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# Stick-Man Logic

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Stick-Man Logic

By

David Leung

\*\*\*\*\*

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of Visual Arts  
UNION COLLEGE  
June 2013

## **AVA Thesis Paper Outline:**

### **Title/s:**

“Stickman Logic”, “PictoLife”, or “Stickman Font”.

### **Purpose:**

To present contemporary themes in a minimal, stylized and systematized form. My messages are meant to be profound and thought provoking, allowing for some of my subject matter to come through in a humoristic light. The question I am asking is very simple. Is it possible to represent some of today’s problems in contemporary society successfully through a graphically simple medium? The purpose is to guide people (not necessarily make up their mind for them) to their own interpretation of the work.

### **Background:**

- Open up with defining pictograms and icons and their purposes/impact on modern day culture.
- Speak briefly of Otto Neurath and Otl Aicher in terms of the origins and development of pictograms.
- Talk about Pippo Lionni and his work
  - o The major influence in my works.
  - o Mention Steve Mockus (Stick Man’s Bad Day) briefly in terms of influencing different compositions.
- Expand upon aim of thesis (from above... maybe condense purpose and expand more here)
  - o To have people form their own thoughts on contemporary issues.
  - o To raise awareness to issues.
  - o To make people think and question.

### **Methods:**

- 1) Brainstorming of issues looking to portray (written down in sketchbook)
- 2) Researching those issues to isolate key terms or words.
- 3) From those terms and words and issues, thinking of icons or developing icons in order to portray the issues.
- 4) Sketching down as many ideas as possible.
- 5) Using Adobe Illustrator to bring those ideas to “life”.
- 6) Working with engineering lab in order to cut out the figures with a water jet cutter.
- 7) Painting (if needed)
- 8) Constructing the display room.

### **Results:**

- Maybe listing down the issues, key words and terms that were used in the final products.
- Scanned JPEGs of sketchbook to show that work.
- Several images of the vector images.

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- Photos of the final product (figurines and display area)

**Discussion:**

- Talk about the development of ideas (why were some things not chosen to be used in the final display; what things were learned; what different compositional techniques were experimented with). Would I be allowed to talk about how I came so far from my first idea to this idea that I finally settled on? Does it connect enough? Is it relevant?
  - o From just images on printer and how it came to be a cut-out thing.
- Take each image and talk about the thought behind it and it's meaning to me.
- Talk about why some were painted.
- Talk about why the display that was chosen was done so.
- What is the importance of this work to those who will see it?

# Stick-Man Logic

David Leung, Union College

Thesis Advisor: Fernando Orellana

## Abstract

Using the minimalist aesthetic of pictograms, I constructed a series of silhouettes to represent some of the issues an everyday American may come across. The idea behind each silhouette was initially documented in a scrapbook. Eventually these images were transformed into vector images in Adobe Illustrator and then cut out of sheets of masonite into physical beings. These “stick men” were then sanded down and painted in a variety of colors in order to emphasize the significance behind each one. The outcome of the project was a population of “stick-men” that could stand on their own or together as a crowd of beings. Each silhouette is meant to have a different meaning but was left open-ended in order for the viewer to form their own opinion on the subjects approached in each piece.

## Introduction

The purpose of my visual arts thesis is much more than just exploring the aesthetics of a particular artistic medium. The idea is based off an exhibition by Pippo Lionni titled, “Facts of Life”. Lionni used “universal and symbolic languages of pictograms” to make social commentary about contemporary life<sup>1</sup>. “A pictograms is a graphic symbol that represents an idea or concept and conveys its meaning through its pictorial resemblance to a physical object”.<sup>2</sup> Like Lionni, my messages are meant to be profound and thought provoking, allowing for some of my subject matter to come through in a humoristic light. The question I am asking is very simple. Is it possible to represent some of today’s problems in contemporary society successfully through a graphically simple medium? The purpose is to guide people (not necessarily make up their mind for them) to their own interpretation of the work.

The expected direction of this work can be likened to the works of Pippo Lionni in his gallery/book publication under the name “Facts of Life”<sup>5,6</sup> and the works of Steve Mockus’s, *Stick Man’s Really Bad Day*<sup>4</sup>.

