POSITIONS THROUGH ITERATING

May 30_2025

Statement

This project critically examines how brands construct perceived value through layered visual and narrative design. Drawing on Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, I explore why consumers are often drawn not to a product's functionality, but to the symbolic language it carries—logos, packaging, and stories of exclusivity. To exaggerate this mechanism, I created fictional brand collaborations, pairing luxury brands like Apple, Gucci, and Balenciaga with everyday objects such as plastic gloves and outdated mobile phones. Each product is presented with hang tags, user manuals, and product catalogues, simulating the full ecosystem of a real brand. The final outcome features a co-branded product brochure between Apple and Nokia—two icons representing different eras of technological imagination. By closely mimicking commercial brand language, this project pushes the illusion of value to its limit—inviting the viewer to reflect: when we consume, are we buying the product itself, or the constructed value behind it?

Reference

1. *Reinfurt, D. (2019). 'I-N-T-E-R-F-A-C-E'. In: A New Program for Graphic Design. Los Angeles: Inventory Press, pp. 170–253.*

At the beginning of the project, I saw the 'zipper' as a symbolic structural interface - a physical opening and closing tool as well as a visual invitation: it suggests the presence and possibility of 'being revealed'. It suggests the existence of "inside" and the possibility of "being revealed". This design 'transition' reminds me of what Reinfurt says in his chapter 'Interface': that interfaces connect not only technology and people, but also cognition and behavior. The zipper is that "interface" for me. It doesn't convey information per se, but it organizes how we access it.

After placing 100 objects on the zipper and making a "booklet", I began to wonder if a booklet could be like an interface, guiding the viewer "layer by layer" through the information structure of a product. The book reminded me that design is not about the content itself, but how we are allowed to access it. Therefore, I would like to further design "multi-layered interactive information interfaces" that allow users to not only see the surface of a product, but also dismantle its structural illusion step by step.

2. Foucault, M. (1989) 'Preface', in The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. London: Routledge, pp. xvi–xxvi. (First published 1966).

Inspired by Michel Foucault's idea that systems of knowledge are culturally constructed rather than naturally given, this project explores how consumer goods are visually and structurally organized to shape our perceptions of their value. My question is: when we buy a product, are we buying the object itself or the system of meanings built around it? Using "zipper" as a metaphor for 'revealing' and "hiding", I deconstruct the object into four dimensions by scanning and layering: surface, experience, object and structure. This approach allows me to analyze how visual packaging, emotional engagement, material properties and the economic mechanisms behind them interact to shape consumption into a multilayered narrative process, and to further question whether these seemingly transparent layers of information are revealing the truth or creating an illusion.

At the same time I began to think about a tool for rearranging meaning, perhaps a booklet: not just a container of information, but a system for reclassifying it.

3. Kosuth, J. (1965) One and Three Chairs. [Conceptual artwork] Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Joseph Kosuth's One and Three Chairs presents a single object through three parallel forms — the physical chair, a photograph of it, and its dictionary definition — exposing how meaning is distributed across material, visual, and linguistic systems. This conceptual strategy had a deep impact on my project. In my early explorations, I considered how a zipper might serve as a metaphorical tool for "unzipping" layers of meaning within consumer goods. Kosuth's work prompted me to ask: could I apply a similar logic to the everyday products we consume? Could I dissect the multiple realities embedded in a single object — not just what it is, but how it is made to feel and function symbolically?

This led me to develop a four-tier interpretive framework for unpacking commodity meaning:

Surface — what we first see (brand, packaging, image);

Experience — what we are made to feel (emotions, rituals, atmospheres);

Object — what the item materially is (its physical, industrial truth);

Structure — why we are made to want it (socioeconomic and symbolic systems).

If Kosuth's chair speaks through object, image, and definition, then my booklet acts as a scanner —pulling apart belief layer by layer, to reveal how meaning is not found, but designed.

