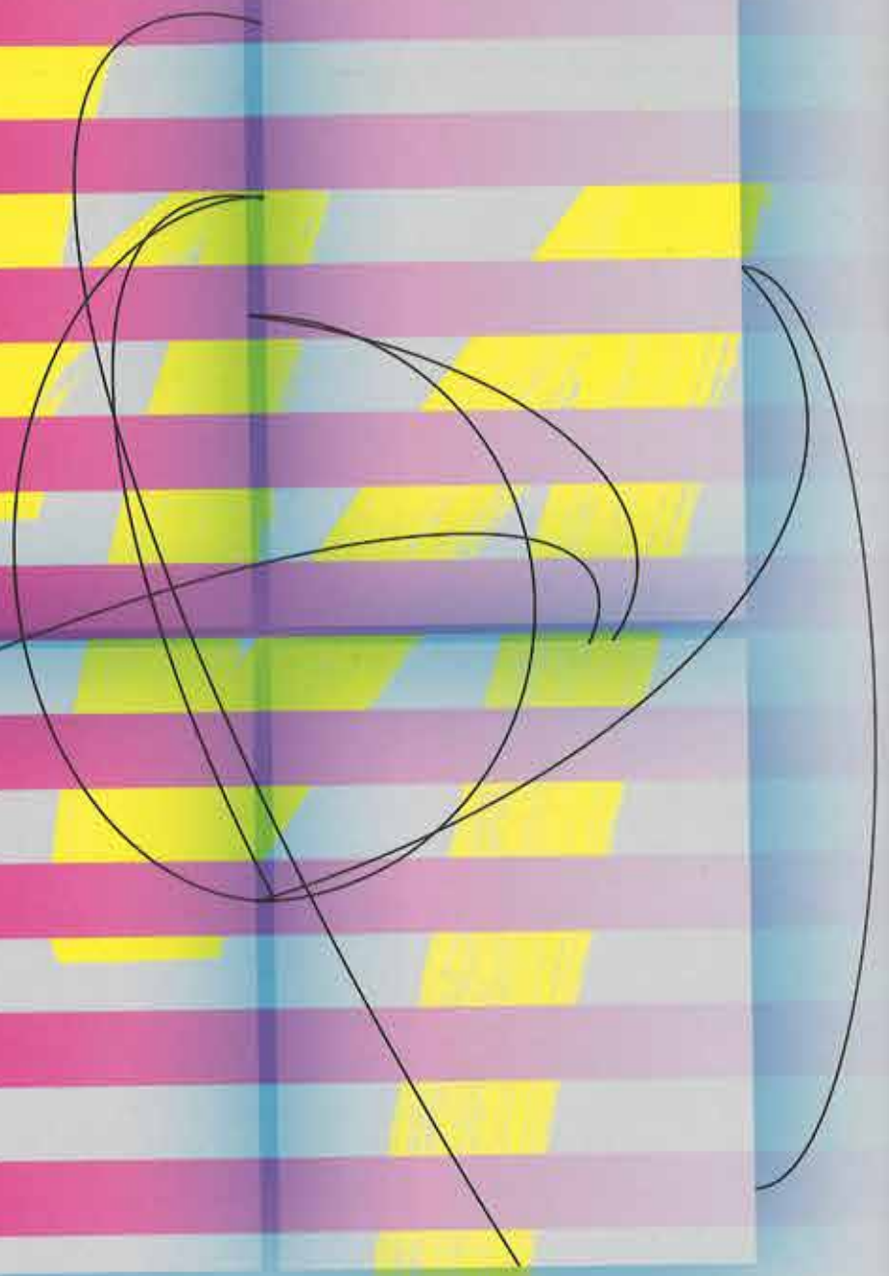
5 *Messages To The World. The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, edited and introduced by Bruce Lawrence, transl. James Howarth, London: Verso, 2005, p. xi.

6 See Wally Olins, *Trading Identities: Why Countries and Companies are Taking on Each Others' Roles*, London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000.

7 Yann Moulier Boutang, 'A Mutation of Political Economy as a Whole,' in: *Mutations*, Barcelona/Bordeaux: Actar/arc en rêve, 2000, p. 77.

8 Momus, *The Book of Scotlands*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009, front cover.

'GAME'



UNCOVER THE CONSPIRACY BY FOLLOWING THE LINKS, FINDING OUT ABOUT THE REAL INTENTIONS BEHIND THE GRAPHICS.

PITCH BLACK METAL

Logos, Passwords, and Games

METAHAVEN

Certain correspondences have been detected between privacy software and subculture, as manifested in black metal and its illegible logos.

The genealogy of proto-Metal font Fraktur—from Middle Ages to Third Reich—is the gateway to the many lives (and 'faces of death') of black metal: as a conservative force of teenage negation, as a torture technique at Guantánamo Bay, and as a blast of 'realness' in art galleries.

The song is called *War*. Backed by drums, the sound of massive guitar overdrive blares from the speakers. Then, a shrieking voice joins in. Although the singer is in deadly earnest, it sounds like some kind of horror muppet is being strangled. Varg Vikernes, the lone member of the Norwegian band Burzum, sings, drums and plays the guitar. A major difference between Vikernes and 'hard rock musicians' like Black Sabbath's Ozzy Osborne, or Metallica's James Hetfield, is that Vikernes has taken the ideology of his music to heart, and declared war on the world. Vikernes is now in jail for the murder of Øystein Aarseth, the guitarist of the black metal band Mayhem. He is also serving additional prison time for setting fire to ancient wooden churches in the Norwegian countryside. In prison, Vikernes devotes himself to the future of the Aryan race, writing down his world views in *Vargsmål*[1]—a book that looks somewhat like *Mein Kampf* gone Ikea. After his release from prison, Vikernes will move to a rural village in southeastern Norway.