Along with producing several galleries of the work, Pippo Lionni also published a book called *Facts of Life*<sup>3</sup> that showcased his work. An excerpt from his book description reads, “Using pictograms familiar to us all from everyday life, Pippo Lionni uses each page of this book to tell a story or make a comment, entirely without recourse to words. Amusing, wry, ingenious and poignant by turn, his acutely observed subjects won over his audience to laughter and reflection”<sup>3</sup>. This short excerpt is exactly what my project aims for and the images in the book fueled my imagination.

Mockus’s, *Stick Man’s Really Bad Day*<sup>4</sup>, served as another outlet to broaden my aesthetic boundaries while still using pictograms. It mainly influenced me to experiment with different compositions between the different pictogram elements in my artwork. At the same time, Mockus’s work reinforced a lot of the things that Lionni aimed to address with his audience and so looking through Mockus’s work strengthened and clarified the direction of my work.

The influence for the work will come from things we see every day. From signs you might encounter at the airport, bus station, or even on the intersection/corner of the street you drive down everyday. The graphic simplicity of this proposed body of work is very important. The complexity will be found in being able to construct pictograms that are self-evident by taking multifaceted issue and boiling them down to their essential parts. The images will all be formed

using Adobe Illustrator so as to create vector-based line drawings. With help from the engineering lab, these line drawings will then be cut out of Masonite using their water jet machine. The resulting masonite silhouettes, will be painted in varying colors and hung on the Visual Arts Atrium Gallery walls using wood screws.

Some of the issues I have focused on are the economic state of the America, American lifestyle and the American medical system. The economic strife in America was a topic I wished to address because it has been one of the defining topics of my generation. I find that a lot of people complain about the economic state of our country but their complaints don't have any substance. Part of my work is aimed towards persuading people to get to know the issues, and to form educated opinions. Next, the American lifestyle is an important issue because one starts to lose perspective when ingrained in a culture for such a long time. When that lifestyle or culture is all you've ever known, it is hard to stop and question social norms .

My goal with this topic is to bring attention to the issues I see with the American lifestyle such as materialism and obesity. Lastly, the American medical system is another topic that many Americans are concerned with. This has personal interest to me, as I will be attending medical school next fall. Similar to my approach with the economic state of America, I am looking to address specific issues in this topic in order to persuade people to hopefully form their own opinion on a very controversial topic.

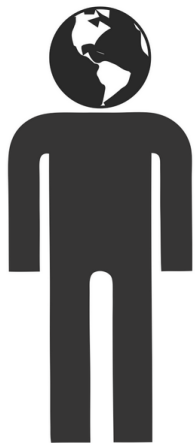
## **Methods**

The idea behind each structure came from a series of influences including street signs, books<sup>8</sup>, and random image searches on the Internet. Each idea was first roughly drawn down within a sketchbook. The sketchbook detailed up to 250 different ideas. I then worked through these 250 ideas and picked approximately 40 ideas. These 40 ideas were then redrawn and perfected within the sketchbook. These ideas were then translated digitally through the use of Adobe Illustrator.

Using the pen tool, each idea was constructed into a vector image. These vector images were then saved into DXF format so that they could be compatible with the software in the engineering lab. I collaborated with an Engineering Technician from the Union College Engineering Lab (Paul Tompkins) who aided me in operating the Water-Jet cutting machine. The machine used high-powered jet of water in order to trace out the design. Each silhouette is constructed of masonite. Each structure was then given two coats of white paint and sanded down. This initial paint job was then followed up by another one or two coats of paint in a variety of colors. The finishing touch was to add strips of Velcro to the back of each structure so that they could be hung up on the felt wall in the display area.

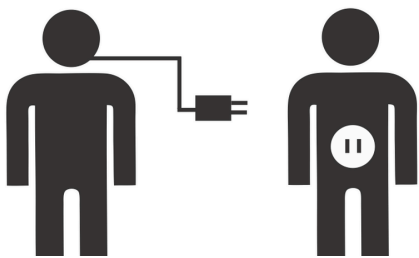
## Results and Discussion

There were 38 different structures that were constructed by the end of the project<sup>6</sup>.



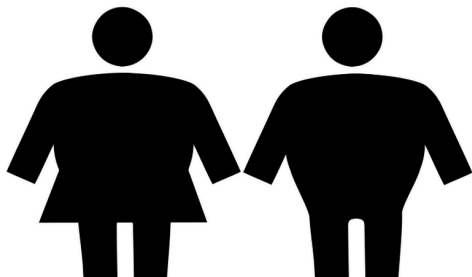
### World Head

This silhouette was meant to open discussion about our society's all time high awareness about the status of our home planet. Never before has there been such discussion of the preservation of our home planet for ourselves and for future generations.