4.   Condorelli, C. and Wade, G. (2009) *Support Structures. Berlin: Sternberg Press.*

The initial inspiration for the use of zippers in this project came from exploring how seemingly mundane objects can contain hidden systems of meaning. Céline Condorelli's "Support Structures" provide a crucial conceptual foundation. Her work challenges us to pay attention to the invisible frameworks that make perception and participation possible - from architectural supports to ideological, institutional or spatial systems. What supports what we see and why are these supports often hidden?

For me, the zipper becomes a way to visualize and interact with these hidden supports. It is a tool for opening and closing - accessing and hiding - and in this context it is both metaphor and method. I placed the zipper on everyday objects and subsequently created a layered booklet as a symbolic mechanism to "unzip" the surface of consumption and reveal the truth behind it: emotional narratives, aesthetic manipulation, production mechanisms, and capitalist strategies. Like Condorelli's notion of "support," these layers are often invisible, but they support entire systems of desire, values, and beliefs. The zipper thus serves not only as a visual distraction, but also as a device that makes the support structure visible, interactive.

5.   Drucker, J. (2014) Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

In Graphesis, Johanna Drucker argues that visual forms are not neutral containers of information, but epistemological tools that can actively shape the knowledge they present (Drucker 2014). In the chapter "Designing Graphic Interpretations," she critiques the assumption that "visualization merely "presents" data and notes that all graphic formats are performative - they construct interpretations, direct attention, and are used as a means of communication. -They construct interpretations, direct attention, and encode assumptions. This perspective has profoundly influenced my project development, especially in the shift from deconstructing consumer products to designing "layered legibility" systems. Inspired by Drucker, I stopped thinking of diagrams and labels as explanatory complements and started designing them as interfaces that produce meaning. The booklet I created - organized by surface, experience, object, and structure - serves not only as an archive for product analysis, but also as a way to develop the reading habits of the viewer. Each visual format (scans, labels, charts, graphs) becomes part of the product's symbolic infrastructure. Drucker's insight reinforces my understanding that graphic design does not reflect systems, it builds them.

6.   Reed, J. and Smyth, H. (2021) 'Handles', in Demo 7. Amsterdam: Demo Publications, pp. 86–91.

In the Handles project, the designers write, "The handle acts like a code word, triggering a person's functional interpretation of what is in front of them and the onset of the action of opening the door. Reading this code word has become instinctive." This quote made me rethink the significance of the zip: not only as an opening mechanism, but also as a 'point of contact'

between the user and the structure of information. By collecting everyday objects such as doorknobs and drawer pulls, Handles emphasises their role as "interfaces" - they are not to be seen, but to be manipulated. This inspired me to consider the "zip" as an iconographic metaphor for interaction: it not only suggests an internal presence, but also stimulates the viewer's desire to participate. In my project, the zip becomes a visual starting point for deconstructing the commodity, leading the user to a multi-layered information system consisting of a surface layer, an experiential layer, an object layer, and a structural layer. Handles made me realise that micro-objects such as zips can act as an interface between meaning and behaviour in design.

POSITIONS THROUGH CONTEXTUALISING

Reference

7. Debord, G. (1994) The Society of the Spectacle. New York: Zone Books. (Originally published in French, 1967)

In The Landscape Society, Guy Debord states that 'the landscape is not only a collection of visual images, but also the product of social relations that are deformed through the mediation of images.' (Debord, 1994) This insight accurately captures the essence of the contemporary brand association mechanism: it does not create functional products, but rather consumable 'visual social relations'. (Debord, 1994) This insight accurately captures the essence of the contemporary mechanism of brand association: it does not create functional products, but rather consumable "visual social relations". In my project, I have modelled the linguistic system of co-branding (e.g. Apple × Nokia) - hang tags, illustrations, instructions, numbering mechanisms, etc. - to construct an 'illusory structure that can be trusted'. ". These visual symbols do not point to the object itself, but to a symbolic identity that is viewed and purchased. Inspired by Debord, I no longer see 'design' as a tool for conveying meaning, but as a machine for creating 'viewability'. In this landscape society, co-branding is a performance of power: it creates a sense of belonging, scarcity and belief through visual logic. I chose to use simulation to make this language of landscape self-revealing and self-exposing, thus leading the viewer to reflect on the 'reality' of what they are viewing.

