“EGO”
Takes A Trip

Zoë Barber
“A designer has to have the hide of a rhinoceros, the neck of a giraffe, the memory of an elephant and the persistence of a woodpecker.”

— Alan Fletcher
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Research: Ego, Superego and the Id</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background Research: Character of Creativity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What We Know &amp; A Voice of Reason</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego Takes a Trip</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And So…</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix One</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I started this paper because I wanted to have a rant: designers are arrogant, self-absorbed monsters who are yet to justify the elaborate superiority they have placed upon themselves and their profession. Not the most solid reason for initiating a research paper, but this had bearing upon the doubts I have had about this industry for the past four years.

Ironically enough, in the course of my research and through some self-absorption of my own, I began to realise that in fact the ego had an important role to play in what the designer does. I did not resolve my questions about the value of the practice itself, but if we are going to be designers (irrespective of whether or not we should be), then we are entitled to use our ego and id in the process.

So the body of this paper now travels this path. It’s about soothing the superego into silence and giving the ego, the self, a mighty scratch behind the ears. “Good dog!”

But I still have my doubts, and rather than disregard them, I have allowed them to run along the edges of this argument. Occasionally, they come back to my fundamental uncertainties about what I have chosen to study. More often, they are the initial concerns I had about the role of the ego in design and some of the designers, writers and critics who happened to have similar thoughts.

Freudian psychology provides me two lines of argument: a loosely controlled id, which encourages us to wave the ego flag, and a more restricted superego, that casts doubt and offers a voice of reason.
INTRODUCTION

“Currently, graphic design history and practice is neither specific nor general in its scope; rather, it is elusively constructed out of fickle self-interest and unchallenged ego. Unchallenged, because, for the most part, the rest of the world doesn’t give a shit about graphic design anyway.”

Jeffrey Keedy (1993: 16)

“Ego” Takes A Trip studies the role of ego in Visual Communication, as well as the creative process and creative character and how these things contribute to, or detract from, our understanding of ego.

The creative person is shadowed in mystery, shadowed by processes that others do not fully understand. Even in academic discourse, the creative process in not consensually understood. And when speaking of design, the discussion becomes more complex again. “Even our own minor participation in the creative act arouses a feeling of awe. We participate in a mystery” (Barron; 1997: 330).

Additionally, the terminology employed here — especially “ego” — requires clarification, for it too is questionable. “Ego” is inherently a concept of the self; it distinguishes each individual from another. In psychology, the ego controls and mediates a person’s behaviour and provides a defence against the demands and expectations of the id: “…the dark, inaccessible part of our personality” (Freud: 1933: 65).

Yet, in much contemporary communication and frequently in design writing, “ego” is defined through a more vernacular understanding, as “an exaggerated sense of self-importance [or] conceit” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).
Consequently, “ego” even in psychoanalytical discussion, becomes laced with negative implications; suggesting self-centredness and egotism. This is not necessarily a realistic representation. Ayn Rand (1964: ix–xv) makes a convincing argument towards a positive understanding of egoism, stating that the ego — in its vernacular definition — and some degree of selfishness are not guaranteed precursors to arrogant behaviour.
EGO, SUPEREGO AND THE ID

Grounding the psychoanalytical concept of the ego is the Freudian explanation of the unconscious mind, which spans three areas. The ego is the self: it acts as a mediator, balancing internal and external pressures, temptations or persuasions, with accepted behaviours as informed by the superego. It is consequently driven by the ‘reality principle’ ("a tendency to satisfy the id’s demands realistically, which almost always involves compromising the demands of the id and the superego" (Carlson & Buskist; 1997: 465).

Countering this is the id, which Freud (1993: 65) described as "the dark, inaccessible part of our personality… We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations… It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organisation, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle." The id then is insistent and unresponsive to limitations of reality.

The superego is the conscience, carrying the rules and restrictions of society, and the ego-ideal, the internalization of what we aspire to be. The superego applies a suppressive instinct to counter the whims of the id, and is balanced by the ego. (Paraphrased from Carlson & Buskist; 1997: 465.)