### Inspiration

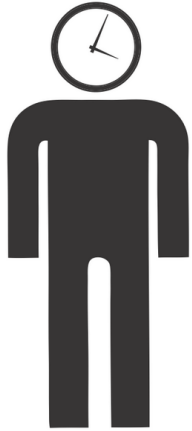
To me inspiration is about taking an idea or a thought from someone or somewhere else and allowing it to light up your imagination. Inspiration is powerful and sticks right in your gut.



### Fat People Bathroom Logos



Almost 30% of the adult American population can be defined as obese. Being overweight is an epidemic that has gone unchecked in our lifetimes. If this trend continues we may as well change our bathroom logos to this in order to accurately represent our country.

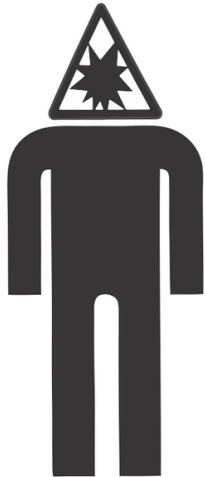


### **Time is Money**

Time like money is a much cherished commodity in our lives. It never seems like we ever have enough time to do everything we want. Time is also always on our minds. We have this class at this time or this appointment at this time.

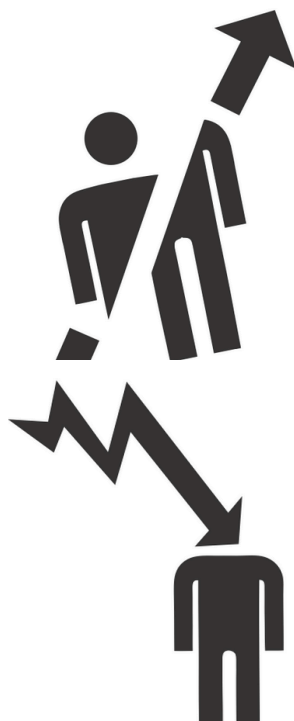
The idea of time is ever looming.

This silhouette too much things explode in overwhelming.



### **Explosion Head**

was meant to express those moments where we just have information or things to account for in our heads. Those our minds and make things seem impossible or



### **Diagonally Split Person**

This silhouette was meant to express the strain that we feel on our bodies during times of stress or duress.

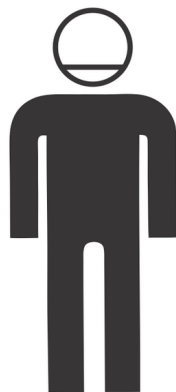
### **Falling Stock**

The financial recession has been one of the largest historical events in many of our lives. This silhouette was meant to depict this event. The stock market fall knocked the “heads” off many Americans and left them shell-shocked.



### Home is Where the Heart Is

As cliché as it may be there is never truly a place where the body or heart feels most comfortable than at home.

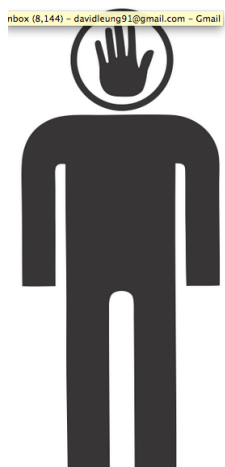


### Sleep

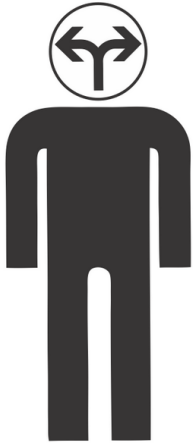
The sleep icon used in this silhouette comes icon to put your computer to sleep in most of today’s Apple and Microsoft computers. This silhouette is meant to indicate how many of us go about everyday life in a nonchalant manner.

### Hand Face

This silhouette is feel about the It represents the and deflection so

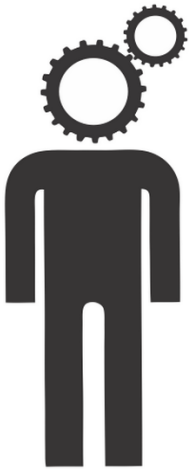


meant to represent the frustration that many Americans media, politicians or anybody that they may interact with. urge that we all want to just cut through all the double talk that we can just hear the unfiltered and concise truth.