When Mayhem issued its now legendary debut demo in 1985—called *Pure Fucking Armageddon*—it was common practice for underground metal bands to record their own tapes and distribute them through an intensely networked, but very distributed, community of fellow bands, zines and random youths aspiring to have a band of their own. In starting a band, the name would be essential, with the word 'death' often prominently featured.[2] Equally important were the photos of the band, cover art and, most of all, the band logo.

These symbols were to be prioritized over any sense of credible musicianship. The logo of an underground black metal band had to be illegible—a symmetrical maze of jagged forms. The brand message of the illegible logo, of which there are now many thousands, is the visual personification of an idea of 'Evil'—and with that, a carefully fabricated stance of rejection of the 'modern world.' Historically the ideas of 'Evil' in black metal logos are linked to a strain of iconography and typography used in Nazi Germany, which freely borrowed and appropriated from earlier sources. As an offspring of the more generic 'hard rock' genre and its early 1980s infusion with the D.I.Y. sound of punk rock, extreme metal bands have often referenced the typography of the Third Reich to embolden their logos. The logo of Kiss, designed in the early 1970s by band member Ace Frehley, already unmistakably resembles the SS trademark. Though not ideologically endorsing Nazism, Kiss wanted glam and scandal, appropriating not the politics but the shock value of form—a postmodern Las Vegas rather than a return to some sort of invented 'Aryan roots.'

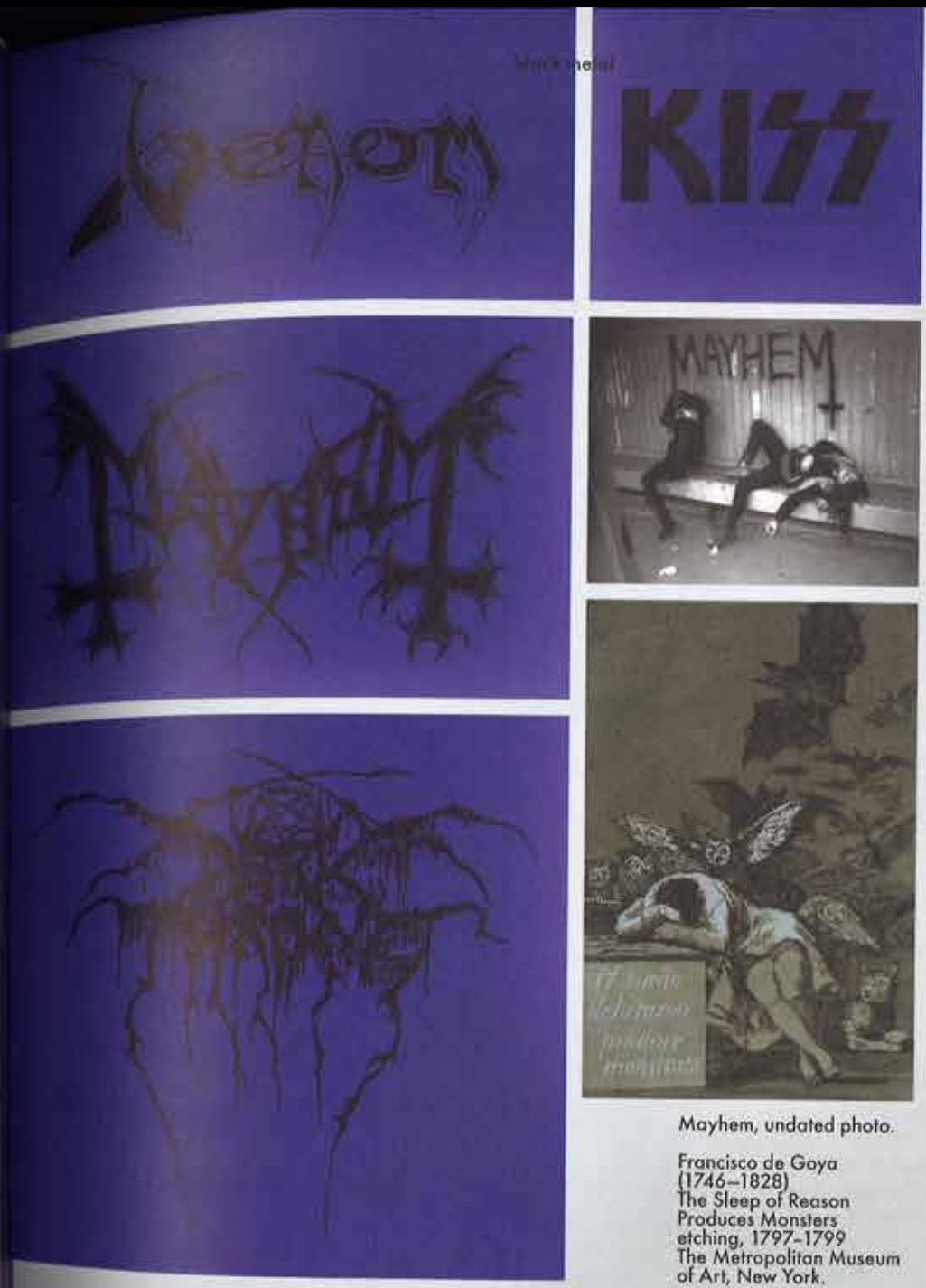
Deena Weinstein, author of *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, believes that metal is apolitical, and interested in the *idea* of power in the most general sense. Fans and musicians behave rather naively, and Frehley and the other members of Kiss explain the two S's in their logo as lightning bolts.[3] Robert Walser, professor of musicology at the University of California, qualifies that image. He writes that heavy metal musicians make use of 'images of horror and madness' in order to comprehend and critique the world:

> Although they are continually stereotyped and dismissed as apathetic nihilists, metal fans and musicians build on sedimented musical forms and cultural icons to create for themselves a world with more depth and intensity. If in some ways heavy metal replicates the ruthless individualism and violence that capitalism and government policy have naturalized, it also creates communal attachments, enacts collective empowerment, and works to assuage entirely reasonable anxieties.[4]

Tom ter Bogt, professor of pop music at Utrecht University, adds: 'Metal is a form of escapism. Naturally you see this more often in youths who are up against it. A metal concert is a celebration by people with problems. I think this is less true in the Netherlands, by the way. If you are a hard-core metal fan in the United States, you are extremely marginalized socially. Dropouts from school, if they are white, are always metal fans.'[5] U.K. Subs, a legendary 1980s punk rock band, had 'Self Destruct!' as its motto. The black metal logo seems to have taken this idea to heart. Its systematic illegibility has a self-cancelling quality to it; a message erased at the very moment it is transmitted.

As black metal threatens the world with total devastation, it issues similar threats to the logo.

Sometimes, this even happens amidst Scandinavian social-democratic well-being. According to the American designer Mark Owens, Mayhem (Norway) was among the first bands to have an illegible logo.[6] The logos of predecessors like Venom (England) and Celtic Frost (Switzerland) were still barely legible. As Mayhem's logo took a tiny step over that line, it seems that that the illegible band logo came into being around 1985. The logo is a password–behind it, a secret world is waiting. Illegible logos and messages are an unprecedented brand of fantasy in the otherwise rationalized world of visual trademarks, especially when seen in public. Their coded, forbidding appearance negates common assumptions on how to properly visualize an organization. Graphic design has, by education and professional mandate, cared for modalities of legibility and communicability more than for oppositional or romantic notions of public recognition. Design's role and alibi as a provider of public information may have initially identified with a utopian drive towards a new and more enlightened society but has ended up obsessed with accessibility and marketability that appeals to convention and habit. Communication strategists, behavioral scientists, copywriters, styling agents and other experts have helped create a world without secrets. Black metal logos, by contrast, are perhaps pseudo-religious or faux ideographic forms more akin to encoding and encryption than they are to clear ('public') communication.



Kiss logo–glam rock–and the black metal logo's transition to illegibility: Venom (UK), Mayhem, and Darkthrone (both Norway).

Mayhem, undated photo.

Francisco de Goya
(1746–1828)
The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters
etching, 1797–1799
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

BLACKLETTER'S MANY USES

Before the illegible logos of bands like Mayhem, metal and hard rock bands were mostly identifiable by their use of gothic Blackletter, or 'Fraktur.' While the typeface was ubiquitous in medieval Europe, it was progressively marginalized as a common form of script, especially at the advent of Renaissance, except for Germany, where it remained current. Much later, at the time of German unification in 1871, Bismarck considered Blackletter the only correct German script.

Fraktur, among many other applications, served as the logotype of the anti-Semitic magazine *Der Stürmer* published by the Nazi ideologist Julius Streicher.' The German forces got rid of Fraktur as their corporate typeface in 1943, due to its lack of legibility to inhabitants of occupied territories.

Fraktur and its relatives are widespread as titling typefaces. Fraktur doesn't necessarily refer to any Nazi ideology when it adorns the front page of newspapers (like *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*), eminent lawyers' offices, various brands of alcoholic beverages—including Warsteiner and Jägermeister—and so on. Metal and hard rock bands combine Fraktur with an umlaut (Motörhead) to strengthen references to Germany and the Third Reich. Formally, Fraktur also resembles spikes, flames, foliage, castles, scythes, church towers, and fences, and in more than one respect is related to the later generation of illegible logos.

Fraktur is still widely used, from diplomas to wedding invitations. There seems to be nothing 'evil' about that, but perhaps there is something about Fraktur which has generally come to stand for immovable loyalty, permanence, and a retroactive rooting in history—the fact that it is put to use to typographically mark *important*, *decisive*, and *binding* moments—such as graduation, or marriage—is fully compatible with its usage as a symbol of power. The brewery giants' gothic logos refer to their craftsmanship, tradition, and origin—someth only to be appreciated by connoisseurs. Fraktur's li to connoisseurship also str a note with metal fans. Rob Martinelli, editor of the *Maelstrom* metal fanzine, wri 'A logo plays a huge part i image of a company or produc This is also certainly the case with bands... In black metal particularly, there is a certain revered aesthetic, like spikiness, illegibility, intricacy; to those things a added that intangible elemen that tells the connoisseur 't is a cult album that is wort your time.'[9]

Extreme metal is generally considered an 'underground,' especially when Satanic or Pagan forces revolt against what is pictured as a Christian world establishment. From this perspective, metal promotes points of view which seem 'conservative.' So much in fact, that this point of view may wear a progressive mask, evoking a mythical world before any social contract, when human relations came down to the direct, unmediated confrontatio between adversaries.