Freud believed that the compromise between these two conflicting forces often generated a sense of frustration, which contributed to artistic creation, a way of expressing whatever had been repressed. He concluded, for instance, that the extraordinary talents of da Vinci and Michelangelo was a consequence of displaced sexual energy and
repression, “a sublimation of the id into the realms of fantasy and the aesthetic” (Negus & Pickering; 2004: 141).

Similarly, “Goethe did not feel he had dealt with an experience till he had discharged it in a creative artistic activity” (ibid). The problem with this theory of repression leading to artistic creation, to which Freud so often referred, is that instances of repression present often in clinical psychology, yet demonstrate no apparent, corresponding expression in the creative arena.
CHARACTER OF CREATIVITY

Attempts have been made to identify the characteristics which are common in creative individuals and those tending towards genius. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) system, used in conjunction with standard IQ testing, highlighted a range of attributes shared by creative types.

These included independence of judgment, self-confidence, intuition and an established sense of the self as a creative person. “Creative individuals tend to believe they are creative and this belief is a strong motivator of their work” (Weisberg; 1986: 73). Additionally, several of these studies aimed to differentiate between artistic creation and scientific creation, and determined that the former group showed a greater reliance on emotion intuition, in themselves and others.

Such qualities are fairly unsurprising, although one factor deserves more consideration. A creative sense of self becomes increasingly developed through education and into the professional environment. It becomes a barrier to establish in face of threats to one’s practice, a process of self-endorsement and personal security. Weisberg doesn’t comment on the insecurities that may belie this approach or at least underlie it.

Nor does he extend the discussion to considering how a vernacular understanding of the ego could fit into this. But to pursue the line he begins, and the studies of Dr. Francis Barron (1997), we can propose the following:

1. Interestingly, Swede (1993: 27–32) demonstrates that creativity is not necessarily any indicator of IQ as it presents in standard tests. However, Storr suggests that “although a person of low intelligence may have an original idea, it is unlikely that he will be able to elaborate or present it in any effective way. High intelligence is invaluable for most creative endeavours” (1972: 240–41).
Creative aptitude arouses a sense of awe in those that observe either the process or the result. Those who are creative feel this drive as an integral part of who they are. They are generally sensitive to others (their audience, clients, peers etc.) and to the emotional atmosphere surrounding them and their work. They are quite likely, by deduction, to be aware of the awe their creative act can inspire.

Does this contribute to an exaggerated display of the ego? Through the acknowledgement of other’s being impressed or in awe, there is potential for the designer’s ego to arise. Or, contrary to this, for the designer to feel pressured and unable to live up to such expectations. This, though, is the more unlikely scenario, especially in reference to Weisberg’s definition (self-confidence being the primary feature). Nonetheless, as professionals, designers are in the unique position of not having clear, factual information to give their clients. There is infinite space for subjective responses to what the designer proposes, infinite solutions and interpretations.

The common understanding of creative types would tend to feature most of the characteristics noted above, and perhaps also cite the perceived ‘craziness’ of the creator. The media particularly has built an image of the ‘mad scientist’ or ‘eccentric artist’, and this has lead to an interpretation of creativity as a result of some kind of mental instability. Van Gogh, for instance, is as notorious for his paintings as his schizophrenic behaviour. What is rarely reported, however, is that he relied on painting to reach to a more lucid state: “If I could once really throw myself into it with all my heart, it might be the best remedy” (Winner; 1982: 376).
Swede (1993: 38) meanwhile, writes convincingly against the myth, citing studies that show the frequency of psychiatric problems to be no higher among the “eminent” than the rest of the population. Yet the myth remains, perhaps because, as Swede suggests, the creative person often demonstrates behaviour that society does not expect or understand. Generally, they will not conform to mundane normality nor willingly apply to social regulations. “This deviancy of responses may be erroneously interpreted as emotional instability or possible maladjustment by some observers” (Schubert & Biondi; 1977: 192).

Studies conducted by Francis Barron, a psychologist renowned for his interest in the artistic personality, also contribute to the development of a clearer definition of the creative character. Barron worked during the 1950s and '60s at the University of Berkley.

Barron's research expands on Wiesberg to include risk-taking, to the extent of non-conformity. He wrote: “Creativity requires taking what Einstein called ‘a leap into the unknown’. This can mean putting your beliefs, reputation and resources on the line as you suffer the slings and arrows of ridicule” (1997: 330).
WHAT WE KNOW

To clarify, the character of the creative individual is not built on a madness or desire for deviancy, nor is it necessarily driven by a high IQ, though we anticipate that this would be evident.

