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Ultrasound

Re:viewing Bodies

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Design, Visual Communications at
Virginia Commonwealth University.
2018*

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Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
2018

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Graphic Design
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*Special thanks to my committee
#313 classmates
and my family*

+

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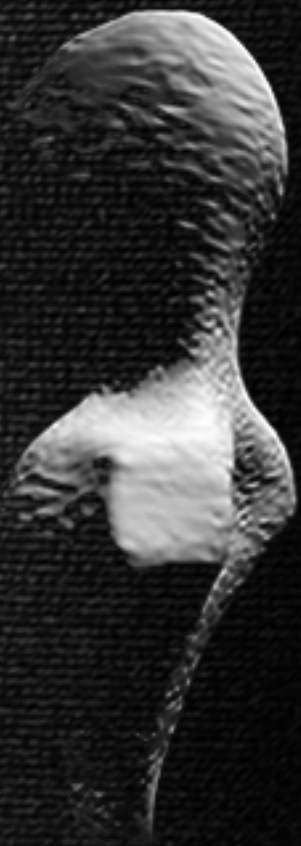
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—*Re:viewing
Bodies*—

Ultrasound—*Re:viewing Bodies*
by Minjee Jeon



Abstract

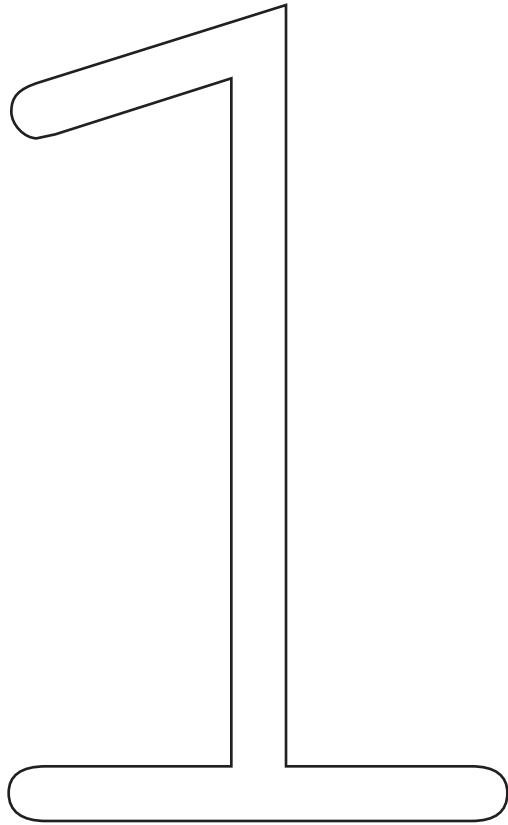
A medical evaluation of physical impairment imposes the additional burden of "labeling" the patient with the condition. The binary nature of the normal versus abnormal label emphasizes difference and can lead to trauma. Understanding differences, however, can lead to the generation of new forms and thus, more sensitive differentiation and representation. Tension is created by exploring different bodily forms—a dialectic between form and essence. I am designing a space that visualizes and illuminates difference as a source of trauma and amplifying the tension by comparing figures that represent varying degrees of normalcy. This forms a critique of idealized form and creates a context for people unaffected by this type of trauma to reflect on possible realities outside of their assumptions of normality.