And yet, the negative energy prevailing in black metal is not amenable to the release of 'progressive' ideas; metal's rejection of the present order is more strongly connected with notions of power and violence, or the imagined omnipotence of totalitarian force, than with the ideas about equality and anarchy which typified punk.' According to Dieter Roelstraete, a Belgian curator, philosopher (and musician in the metal-inspired grindcore genre), such a distinction is 'typical of the 80s': 'I think that punk always had more to do with the *ethics* of protest, and metal more with the *aesthetics* of protest; however, the idea that metal could be an affirmative cultural phenomenon seems to me impossible—'reactionary' does not necessarily imply identification with power.'[10]

BLACK METAL AT GUANTÁNAMO

At the Guantánamo Bay prison in Cuba, an American extra-legal bastion located outside of any jurisdiction, prisoners caught in the 'War on Terror' were exposed to a range of experimental punitive methods, in order to have them disclose information about their alleged membership of terrorist networks. One those advanced torture methods consisted of exposing kneeled, chained prisoners to (black) metal music played at concert volume, with the same song repeating for hours. This practice was portrayed in Michael Winterbottom's film *The Road to Guantánamo*. The film describes how Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal, and Rhuhel Ahmed from Tipton, England were deemed to be terrorists by the American forces in Afghanistan and locked up in Guantánamo Bay.[11] In Winterbottom's version, the featured black metal music was by Cradle of Filth from Suffolk, England.[12]

Asked about the use of metal at Guantánamo Bay,[13] Tom ter Bogt replies: 'This type of music is very far from the musical idiom of the people who are imprisoned there. Even to Western ears, it can literally sound devilish. Most people will go crazy if you force them listen to that sort of music... Particularly the so-called 'grunting' brings out something devilish that is probably recognizable in other cultures too. I don't know for sure, of course, but I think that this way of singing cross-culturally refers to very dark things. That is why it is so effective. It could also be music that is popular amongst the prison guards there.'[14] Guantánamo Bay held 'unlawful combatants' (a special juridical category invented by the George W. Bush administration) without granting them the prisoner-of-war status required by the Geneva Convention.

There is an alignment, a relation, between the usage of metal music in torture experiments at the Guantánamo prison, and the idea of power promoted by metal as a music genre in general. This alignment or relation can be conceived of purely at a conceptual level: the expression of total, unforgiving destructive power—perhaps also the power the Leviathan possesses, the sovereign beast who decides on the state of exception, revealing the base of law to be the arbitrariness of power...

Metal may not simply be 'apolitical' as Deena Weinstein claims. Paradoxically, metal as a cultural phenomenon is defended and promoted with liberal arguments by liberal American academics, while the positions of many black metal groups in continental Europe seem to be more of an ultra-conservative rightist lineage. Indeed, Varg Vikernes, black metal's most fervent ideologist, states that he is inspired by Vidkun Quisling, Norway's national-socialist leader during World War II, who authored a patchwork ideology of mystical beliefs he called 'Universism.'[15]
Yet, black metal and its visual culture have also provided a powerful cultural meme of resistance and negation. This meme, as we will see, serves as a stand-in for elements which are currently found to be 'missing' in the realm of 'high culture.'

BLACK METAL'S CULTURAL BRAND

Dieter Roelstraete, in an article on the artist Steven Shearer, remarked that 'the broad "cultural" attraction of grindcore is not only in the searing, destructive energy of the music (and the accompanying cathartic release) but also in the fiery passion with which this lifestyle has managed to embody a steely, evocative "NO," and to propose this "no" as a legitimate cultural position.'[16]
The soundtrack of Harmony Korine's feature film *Gummo*, 1998, featured Scandinavian black metal bands including Burzum and Bathory. Artists like Jonathan Meese, Mark Titchner, and indeed Steven Shearer cite freely from the black metal and grindcore mentality and aesthetic.

Artist Bjarne Melgaard collaborates with the Norwegian collective Thorns Ltd. to produce black-metal inspired experimental music, accommodating the genre in the broader artistic current of 'relational aesthetics.' Thorns Ltd. made its debut in 'Playlist' at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Roelstraete observes:

The art world looks with great envy and longing at the bizarre excesses of a handful of spoiled Norwegian teenagers because it thinks it recognizes a residue of 'realness' that can no longer be genuinely experienced in its own habitat, which has long been paralyzed by the cult of irony. Enter the 'Return of the Real!' The longing for negation and/or negativity which is really and truly 'bodily' experienced—that is what interests the art world in its flirtation with the metal underground.[17]

The 'black metal artist' becomes an exchange medium between the creative elite of viewers paralyzed by irony, and a dark subculture of abject and archaic symbols. Here, the contradistinction between 'good' and 'bad'—beautiful vs. ugly, high vs. low culture, as rehearsed by pop art—has given way to the juxtaposition of 'good' and 'evil.'[18]
But metal and grindcore's brutalizing energy also has more advanced usages than a mere stylistic scraping of the black metal brand for its 'evil' looks. John Zorn, a New York avant garde composer and musician, has been a pioneer of accommodating metal and grindcore influences in a more abstract method. In 1988, Zorn formed Naked City, a band merging elements from grindcore, jazz and surf. Naked City's music was used as the title soundtrack for Michael Haneke's feature film *Funny Games*.