What does appear consistently in the creative person is an aptitude for risk-taking, strong intuition and sense of self, self-confidence and independence of judgment. The designer, or Visual Communicator, is a creative individual; most of these traits are consequently evident in their personality, regardless of how muddied the creative process becomes due to the commercialisation of the output. Self-confidence generally facilitates a willingness to take risks and exert independence of judgment.

Intuition or hunches potentially give rise to issues of self-doubt, as it is not clear as to how these whims arise. This aspect of creativity is unreliable and unstable and cannot be willed into specific action.

The most creative designers, who consistently produce expressive, innovative work, are taking the greatest risks and making the most independent, expansive judgments. Thus they are demonstrating the greatest evidence of self-confidence and probably, ego.

A VOICE OF REASON

Perhaps ego is not the ideal term to shape this discussion. May (1975: 13) attributes much creative impulsion to courage, distinguished from a more arrogant ego-drive. “What masquerades as courage may turn out to be simply a bravado used to compensate for one’s unconscious fear and to prove one’s machismo.”

Yet there is strength of self-conviction in May’s definition: “a chief characteristic of this courage is that it requires a centeredness within our own being” (ibid). This can be interpreted as a sense of the self, as an ego-strength rather than ego-drive or arrogance.

May notes a paradox in this courage concept, stating: “We must be fully committed, but we must also be aware... that we might possibly be wrong” (1975: 20). There is potential here to begin distinguishing between aspects of ego versus arrogance. Or rather, between behaviour that reflects the id and that which shows the superego controlling it.
Neumeir explains the relationship between designers and the ego in the following way: “The most daring thinkers are those with a high degree of self-confidence. This may explain why there are so many outsized egos in graphic design — the work requires it” (1996: 43).

The body of this paper looks to develop this idea more extensively, by considering the creative personality and the significance of the id/superego conflict.

As noted previously, intelligence is not a certainty when assessing the creative person. However, within Visual Communication, there is an expectation that the designer will possess a reasonable intellectual capacity. This may not be academic, but rather a social and cultural intelligence; it allows the designer to consider the position of their audience through an imagined empathy, and provides a capacity to move into the professional arenas of a vast range of clients.

As so most intellectual practitioners, designers often reflect on their position within society and how their rather enigmatic practice can impact its audience. Gui Bonsiepe (Toorn; 1998: 106) explains that such reflection frequently translates into developing methodologies which deride issues of self-complacency, identify disparity and, most importantly, ask society for “legitimation of power.”

For designers, this power is expressed through the manipulation and control of the visual and typographic world: they influence, employ gentle subterfuge, convince and effect. How extensively the public are consciously aware of this, and more significantly, how extensively they are influenced by it, relies on how well the mediums available to the designer are employed. If it is a considerate application — where

“The problem with graphic design is that it’s too easy. That may be weird thing to say, maybe it’s arrogant, but it’s not the world’s deepest profession, especially the way it was practiced when I was starting out... I think a lot of people are having to struggle with how to get it to be more important.” (Kalman: Goldstaud-Dairiotto; 1999: 97-98.)

Even seasoned high-profile designers doubt what we do and question the intelligence of it. I don’t doubt that the
the designer is delivering more to the collective ocular psyche of the public than pretty visual fodder and where they promote only the message and content of the required communication — then there is also an inherent responsibility in the role of the Visual Communicator. Michael Rock (1992: 192) says design involves a “responsibility for creating meaningful forms,” and for not limiting messages through the communication of the designer’s personal agenda, nor folding to a client’s desire for irresponsible self-promotion. Simply, there is a responsibility embedded in any professional which deals with “the modulation of information” (Rock; 1992: 191).

