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# Think Negative!

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**Abstract** The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great effect on not only the people of Cyprus, but the whole world. It seems that it's the only subject that we have been talking about constantly for the past two years. Apart from the physical effects many of us had to endure, the psychological distress has also contributed heavily in so many ways. Whether it has affected peoples jobs, families and finances, COVID-19 has been an overwhelming challenge on the whole world.

**Keywords** COVID-19, positive, negative, emotions, design

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## 1. Introduction

Positive and negative space is used to determine a composition of artwork. Positive space is described as the parts of artwork that show areas or subjects of interest. Negative space is the parts of artwork around the subjects of interest. This paper discusses how designers' mindset may have changed and investigates different perspectives on the words "positive and "negative".

## 2. "I'm positive + ... then silence".

Shock. Emotion overload. Worry. Who? When? Why? How? ... all these questions running through one's mind.

Many people have thought; "Did I pass it on?" "Who did I see?" "Who did I talk to?" "Do I need to call everyone I've seen and let them know?" "What if someone falls ill and it's my fault?"

So many questions. So much uncertainty.

Being positive seems to have a different effect on people nowadays. One's mind goes straight to the COVID -19 virus and not to anything positive at all. Being positive means being locked away from the rest of the world - to allow the virus to run its course. After which one may re-enter the world and your everyday life.... Or dose one?

Does one have a regular life? Sending messages to leave the house, wearing a mask that covers ones face, keeping a distance from your loved ones, not being able to hug or kiss. Is this normal?

It seems that the word "positive" is having a negative effect on oneself.

"Negative" thinking signifies feelings of hopelessness and lack of optimism towards something or oneself, not having "positive" thoughts, anxiety, stress and generally feeling that everything around us is not good or "negative".

With this in mind, the word negative is now being associated with positivity! One would want to have a negative COVID -19 test result, but one wouldn't want to have a negative mindset. It's interesting to contemplate whether ones preconceived notion of negative is the new positive.

Does one want to have a negative outlook on things? Does one want to have negative thoughts? What is it about negative thinking that makes one have a negative aspect on life? How has this phrase affected ones thoughts, or ones ideas and one's life - and for how long will one be negative thinkers and not positive thinkers?

We have always been told to think positive, to have a positive outlook on life and whatever comes ones way - but our minds have been branded - influenced - with negativity and with that of having a negative COVID -19 test result.

## Positive and negative in design

In design one talks about positive and negative space, and in a way one can connect this to positive and negative results. Depending on how one sees things and what frame of mind one is in, will determine how one will look at images - in a positive or negative composition.

Positive and negative space both play an important part to design. The "positive" space is usually considered to be the real focus on a designers work.

Positive and negative space is used to determine a composition of artwork. Positive space is described as the parts of artwork that show areas or subjects of interest. Negative space is the parts of artwork around the subjects of interest.

Negative space usually means that there is nothing there, it's empty, it's the white page that is shown or the gap that is created through adding the positive images. Saying that the empty space around also has a meaning.

Just as it would be difficult to appreciate music if it wasn't for silence, negative space in graphic design provides the eye with a place to "rest" between important information, while also creating rhythm and structure. Gutters, margins, and the space between

columns are all examples of negative space within a graphic design context. Without these elements the discipline would be a lot less effective as a means of visual communication (in <https://www.framer.com/dictionary/negative-space/>)

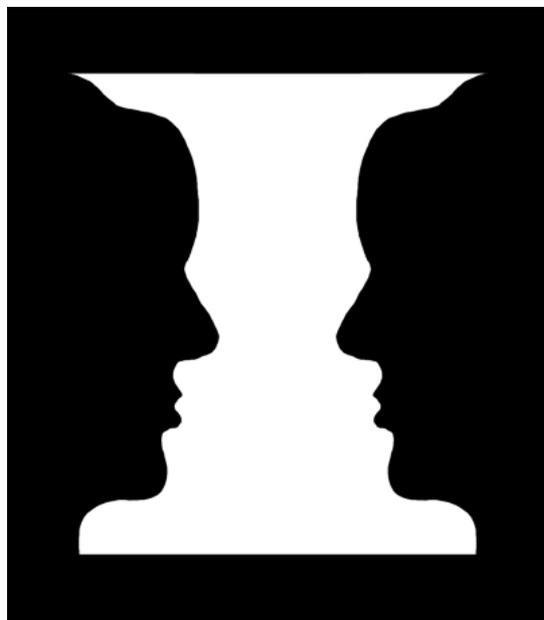
The most famous example of negative space is Rubin's vase. This is a very simple black and white drawing of that, depending on the viewer's point of view, you either see two profile faces or an ornamental vase. Rubin was a psychologist who played with optical illusions around 1915.

*Rubin explained the illusion as follows:*

“One can then state as a fundamental principle: When two fields have a common border, and one is seen as figure and the other as ground, the immediate perceptual experience is characterized by a shaping effect which emerges from the common border of the fields and which operates only on one field or operates more strongly on one than on the other” (Rubin, 1915)

Some known examples of positive and negative space:

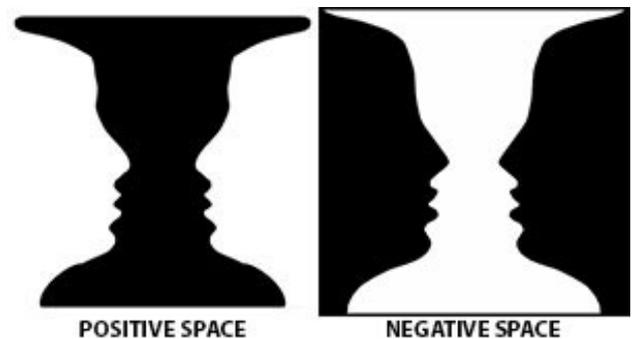
Observe Figure 1. What does one see?