In 1991 Zorn formed the band Painkiller, which sought (and found) a more direct appeal to extreme metal audiences. John Zorn also applied game theory-inspired methods to improvised jazz.[19] The score of a 'game piece' consisted of little more than rules of engagement for improvisation between musicians, inspired by Cold War strategic models for games of coordination.

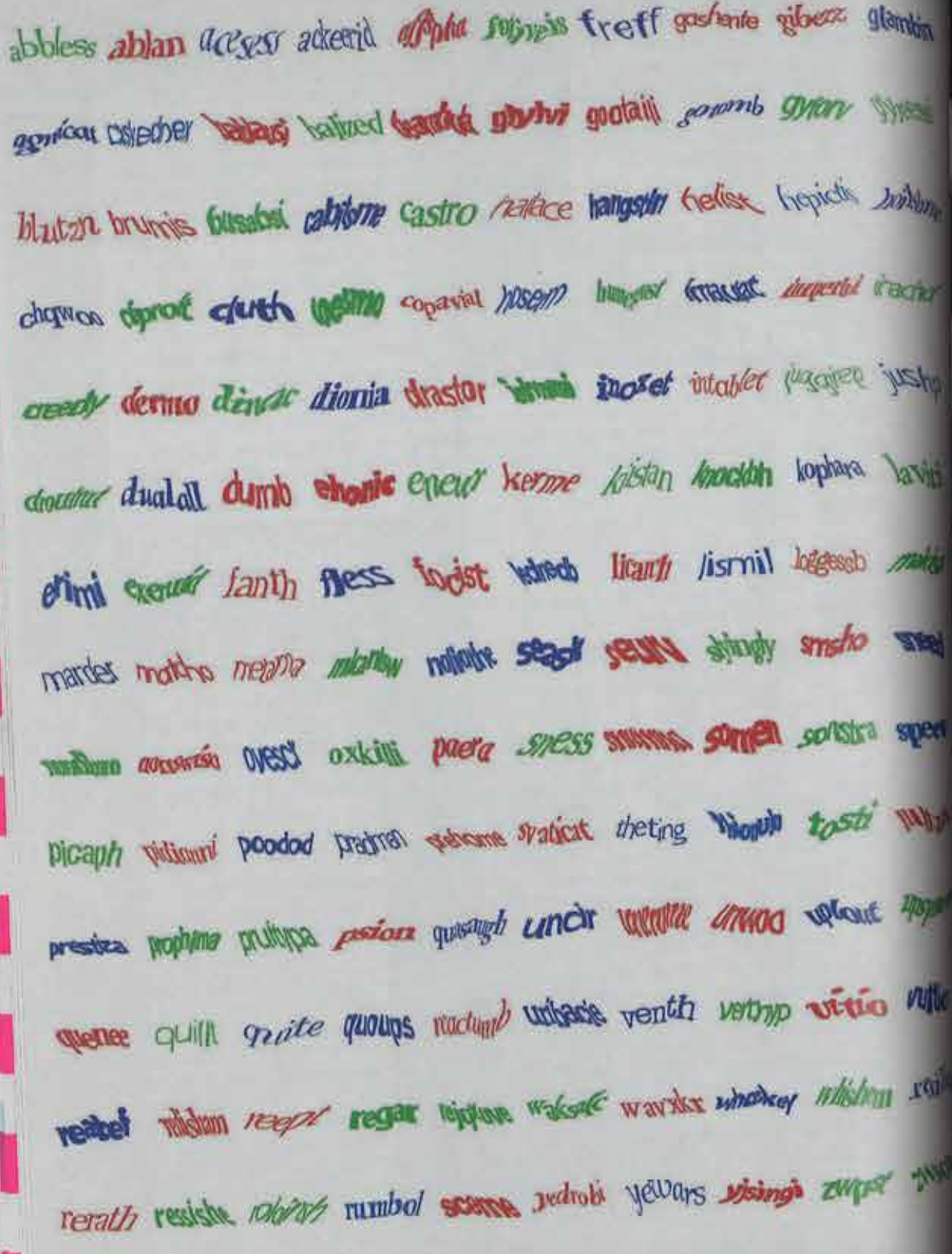
ULTIMATE D.I.Y.

With the advent of activist, or violent, black metal, the band as a group entity becomes smaller and smaller. For reasons of extreme aural distortion, the distinction between guitar and bass is no longer very meaningful. Either instrument may be jettisoned, and, when it comes to ban politics, a smaller band stands less of a chance to break up into disagreement between members. The shrinkage of the metal band may also be traced back to punk's decisive impact. At the end of the 1970s, hard rock had degraded into a symphonic genre for middle-aged men with ponytails and overly expensive audio equipment.
Under the influence of the punk movement, metal bands became smaller, their music louder, faster and often messier. Venom, the legendary Newcastle trio who invented black metal, could hardly play. In that sense, it was more of a two-man band. With its illegible logo, Norway's Darkthrone is one of the most famous and two-man groups. The most bizarre was probably the Swedish duo Abruptum, with a dwarf named 'It' as frontman. Abruptum's vocals allegedly were produced through self-torture and automutilation.

With the advent of the one-man band, a new meaning has been given to the word 'solo career.' Music, lyrics and logo have become the vehicle for the distribution of highly personal ideas. The influential Swedish black metal group Bathory essentially was the one-man project of Ace Börje 'Quorthon' Forsberg. Poland's Graveland is the solo project of Rob Darken (born Robert Fudali), who holds extremely nationalist political views. And there is Burzum, Varg Vikernes being its only musician and the Leviathan of his personal battle against the rest of the world.