Having defined the creative personality, however, we start to address how the designer’s personal concerns could be employed within their professional output. “Graphic designers might too have something to ‘say’, some point of view to express, something necessary to add to other viewpoints” (Poyner; 1999: 16). Intelligent, creative, inventive individuals, whose receptivity to the whims of trends or the zeitgeist is stronger than most (such as Peter Saville), are ideally positioned to communicate with a great range of audiences. Their clients are not always in the same position. The W, H, S, advertising agency in Zurich is a good example of this. Highly successful (they bill around $US 175 million each year), they undertake a process of refinement with each client. Reinhold Weber (the W of W, H, S,) explains it thus: “We study a very thick brief about the company. We go there, get a feel, ask questions, investigate… Then we throw away the most important things, we strip away the bullshit” (Adler; 1999: 48). Weber openly shows his willingness to disregard what his clients have prioritised; what they emphasise is not necessarily what he finds has the most currency for advertising.

industry is populated with intelligent individuals. I do question the inclination to instill value where it doesn’t fit. If Visual Communication is not inherently “important” and its proponents wish it to be, there becomes a solid niche wherein we should begin to find methods for instilling genuine value.

Pro bono work (for charities or similar organisations) may provide an obvious solution: a way to resolve problems otherwise untouched and contribute to society through messages of substantial purpose. It would mean the complete sacrifice of the ego and any personal ambition relating to it, as well as the repression of the id: to truly have value, such communication would need to be exclusively about the organisation for which the designer is providing the service.

Furthermore, working from this presumed intelligence, I question the extent to which ‘graphics’ is taking bright students from other professions. With little consideration of the corresponding client demand, design colleges are expanding hugely, granting masses of students entry to a field that used to be more considerately
This provides another element in the arsenal of the designer, another stage at which their influence may become directly evident in their practice, where self-expression (through this feeling for the zeitgeist) becomes a perfectly acceptable model for communication.

Every Visual Communicator, to varying degrees, draws on personal expression and experience to formulate designs that respond to each client's unique requirements. Short of taking Saville's bold approach — only working for clients who have “what I do as a brief” (King; 2003: 156) — the designer is building their own personality into the communication of someone else's message. Weber endorses practice akin to that of Saville: “He has talked often and openly about trying to keep his artistic integrity while doing what the client wants. By ‘making bullshit,’ I took him to mean ‘caving in’ to clients” (Adler; 1999: 48). Both Saville and Weber reveal aspects of their id: a sense of self-assurance and superiority that builds not only their practice, but also their ego.

By placing a reliance on self-expression, however, these designers are putting themselves in the way of any sort of critique by eliminating critical objectivity. To return briefly to Barron, they are exposing their “beliefs, reputation and resources… [and potentially suffering] the slings and arrows of ridicule” (1997: 330). So how does a designer defend against such attacks, which often feel personally directed on account of the nature of creativity: subjective, of the self. And though these criticisms are not intentionally targeted at the creator, they are nonetheless confronting, even from the mouths of amateur critics (or clients).
And so to ego, or rather its precursor: self-confidence. In the creative person, it facilitates risk-taking and the independence of judgment, which encourage, even allow, innovative design solutions. Where pressured or challenged, the designer's self-confidence extends to present as ego. Without it, few would be confident enough to sustain their practice and persevere through the rejection or disinterest of clients and frequently, the public. The ego can sustain a designer's motivation; it serves as a whisper (or bellow) of reassurance that the practice has validity.

To propose a piece of communication, that involves some degree of self-expression, a designer has to embody an air of conviction that they are suitably equipped to communicate with any audience. They have to be strong-willed enough to fight for the appropriateness of this communication, and to believe in it sufficiently that they are in a position to fight. As Todd Lief (2002: 266) writes, “if you are to act — especially if you are to succeed — on the belief that you have the power to make things look and work better, you were obviously gifted at birth with the prized genes of talent, persuasion and chutzpah.”

On a similar theme, Milton Glaser states that designers need to be “courageous…[and] willing to be embarrassed” (Neumeir; 1996: 43). Of Tibor Kalman, Stephan Stagmeister says, “he is the most direct person I know, completely fearless” (Goldstad-Dairiotto; 1999: 97). Peter Saville wrote in his journal of January 1990: “don't be afraid; don’t bury the attitude under any surface” (King; 2003: 183).

Each of these designers demonstrate aspects of the id by confronting behaviours most people avoid through social decency. Saville, for instance: rather than quelling his attitude, as society anticipates he
would, he reveals it, allowing his personal attitudes into the work, as well as his ego. As close to a celebrity designer as is possible, Saville’s ego is well-adapted to informing his practice.