8. *Metahaven (2015) The Sprawl: Propaganda About Propaganda. [Film].*
   Netherlands: Metahaven.

Metahaven's film The Sprawl simulates how information dissemination has shifted to emotionally driven, visually manipulated and fragmented narratives in the digital age. Instead of exposing propaganda, they simulate the mechanics of propaganda, allowing the audience to lose themselves in the 'illusion of credibility'. This strategy has had a profound impact on the way I approach the artefactualisation of brand co-branding systems. Instead of satirising brands, I use the language of the brand itself to construct a complete mechanism of trust - hang tags, numbers, illustrations, screenshots from the website, etc. - to form a visual structure that can be "trusted". Just as The Sprawl countered propaganda with propaganda, my project countered simulation with simulation, using design to create an illusion, and then using the illusion to make the viewer realise that what they believe in is just a construction of information that has been carefully planned. It is a kind of visual manipulation against manipulation.

9. *Metahaven (2010) 'Sealand', in Uncorporate Identity. Zurich: Lars Müller*
   Publishers, pp. 6–49.

In Uncorporate Identity, Metahaven demonstrates how identity can be designed, pseudo-constructed, and made 'credible' through the design of a complete national visualisation system for the 'micro-nation' Sealand. ". Rather than judge Sealand's legitimacy, they used the language of design to create an illusion of visual sovereignty. This made me realise that design doesn't just communicate existing identities, it creates them. This is very much in line with my practice of modelling co-branding brands such as Apple × Nokia and Gucci × Bic in my projects, and the case of Sealand has made me rethink the idea that hangtags, numbers, iconography, authentication, etc., are not subsidiary visuals, but an institutional language that constitutes a "structure of trust". The idea of 'design as political action' in the book pushed me to move from visual aesthetics to the simulation of visual power mechanisms. Instead of just analysing the language of branding, I use it to create illusory institutional structures, thus exposing its essence: it is not the object that we trust, but the information order behind it.

10. *Chan, S. (2019). MACAU Casino City. [online] Suzy Chan. Available at: https://*
   suzychan.com/Casino-City [Accessed 25 May 2025].

Suzy Chan's MACAU Casino City (2019) is a critical design project that fuses traditional culture with contemporary visual language. By simulating Macau casino advertisements and incorporating traditional Chinese ritual symbols, such as the traditional way of ritual sacrifice (scattering money, burning money, etc.) to 'mourn' the 'dead city', she constructs a satirical visual system that aims to arouse public reflection on the social and cultural impacts of Macau's gaming industry and its dominant economic development. Chan's design is not only an exploration of visual aesthetics, but also a critique of social structures and an initiation of dialogue.

This 'association' of symbolic systems inherently resonates with the pseudo-branding strategy of my project; rather than directly critiquing casino culture, Chan has constructed a visual system that utilises symbols that are often found in casinos. This inspired me to think about how co-branding is actually a form of cultural grafting: the narratives of two systems are artificially stitched together to create new 'desires'. In my construction of the pseudo-brand, I drew on Chan's practice of turning visual illusions into a critical language through rigorous image simulation, making the viewer oscillate between 'believing' and 'perceiving', thus making the viewer feel the difference between 'believing' and 'perceiving', thus making the viewer feel the difference between "believing" and 'perceiving'. This makes the viewer oscillate between 'believing' and 'perceiving', so as to see the mechanism of manipulation behind the symbolic capital.

11. Ryu, A. (2023) Outlet. [Exhibition] Museumhead, Seoul, 15 December 2023 – 27 January 2024.

Ahyeon Ryu's solo exhibition Outlet (Seoul Museumhead, December 15, 2023-January 27, 2024) critically examines consumerism by transforming the gallery into a mock retail environment. Divided into two sections, "Showroom" and "Fitting Room," the exhibition features installations and performances that blur the boundaries between the body, the commodity, and the image. In the gallery, the performers' limbs protrude from the panels, resembling mannequins or virtual images, highlighting the commodification of the human form. The fitting room, on the other hand, displays sculptural garments that fuse the garment with the body form, questioning the boundaries between the self and the product. It shows the flat body trapped in the capitalist present while suggesting its transformation into a new mode of subjectivity.