ENCRYPTION AND THE INTERNET

The visual symbols of contemporary society are increasingly based on their interaction with or existence in electronic information networks. A symbol like the bar code, which has come to stand for free market exchange and consumer society, is primarily used to compress information into a formal standard. The information 'hidden' inside the bar code can be extracted from its otherwise 'illegible' form at each occasional scan.
Adjacent to the bar code, some forms of encryption and compression were developed especially for the Internet, such as the so-called CAPTCHA—'Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart.' CAPTCHA images are word pictures generated without human intervention, which must be retyped by a computer user when setting up a Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo e-mail account, for example.




ABSURD
KISS
KREATOR
MORGART
OBITUARY

The CAPTCHA has to guarantee that it is a person and not a machine setting up the account, so as to prevent abuse for spamming purposes. As such, the characters that compose the CAPTCHA have to optically diverge from standard letterforms, being practically illegible, while the words they form should be 'meaningless,' so that they cannot otherwise be automatically guessed by a computer. The Dutch graphic designer Jeremy Jansen generated thousands of CAPTCHAS in order to study their appearance and examine their degrees of meaninglessness. He found words like 'shehell,' 'castro,' 'blutzn,' 'ourevil,' and 'askednex.' Some of these uncanny logos recall the names and symbols of black metal bands. Indeed, Arthimoth, Horna, Myrkskog, Toxocara, Tsjuder and Xasthur are all black metal bands, but they could as well be CAPTCHAS.

Black metal's illegible logos functionally correspond to the age of individualism; they are more structurally similar to the bar code and the CAPTCHA than to the swastika. Whereas the Third Reich's symbols and propaganda tools were mass communication devices meant for entire populations, black metal logos—especially when combined with extreme rightist political views—have come to symbolize the hatred of more or less specifically named others by preventing the public from reading the symbol.[20] From Kiss to Burzum, black metal is the privileged subcultural development of an aesthetic of 'evil.' While the political views endorsing the aesthetic may be considered regressive and backward, its sense of visual method is not. It bridges the publicly visible and widely accepted notion of the 'trademark' with the privately defined idea of the 'password.'

NOTES

1
Michael Moynihan, Didrik Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003. Varg Vikernes took the life of Mayhem founder and guitarist Øystein Aarseth a.k.a. Euronymous in 1993; this was after the band already had had to bid farewell in 1991 to singer Per Yngve Ohlin a.k.a. Dead, who committed suicide with a hunting gun. In addition to being the guitarist of Mayhem, Euronymous was the owner of the Helvete record store in Oslo and the record label Deathlike Silence Productions, on which he brought out his own and other people's music. A key figure in the underground black metal network, Aarseth worked on a highly personal view of world history, cultural anthropology, and religion. *Vargsmål*, the title of his book, translates as 'Vargspeak.'

2
At 'Death Metal Generator' by Jan Pieter Kunst, one can automatically generate band names and song titles. www.deathmetalgenerator.info/, accessed 30 April 2009.

3
Deena Weinstein, email to the author, July 2006.

4
Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Hannover, NH: Wesleyan/University Press of New England, 1993.

5
Tom ter Bogt, all quotes from conversation with the authors, August 2006.

6
Mark Owens, email to the author, July 2006.

7
There exists a 'national-socialist' black metal band called *Der Stürmer*, which uses the original header from this Nazi journal as its logo. Based in Athens, Greece, the band promotes a curious breed of Hellenic-Aryan origins; its web site says that 'our strife as a band is IDEOLOGICAL and NOT MUSICAL.' Source: www.thepaganfront.com/dersturmer/main.html, accessed 30 April 2009.

8
See www.maelstrom.nu/ezine/interview_iss7_74.php, accessed 1 October 2007.

9
The late Mayhem guitar player had been a supporter of the Romanian dictator Ceausescu.

10
Dieter Roelstraete, email to the author, April 2007.

11
See also the website of the Center for Constitutional Rights, New York, for the statement of the 'Tipton Three:' www.ccrny.org/v2/legal/september_11th/docs/Guantanamo_composite_statement_FINAL.pdf, accessed 1 October 2007.

12
See for example foia.fbi.gov/guantanamo/122106.htm : '[There were] rumors that [an] interrogator bragged about doing lap dance on defendant, another about making defendant listen to satanic black metal music for hours.' Accessed 1 October 2007.

13
Suzanne G. Cusick, 'Music as Torture, Music as Weapon,' www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=19404, accessed 1 October 2007.

14
Tom ter Bogt.

15
Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos. The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003, p. 168

16
Dieter Roelstraete, 'Death Drives, Différence, and Nothingness,' *A Prior* 12, 2005.

17
Dieter Roelstraete, email to the author, March 2007.

18
The heavy postmodern artworks of Helmut Middendorf and Anselm Kiefer, and even the monolithic tombs of Hubert Kiecol, are distant ancestors of the Wagnerian posturing of the recent wave of artists citing black metal and Gothic references.