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Introduction

My works starts with the question,

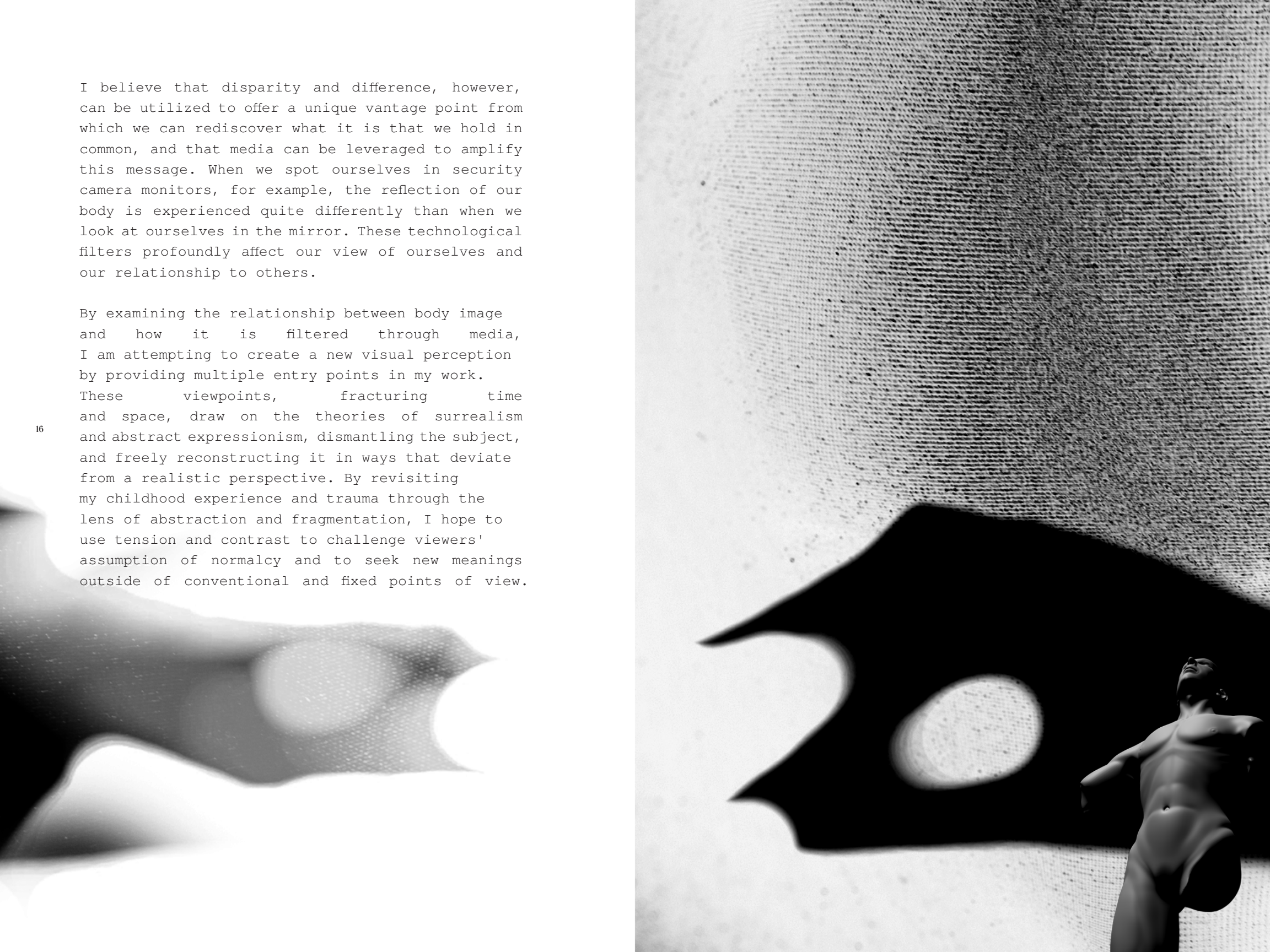
Is difference bad?

My experience as a child in 90s South Korea was embedding in a society that prioritized unity and conformity in order to foster a spirit of community. Distinct individuality and diversity were to be suppressed by requiring mandatory uniforms, walking in single file, and arranging classroom desks in orderly lines. Being left-handed resulted in my being pointed out as a target of disturbance against this unity. Further complicating things was the fact that I had been born with an incompletely formed right hand—something that made me even more unusual. While this resulted in my left-handedness being tolerated, the process of being singled out and forced to undergo shame increased an emotional disparity that still affects me to this day.

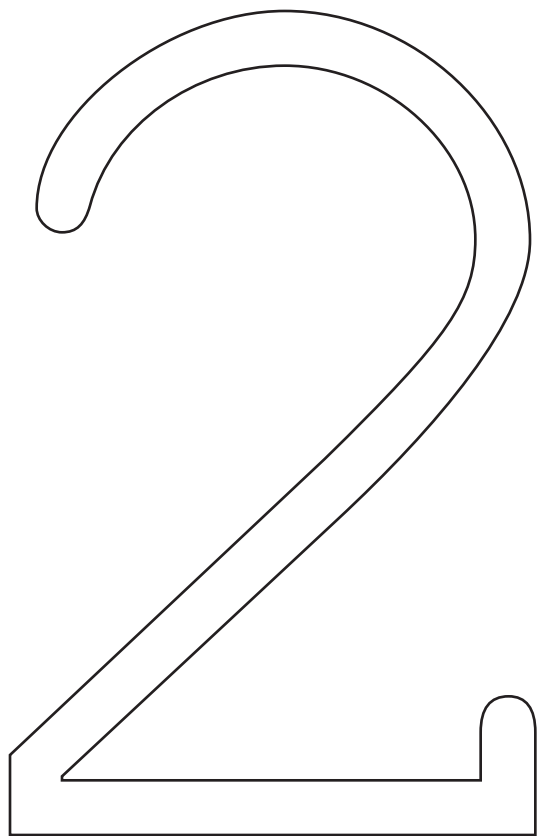


I believe that disparity and difference, however, can be utilized to offer a unique vantage point from which we can rediscover what it is that we hold in common, and that media can be leveraged to amplify this message. When we spot ourselves in security camera monitors, for example, the reflection of our body is experienced quite differently than when we look at ourselves in the mirror. These technological filters profoundly affect our view of ourselves and our relationship to others.