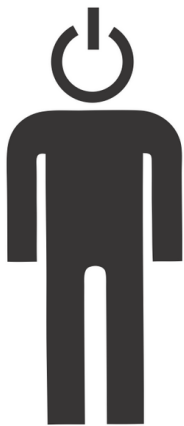
### **Split Direction**

This silhouette is meant to represent a point in the life of a human where they may not know where to go or which choice to make. As a college student we have wrestled with what major to choose and what profession we may want to pursue so that we find a direction for our futures.



### **Gear Head**

This silhouette was meant to represent two different meanings. The first was to illustrate our current generations dependence on machines. The second meaning is mean as a poke at the rigidity of our educational system. Our educational system is antiquated and lacks creativity and as a result students are not achieving their full potential.



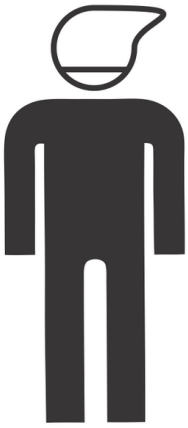
### **Power Button Head**

This silhouette is another allusion to the fact that our generation is heavily dependent upon machines. Our lives seemingly depend on the power that charges our smartphone, computers and digital accessories that exist in our everyday lives.



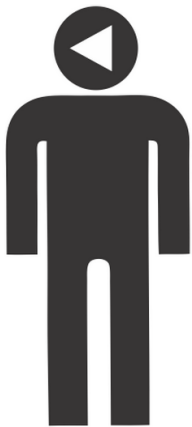
### **Wi-Fi Head**

This silhouette is meant to represent the change in how information is communicated today. The computer and Internet have replaced newspaper and television. A majority of Americans receive their news from accessing the Internet.



### **Mind-Blown Head**

This silhouette is meant to represent the violence seen by the Americans of my generation. We have witnessed 9/11, multiple school and public shootings, and multiple wars. The violence that has surrounded us has changed us and burdened us all.



### **Pause**

This silhouette used the iconography of the pause button seen on my television remotes. This pictogram is meant to address the idea that time does really fly and that often we all do not take enough time to stop and take in the moment.



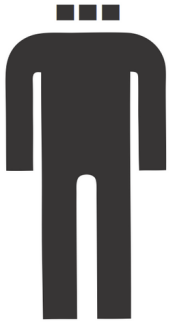
### **Recycling Head**

This silhouette is meant to address the awareness most American now have about the importance of recycling. This initiative has been one that has become

commonplace in our time and most likely will continue to be a part of life in the future.



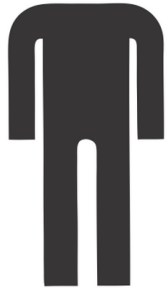
“ ... ”



This silhouette is meant to address how most people are judged, which is through our words. What we say between those quotation marks defines us as who we are to people we meet.



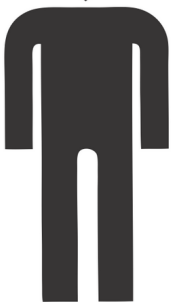
### **Radioactive**



This silhouette is meant to address the danger of nuclear warfare in our world today.



### **Downward Arrow**



This silhouette is meant to address the baggage that each person experience in his or her lives. Be it physical, emotional or mental, we as humans all carry some sort of baggage which weigh down on us.

This  
pays to



### **Cents Head**

silhouette is meant to reflect the significant attention that our society  
money.



## Injured

This silhouette is meant as an ode to the bravery of soldiers all around the world who are injured on active duty and suffer physical scars as a result.



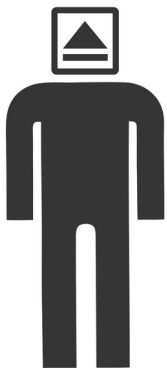
### Fragile Mind

This silhouette is meant to represent how even though our brains can achieve incredible feats they are also highly fragile.



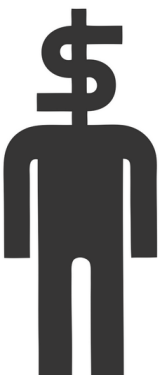
### Exclamation

This silhouette is meant to express the excitement that we experience in our lives. It is a powerful emotion that is felt throughout our entire body.