19
See Scott Maykrantz's biography of John Zorn at www.scottmaykrantz.com/zorn05.html, accessed 30 April 2009.

20
The French philosopher Alain Badiou calls Evil a 'simulacrum of truth': 'When a radical break in a situation, under the names borrowed from real truth processes, convokes not the void but the "full" particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a simulacrum of truth … Fidelity to a simulacrum, unlike fidelity to an event, regulates its break with the situation not by the universality of the void, but by the closed particularity of an abstract set (the "Germans" or the "Aryans"). Its invariable operation is the unending construction of this set, and it has no other means of doing this than that of "voiding" what surrounds it.'
Alain Badiou, *Ethics: an Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London: Verso, 2002.

DEFACEMENT

Dialogues

A Conversation with Michael Taussig

'WELCOME' TO EUROPE

Notes

Place Brands and Borders

It all began with a painted sun.

Now, nation branding is here to stay. Whether it's enticing tourist cashflow or deterring illegal migrants, the exercise of nation branding is paramount to the fortunes of most European countries. But the conflation of brand management and foreign policy shows that a 'Europe united in diversity' reserves the right to select its customers.

Spain did it first....

In the early 1980s the Spanish artist Joan Miró painted a vivid sign: *España*. It was the most widely distributed Miró painting of all time, itself part of a lesser-known subgenre of corporate work by the artist.

It was a new sign for the Kingdom of Spain.

But *España* was not—like a national flag—an expression of sovereignty. Neither was it—like a logo—a sign of government bureaucracy. Neither was it a piece of folk art, or an authorless artifact taken from an archaeological museum.

The sign indicated a *state of mind* about Spain.

The new brand's main purpose was to reposition the Iberian

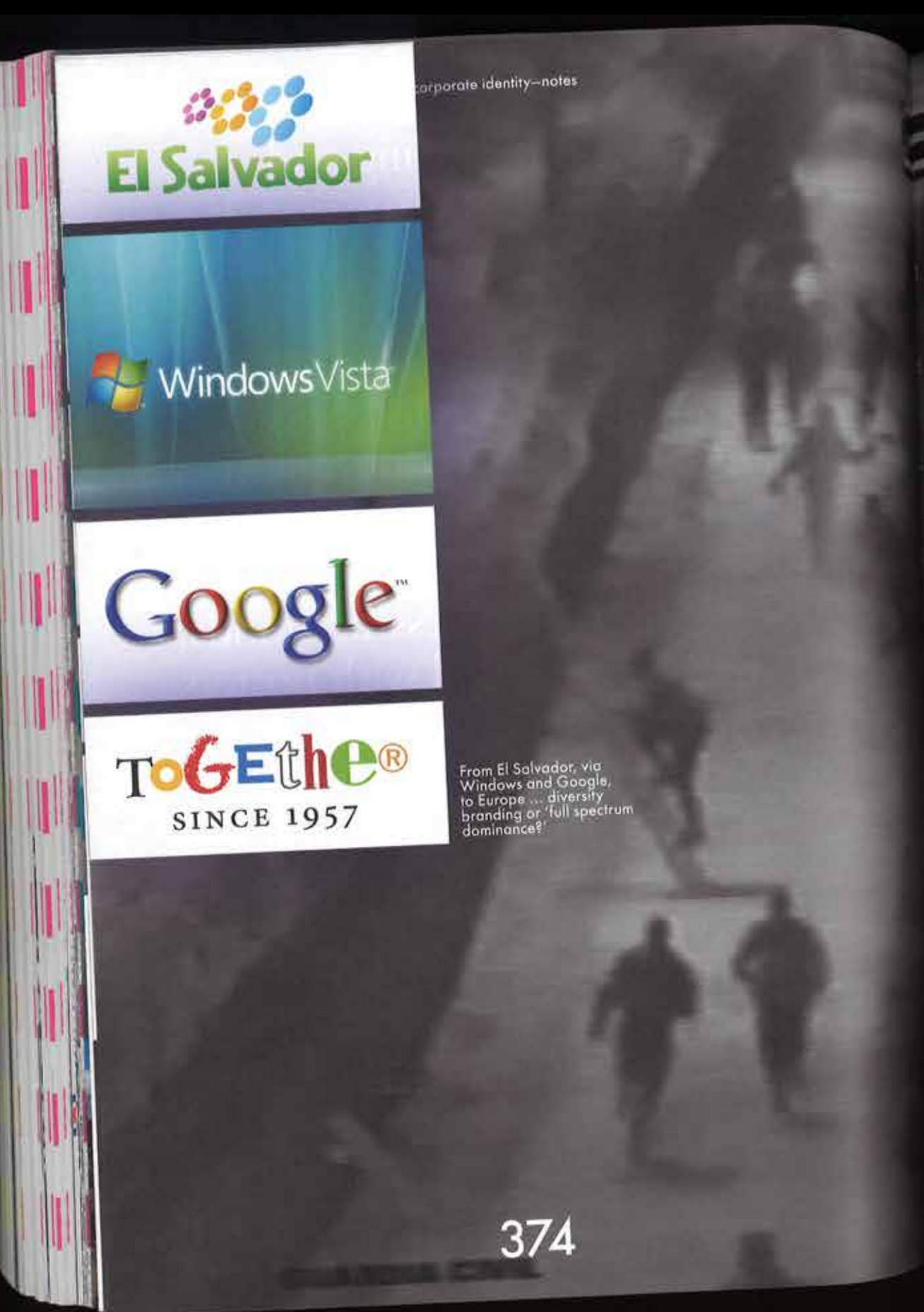
... then Malta, Armenia, Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Maldives, Azerbaijan, and even The Netherlands (holland.com) followed, each making their own 'Mediterranean promises.'

peninsula as a welcoming and vibrant destination for tourists. It is sometimes assumed that it also told the world that Spain was beyond Franco and dictatorship.