He has further applied this sense of self to effective self-promotion, in part by associating himself with high-profile clients — primarily musicians and fashion designers — and also by the use of external commercial applications of his work. Saville has “begun to realise,” wrote Christopher Wilson (King; 2003: 181), “the value of his own history.” As so Kalman and David Carson, Saville has had books of his own work published: records of the profession, certainly, but also delicious ego-boosts.

Saville’s fame (comparatively: he is certainly the only graphic designer to ever have been included in a feature film¹), the attention he has received within the profession, his notoriety, have all fed his ego. But further than this, his unwillingness to compromise (despite being in an industry where the designer’s personal opinion rarely matters to the client), has made him, and his ego, infamous.

Consequently, the traditional model of the designer relying on the client’s initiation has been shifted; Saville designs for those who need his style of work. As such, he is most successful — perhaps only really successful — when the design occurs around his own terms, “which are arrogant, exacting and…deliciously haphazard” (King; 2003: 128).

More often, however, designers have considerable trouble with self-promotion. There is a desperation underlying the industry regarding

---

¹. 24-Hour Party People, about the Joy Division and New Order era, featured Saville, “played to his enormous relief by someone really good-looking” (King; 2003: 125).
the value of the Visual Communicator and what he or she has to offer
the public. Partly, this relates to the ease with which others can access
and utilise what used to be designer-only tools; software for instance.
Partly, it is a matter of public appreciation. Vince Frost laments of his
early industry experience: “I became frustrated thinking that I put so
much energy into the profession and really, the majority of people
can’t see it” (Finn; 2004: 31). There is a hunger for acknowledgement
evident here; if the id were unleashed, perhaps Frost’s voice would be
more effective and pointed, and heard with more clarity by the public.
The cautionary murmurs of the superego force Frost, and others, to
whisper when they would be better served by a bellow.

If the public do acknowledge what the Visual Communicator does,
they generally struggle to comprehend it. When confused, humans
typically aligned things with what is more tangible to their experience,
relying on something which they readily understand or accept. For
designers, powerfully transporting their audience through graphic
languages, there is a potential parallel with marketing and advertising,
imbuing immediate distrust. Visual Communicators, naturally and
rightfully, rile against this.

There is also the more common link to the fine arts, which suggests
designers are highly creative, emotional creators who draw inspiration
from personal experience. Though not necessarily untrue, this does
cloud design with a very personal shadow and moves it increasingly
toward the methods of Saville. Regarding this confusion, Frost noted:
“There is a need to rationalize it [the design process] and put it in an
order that is understandable. For a long time, I felt embarrassed in
some situations explaining that it is an intuitive process because that
is normally related to art. It’s more related to self-expression and we

But “designers are servants, not artists.
They don’t pursue their own desires;
they carry out others’ requests, and
they solve other people’s problems”
(Behrens; 1998: 20). There is little
room for the self, for the ego, here. And
equally, little justification for strict
reliance on self-expression.
don't see graphic design as self-expression. You’re just not trained to think of it as self-expression” (Finn; 2004: 38).

So the association to fine arts doesn't mesh well with most designers, but still the public rely on it, at least partly. And designers, by having such a limited discourse explaining what they do external to their profession, have not managed to alter this mindset particularly.

Design, and particularly Visual Communication, is a complex beast. At a cursory level, it can be explained as the collation of the client’s needs and wishes, shuffled into something on a visual plane. This though, is a elementary understanding of the design process and not a particularly flattering description. It is not necessarily a definition designers want to offer the public, for it sounds more than slightly mundane. More realistically, Visual Communicators are constantly looking beyond what the client has requested to avoid preconceived results: “The tender made by the designer…must absolutely not be seen as a simple form of consensus, as an unambiguous comparison between two contrasting points of view. It is far more a question of the introduction of more aspects in the message than are required to meet the client’s tender. And of course, by no means are all of these aspects to be discussed with the client” (van Toorn; 1998: 162). This habit of not doing specifically what is asked for, however, and hiding certain features of it, can be construed as arrogance.