The author uses the work to ask the question "Has the body become adsorbed to the clothing (or the clothing to the body)?" Ryu's work inspired me: not only are the products co-branded, but the way we see the objects is also reorganized by the brand's logic. This further advanced my project's deep construction and analog critique of "structures of trust". It also made me think: what is the purpose of brand association? With so many brands co-branding, how are consumers' identities shifting?

12. Baudrillard, J. (1994) Simulacra and Simulation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Originally published in French, 1981)

Mimetic consumption emphasizes the symbolic value of commodities rather than their practical value, and consumers express their identity and social status through the purchase of commodities. This kind of consumption behavior goes beyond the actual function of commodities and focuses instead on their symbolic meaning and cultural connotation. According to Baudrillard, mimesis is a symbolic system with no real basis, which creates a "hyper-real" world through advertising, media and other means, and makes consumers consume under the guidance of symbols.

For example, the Apple × Nokia co-branding project did not borrow any real product line, but created the illusion that "it seems to have really existed" through a set of "visual trust syntax" such

as hang tags, illustrations, manuals, numbering systems, etc. This construction does not mimic reality, but rather enters into the world of the real. This construction does not mimic reality, but rather enters what Baudrillard describes as the "society of simulation": it is not the product we consume, but rather the structure of meaning and the projection of identity that it promises.

Inspired by this, I stopped trying to reveal the "truth" of a brand and chose to use the language of design to construct a system of brand association that seems real but never existed. Letting it be exposed as a fiction by over-realizing it. My brand name, the authentication mechanism, the numbering system, are all mechanisms that constitute the "visual illusion of credibility". They are like what Baudrillard called "hyperimage" - they do not exist to carry meaning, but to create the illusion of trust.

My project is not a caricature of branding, but a systematic simulation of branding that aims to make the viewer realize that in the landscape society, it is no longer the object that we trust, but rather a carefully designed order of information that "looks real". We no longer buy the objects themselves, but rather the rules of a carefully planned game of "co-branding".

Reference List

1. Reinfurt, D. (2019) 'I-N-T-E-R-F-A-C-E'. In: A New Program for Graphic Design. Los Angeles: Inventory Press, pp. 170–253.

2. Foucault, M. (1989) 'Preface'. In: The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. London: Routledge, pp. xvi–xxvi. (Originally published 1966).

3. Kosuth, J. (1965) One and Three Chairs. [Conceptual artwork] Museum of Modern Art, New York.

4. Condorelli, C. and Wade, G. (2009) Support Structures. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

5. Drucker, J. (2014) Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

6. Reed, J. and Smyth, H. (2021) 'Handles'. In: Demo 7. Amsterdam: Demo Publications, pp. 86–91.

7. Debord, G. (1994) The Society of the Spectacle. New York: Zone Books. (Originally published in French, 1967).

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10. Chan, S. (2019) MACAU Casino City. [online] Suzy Chan. Available at: https://suzychan.com/Casino-City [Accessed 25 May 2025].

11. Ryu, A. (2023) Outlet. [Exhibition] Museumhead, Seoul, 15 December 2023 – 27 January 2024.

12. Baudrillard, J. (1994) Simulacra and Simulation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Originally published in French, 1981).

Critical analyses

1. **Baudrillard, J. (1994) Simulacra and Simulation. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Originally published in French, 1981)**

In Simulacra and Simulation, Jean Baudrillard points out that we are living in an era of "symbolic substitution of reality" - where goods are no longer meant to be used but rather to "look like they are worth consuming". to "look like they are worth consuming". He calls this mimetic consumption: a "hyperreal system" that no longer consumes objects, but rather images, signals and brand illusions. This perspective reveals the logic of contemporary consumer culture: it is no longer the object itself that we buy, but the "meaning" it carries.