España's hand-painted brush effect became widely copied by other nation-states, along with the motif of sun, waves, and flowers, in attempts to launch equally successful brands. Travel agencies flocked with posters, brochures and display materials promoting just about every country below the polar circle with an image vaguely reminiscent of Spain's.

But one element was consistently different from the 'original.'

The various adaptations (by Poland, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Armenia, Hungary, Bulgaria,



From El Salvador, via Windows and Google, to Europe ... diversity branding or 'full spectrum dominance?'

and even The Netherlands) lacked the artistic signature that had made the original stand out. In trying to repeat and systematize the initial success, the 'spontaneous gesture' had become increasingly steered by the invisible hand of the branding industry. A managerial aesthetics of 'Mediterranean' generosity now carefully guided viewers toward the appropriate brand experience.

ALL-INCLUSIVE

The design historian Steven Heller wonders why nation branding makes 'El Salvador look like a discount subsidiary of Microsoft.' The full-color spectrum, both in the identities for IT firms and place brands, equals an all-embracing grip on human emotion.

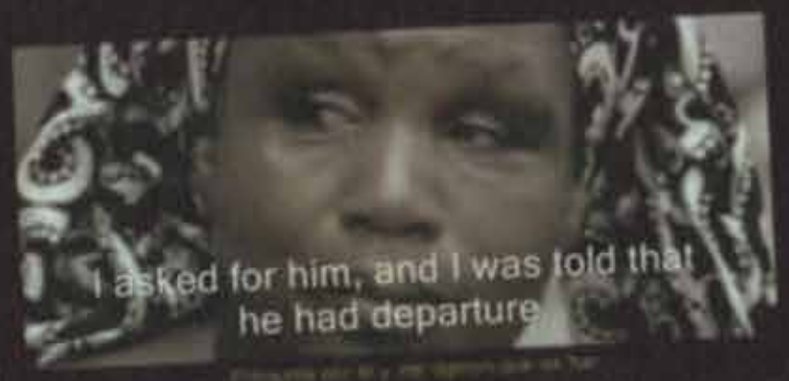
This is not limited to the logos of El Salvador, Microsoft or Google. The European Union displays the same preference. In 2007, it organized a competition among art and design students to create a European 'birthday logo' visualizing one of its corporate values: diversity. The winning entry was a logo called *Together*, with every character set in a different typeface and color. Sex Pistols (*Never Mind the Bollocks*) meets Miró at the coffee dispenser, *Together* appeases with all the formal criteria of diversity and tolerance—family-friendly Europunk for all ages.

GATEWAYS TO EUROPE

Nation brands are part and parcel of the management of gateways

and borders. Territories may be be branded positively, or negatively, depending on the types of flows desired, including people and finance. The notion of 'openness and diversity' is a question of target audience. Advertising campaigns, issued in an attempt at rebranding Europe as an unattractive and harsh place, illuminate this fact.

In 2007, Switzerland funded an anti-migration television commercial which illustrated the horrors of living in Europe as an undocumented migrant. Simon Bradley described how 'the advert, which has been aired on prime-time television in Cameroon and Nigeria, depicts the life of freshly arrived migrants in Europe as one fraught with problems

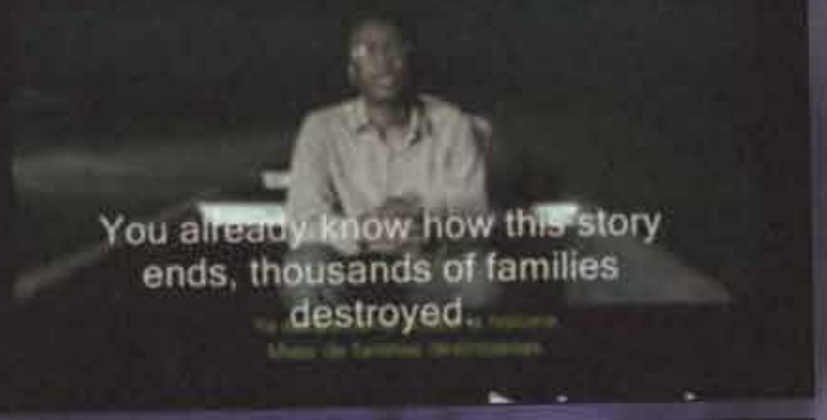


Spanish and Swiss campaigns to fend off illegal immigration.

and dangers. [...] An African migrant phones his father from somewhere in Europe in the pouring rain and assures him that all is well while in reality he is living on the street, being chased by the police and having to beg for a living.'[1] The advert was part of an awareness campaign by the Geneva-based IOM, and supported by Switzerland and the European Commission.

THE RAIN IN SPAIN

Since 2007 Spain also targets potential migrants on African television in an effort to discourage them from crossing the Mediterranean. The adverts show images of what appear to be drowned migrants—actors?



Spanish and Swiss campaigns to fend off illegal immigration.

Despairing family members give emotional accounts of their missing relatives. At the crossroads of border and brand management, these anti-migration campaigns have become the supplement to the sunlit emblems fired at tourists and investors—in a schizophrenic twinning of attraction and deterrence.

NOTE

1. Simon Bradley, *Advert aims to deter African immigrants*, November 30, 2007, at swissinfo.ch, www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Advert_aims_to_deter_African_immigrants.html?cid=6287120.