Architect Denys Lasdum emphasises this attitude: “Our job is to give the client, on time and on cost, not what he wants, but what he never dreamed he wanted; and when he gets it, he recognizes it as something he wanted all the time” (Dorst; 2003: 98). The comment seems laced with egotistical self-assurance and the rebellious superiority of the id.
Kees Dorst (2003: 98), however, argues that this is an integral part of the designers’ character, that ego is an essential component of design and designers could not consistently produce creative work without a reasonable amount of it, especially where it is employed in matters of self-preservation.

To readdress to public perception, designers are perhaps not so eager to change the opinion of their clients and audience. This is not about laziness nor even the complexity of the practice, but rather about ego and the secret society that has been established around the industry to feed it. Designers cherish their secret language. They bewail how no one understands what they do, but hesitate to explain it, in case someone does. It’s a powerful position: holding a wealth of knowledge, a broad-reaching skill set, considerable collective intelligence and an aptitude for reading and controlling the visual world; and not letting clients or the public in on the secret. As Frosl explains, “I was always taught…don’t show them how easy it is” (Finn; 2004: 33). Similarly, typographer Piet Schreuders wrote: “It is a craft to be practiced in silence… The less the general public learns about our activities, the better” (1991).

Partly, this approach to what Visual Communication is, and who the practitioners are, facilitates a private, elitist ego-trip. It’s the whisper of the id that reassures the designer that they know more than their client: a locality of power, where otherwise questionable hierarchy can be subconsciously confirmed. For professionals who are effectively fulfilling the wishes of others, and are self-confident and assured, and conscious of their creative drive, a dose of ‘I’m better than you’ keeps the designer in the game.
This veil of secrecy, however, does not work entirely in favour of the profession. Visual Communication as a complex, intellectual activity is often undermined by the extent to which the process is hidden from both clients and the public. There is a subsequent devaluing of design following on from this, providing a client the opportunity to think, if only fleetingly, 'I could do that'. As Dorst explains it, “from the outside, design is a strange profession; the creation of novel things by means of an incredibly messy process that is hard to control and difficult to rely on. The marked contrast between the inside and outside point of view causes no end of misunderstanding between designers and the outside world” (2003: 73).

And yet, if designers apply transparent models, like those which Frost currently endorses, and deeply involve their clients in the process, there is little chance for revelation (a ‘ta-da’ moment), although there is also a leaner window in which to turn down a tangential path where the client may not wish to travel. Such practice removes a level of risk, which we’ve established is valued by the creative character. Conversely, as Frost has noted, by practicing in this way, a wider understanding of design can be generated.

Because such practice is not wide-spread (secrecy equals security, perhaps), designers still experience a need to justify their creative output. Fifteen or twenty years ago, the provision of commercial work that “expressed feelings” or that the designer simply “liked” (Stiff; 1993: 36) served as sufficient justification. Increasingly though, there is a pressure to develop a “personal preference and a designer-centered ideology” (ibid), creating an environment supportive to the ego and the whims of a designer’s self-expression.
Which returns the discourse to ego and a methodology of personal satisfaction arising from expansive self-expression. Potentially, design participates even less with genuine issues and becomes a doctrine of decoration through this approach to practice, a finishing flourish with little value (van Toorn; 1998: 156). In other words, it becomes even more about style, “something that, if left unchecked, will spread and eventually kill off the substance that lives beneath the surface” (Jacobs; 1990: 188). To revisit the designer’s responsibility to society, the most irresponsible direction they can take, according to Rock (1992: 193), is to rely on “design stunts” that hold little or no function or message and speak, ultimately, only to other designers.

So if they are not doing this, what are designers able to contribute? Hermann Zapf (Stiff; 1993: 36) wrote on the subject of typography, “Creativity can be expanded… as long as it is controlled by people with knowledge and taste.” Presumably he meant these ‘people’ to be designers, or perhaps only ‘good designers’: Zapf was not particularly specific. Regardless, he establishes a position that could seem overtly dogmatic and may entirely deride the group of people that designers rely on for their survival: their audience and clients. However, Zapf is spectacular in his rare willingness to make such blunt assertions; few designers are as bold, though most would have similar inclinations lurking somewhere in their id. The superego, however, prevents such statements from being remotely commonplace, and we tend to hear more of this: “We chafe at the restrictions of client, budget and lack of vision, but without these restrictions, we are not designers” (Ilyin; 1994: 38).