**Figure 1.** Rubin's Vase: <https://thevirtualinstructor.com/positive-and-negative-space.html>

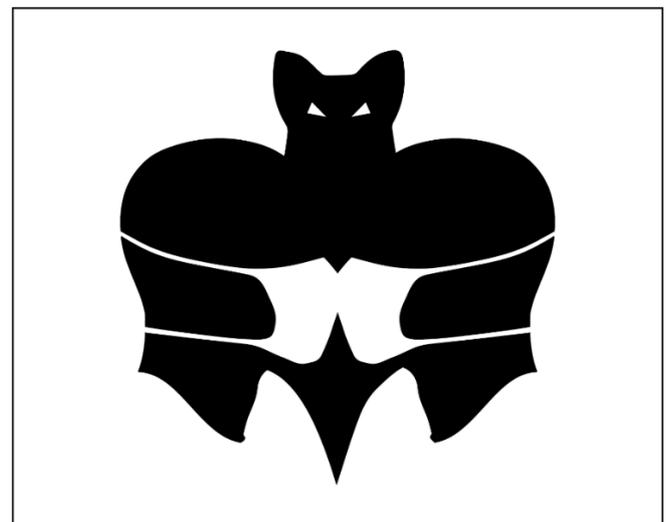
If one studies the image, one will see two profiles and a vase in the middle.

If one sees the vase first, this means one sees the white area which translates as the positive space. The black area is the negative space around the object of interest.



**Figure 2.** Positive and Negative Space. <http://teresabernardart.com/tag/positive-space/>

*“So, what does this all add up to? If we could summarise how the design community is feeling about the coming year, we'd have to say there's an air of cautious optimism. And that's twinned with a passion and a determination to meet the new year head-on, and use the experience of 2020 to help us produce better and more profound work in 2021.”* <https://thevirtualinstructor.com/positive-and-negative-space.html>



**Figure 3.** Author's original design “My own positive and negative space examples in reflection to COVID-19”  
The bat with a mask. Here there are two profiles wearing masks, but they also share the shape of bats wings.

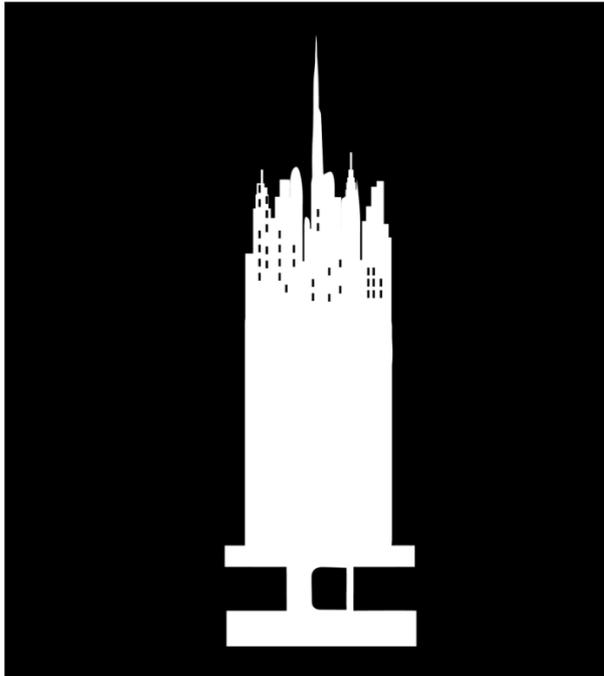


Figure 4. Author's original design

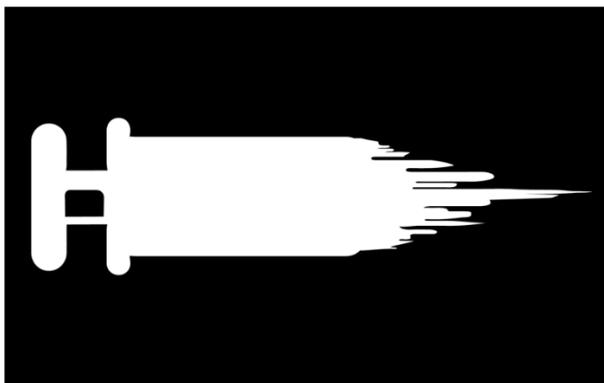


Figure 5. Author's original design

The city with a vaccine. Here the vaccine is taking over the city.

As a designer, one's objective is to promote things in a positive way. Designers have to lead their clients and the consumers to believe that what is offered them is what consumers want and need. It can be contradicting belonging to a profession where one knows that one cannot always stand true to what one believes in and stands for.

### 3. Discussion

Depending on one's state of mind, one translates art, (as one sees in the images above – one may notice the vase first or the two faces – the negative or positive) depending on how one is feeling at that time.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the [almost] two years of being in lockdown, social distancing, wearing masks, and so much negativity, will people

start to notice the negative spaces in art more than the positive? I wonder how that will affect art and design. Is negative the new positive?

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