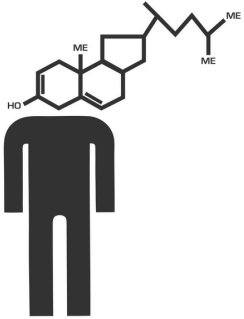
### Eject Head

This silhouette uses the eject iconography seen in most of our computers. The silhouette is meant to signify how we have memories or experiences that are so painful that we would just rather discard them rather than carry on with them.



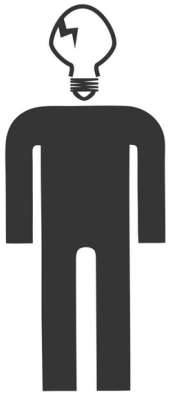
### Money Head

This silhouette is meant to reflect the significant attention that our society pays to money.



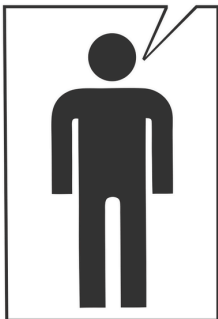
### **Chemical Head**

This silhouette is meant to signify the importance that the sciences like biology or chemistry have played in all our lives. Though we may not realize it, we are surrounded by science.



### **Broken Light bulb**

This silhouette is meant to represent how even though our brains can achieve incredible feats they are also highly fragile.



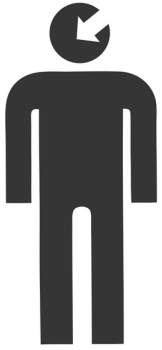
### **Be What You Say**

This silhouette is an aesthetic play on the word box. Instead of projecting outwards, the word box in this case encases the figure speaking.



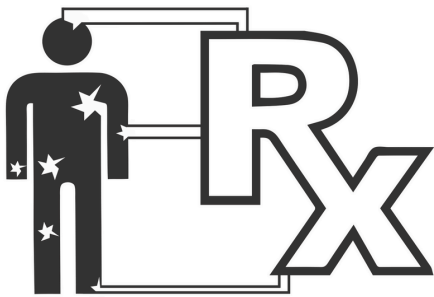
### **Barcode Head**

This silhouette is meant to represent the materialistic view of our generation.



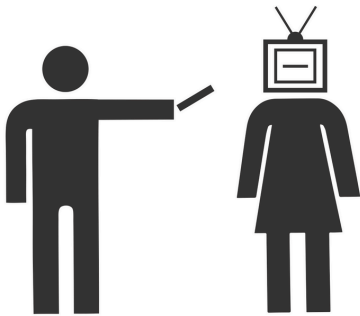
### **Arrow into Head**

This silhouette was designed to be aesthetically pleasing.



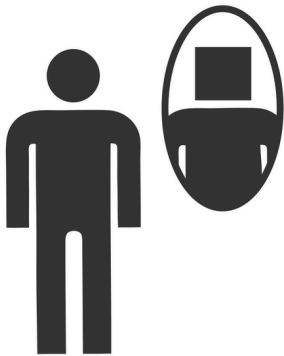
### **RX World**

This silhouette is meant to represent the significance of medicine and pharmaceuticals in all of our lives today.



### **Silence is Golden**

This silhouette is meant as a comical play on the saying that “Silence is golden”.



### **Reflection**

This silhouette is meant to touch upon self-identification. There are many people who may appear one way but may see themselves in a totally different light.





### **Plug-In Head**

This silhouette was designed to be aesthetically pleasing.

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### *The Cloud*

All 38 structures were constructed into a “cloud” rather than as neat rows of stand alone figures. One can think of the cloud as a crowd of people standing on one side of the sidewalk waiting for the streetlights to change. The cloud includes a group of different individuals each with their own agendas all grouped together.

### **Conclusion**

Each silhouette was crafted with my own idea behind it. However, I meant for each piece to be open-ended in order to allow the viewer to arrive at his or her own meaning. The minimalist nature of the pictogram reinforces the openness of the meanings behind the silhouettes. The “cloud” formation was chosen in order to present the structures in an aesthetically pleasing and interesting form.

**\*\* Special thanks to Fernando Orellana, Paul Tompkins and the rest of the Visual Arts Department\*\***

## References:

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