Zapf has recognized, openly in this comment, that the ego remains integral to practice. Designers are simply promoting their training

Juxtaposing the ego is the approach of Beatrice Warde, one of the most verbal proponents of graphic design being quietly unobtrusive. In Warde’s ideal, design was as “thin as a bubble and as transparent” (Warde; 1955: 56). She wrote extensively around a metaphor of the crystal goblet (see Appendix One) and extended the concept to include the designer’s personality, writing that “printing demands a humility of mind, for the lack of which many of the fine arts are even now floundering in self-conscious and maudlin experiments” (ibid).

Her essays now stand in direct contrast to the way typography, and indeed Visual Communication, has evolved. Her accusations of “typographic stunts” fit beautifully alongside the work of such rebels are David Carson, “who just did whatever he wanted to do; it was completely about him, completely about every mark he made being his composition, his every move made visible... It’s not about anybody else as hero” (Finn; 2004: 35). The consequence of this is that the “style of the message is more audible than the content and the parcel distracts from the part it conveys” (Behrens; 1999: 20).
and natural talents as controllers and manipulators of the image. And are they not, by this training and skill, completely justified in standing in positions of power, beyond the reach of the public?

Wherever creativity and expression become involved, when notions of style and aesthetics are brought into play, such positioning is not always well-received. Because creativity is such a personal and fickle concept, the Visual Communicator struggles to convince others of this power. And so it falls to the ego to strengthen the designers self-belief and enable their creative process.
CONCLUSIONS

Zapf, Saville, Kalman, Weber and Frosl have all demonstrated how the ego has not only influenced, but benefited their practice. They have allowed a looser rein on their id and pushed self-promotion, ultimately finding themselves able to focus on their own style and expression rather than a client’s personal preferences. Generally, the communication has been more effective as a result. These designers have shown through some of their more outlandish comments that they do not feel obliged to suppress the id as diligently as most. And consequently, they reveal more of the self in their work.

They contribute to the complex classification of design by progressing toward a level of awareness within the general public, and they begin to show how, as Barron says, “the innovator must be an innovation” (1997: 333). The designer becomes under this definition a new kind of professional who functions in spite of the conflicting nature of the process. In the words of Ted Happold (Dorst; 2003: 97), “I really have perhaps one real talent; that is that I don’t mind at all living in an area of total uncertainty.”

Seemingly ahead of their time, designers such as these may be the forebears of an increasingly self-motivated school of design, whereby the designer becomes an icon of a particular style and it is for this style that clients seek them out.

Designers then begin to evolve as do artists and stronger individuality arises to differentiate between them: a stronger personal sense of self and a more considerate application of the ego. It becomes less about justifying the profession generally, and more about reasoning personal aesthetic goals. If designers become unashamed of putting more of
themselves into their work, and less fearful of the repercussions of
doing so, the id may be more at ease. If they are more forward about
their self-expression, and even more confident about the value of what
they do, Visual Communicators would be more suitably equipped to
convince others of this validity. And furthermore, increasingly adept
in pursuing their own aesthetic inclinations.

This looks toward creative practice where Visual Communicators are
more established in the public psyche. Consequently, through greater
general awareness of the industry and its significance, comes a greater
security for the designer.
AND SO...

To revert to the first person…

What we do is easy.

For us.

Not everyone else.

Realizing this — we've fooled everyone

Into thinking design is

Damn clever,

Mysterious,

Magical,

Indefinable —

We got a little arrogant

And self-absorbed.

A little over-enthused about our own brilliance.

And now we're just feeding our egos…

But why not?

We have the right to books and elaborate self-promotion.

We are intelligent, clever, innovative creators.

And we do have things to say

That may change how you think, see, dream.

So shut up and listen,

Would you?

No.
APPENDIX ONE

The Crystal Goblet, Or Printing Should Be Invisible

“Imagine that you have before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favourite vintage for this imaginary demonstration, so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in colour. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent.

“Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feelings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking the stuff out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of fine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to reveal rather than to hide the beautiful thing which it was meant to contain” (Warde; 1955: 56).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Lief, Todd. 2002. ‘Of Manifestos and Designer Genes.’ Design Annual. USA.