As the project progressed, I shifted my perspective from "deconstructing objects" to "constructing illusions". I began to realize that the most powerful thing in consumption is not the product itself, but the trust system constructed by the brand. Co-branding is one of the most typical mechanisms: it creates a "new narrative worth believing in" by grafting the language systems of two brands together. So I constructed pseudo-branding systems (e.g. Apple × Nokia, Gucci × Bic) and designed a complete visual grammar around them - hang tags, illustrations, numbers, manuals, etc. These symbols are not decorative, but mimic the way in which a brand's language is used. These symbols are not decorative, but institutional components that mimic "trustworthiness". If the zipper is a metaphor for the opening of the structure, then the association is a pseudo-construction of the structure itself, making us think we are buying a product, but in fact we are buying a whole set of symbols that are being manipulated in a sophisticated way.

As Baudrillard says, "The simulacrum no longer conceals reality, it conceals the fact that reality no longer exists." The goal of my design is not to expose the fakeness of the brand, but to realistically create a structure of visual illusions that allows the viewer to be like a detective who is torn between "believing" and "questioning". The viewer, like a detective, is left to wonder between "believing" and "questioning", thus pondering the consumer illusion created by the capital behind the co-branding.

In addition, unlike Consumer Society, which focuses on the symbolic logic of the commodity, Simulacra and Simulation goes further, suggesting that "the production of meaning has become radically detached from the object". This led me to revisit the "hangtags" and "brochures" of the project: they do not point to the product itself, but rather to the construction of a space that can be forwarded, recognized and consumed indefinitely. Brand co-branding here no longer refers to the object itself, but to a space of thought.

Therefore, Simulacra and Simulation not only provided the theoretical background for my project, but also fundamentally influenced how I constructed my design strategy: from function to symbol, from content to illusion, from deconstruction to construction. It inspired my final idea - not to tell the audience "this is not real", but to let them detect it in a highly realistic imitation. Instead of

producing a brand, it replicates how capital creates symbols that are "worth having" to lure consumers.

2. *Ryu, A. (2023) Outlet. [Exhibition] Museumhead, Seoul, 15 December 2023 – 27 January 2024.*

Ryu A.'s exhibition Outlet (2023) was a surreal, playful reconstruction of the relationship between branding, consumption, and desire, and provided a key inspiration for me to conceptualise and deepen my "pseudo-co-branding" project. In this exhibition, Ryu uses the retail space as a 'stage', imitating consumer scenarios such as shopping malls, while combining exaggerated brand language, over-packaged goods and unrecognisable combinations of products, successfully creating an illusion of consumption that is both familiar and absurd at the same time.

This is very much in line with the core logic of my project: we both focus on the 'stacking' of appearances and meanings, and how brands manipulate consumers' judgement through visual language; Ryu's "goods" often have unknown functions, are named with humour, and are even intentionally misleading, whereas my "goods" have unknown functions, are named with humour, and are even intentionally misleading. Ryu's 'goods' often have unknown functions, are named with humour, and are even intentionally misinterpreted, whereas I 'superimpose' the identity of inexpensive items through brand co-branding - tying a disposable plastic bag, glove, or pen to a luxury brand with a high-fashion hangtag, tagline, and description of ingredients to inspire a 'high-value' image in the mind of the consumer. This is to stimulate consumers' misinterpretation of and desire for "high value".

More importantly, Ryu's dramatic approach to display has also greatly inspired my process of image generation and brand language simulation. She uses the visual syntax of the consumer space (e.g., security buttons, price tags, display structures) as part of her artistic language, making 'looking real' the key to a deceptive visual logic. I extend this approach by stacking product illustrations, user manuals, supply chain narratives, etc. to make the whole pseudo-branding system seem plausible, but in fact it constitutes a visual illusion.

Through my research on Outlet, I realised that the absurdity of consumer behaviour is often not due to commodities, but rather to the over-saturation of the 'meaning structures' we assign to them. Therefore, the pseudo-co-branding behaviour in my project is not a parody of the brand, but an attempt to reveal the 'replicability' and 'illusion of trust' of the brand's language itself, which is in deep dialogue with the 'over-authenticity' created by Ryu A. in the exhibition. This is a profound dialogue with the 'excessive authenticity' created by Ryu A. in the exhibition.

(Content translation via deepl and Google translate.)