By examining the relationship between body image and how it is filtered through media, I am attempting to create a new visual perception by providing multiple entry points in my work. These viewpoints, fracturing time and space, draw on the theories of surrealism and abstract expressionism, dismantling the subject, and freely reconstructing it in ways that deviate from a realistic perspective. By revisiting my childhood experience and trauma through the lens of abstraction and fragmentation, I hope to use tension and contrast to challenge viewers' assumption of normalcy and to seek new meanings outside of conventional and fixed points of view.





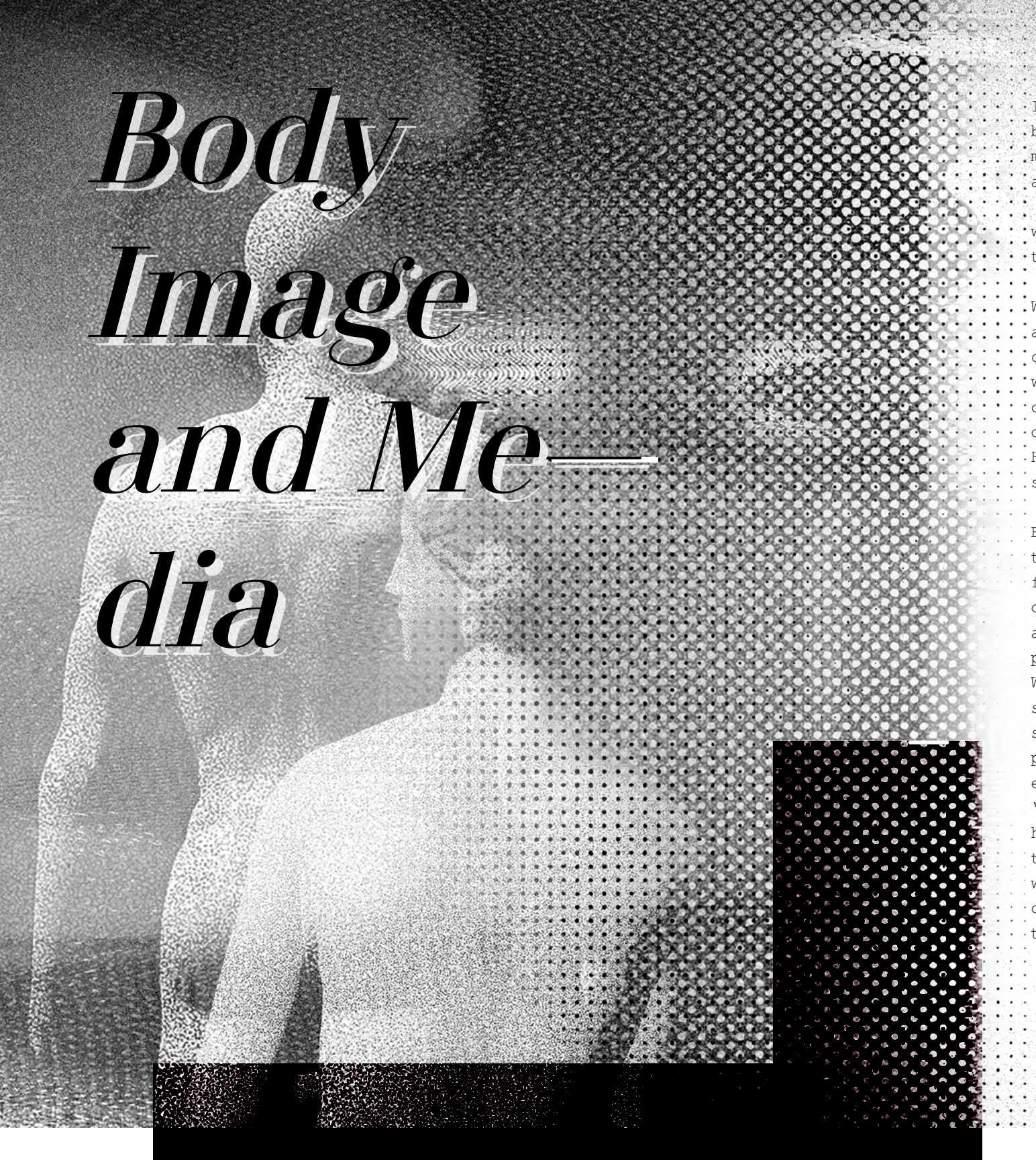


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Body Image and Me— dia



In a media-saturated culture, body image ideals perpetuated by the media hold compelling cultural and social influence.¹

The culture is becoming obsessed with *the image*; it significantly pressures those who subconsciously seek to relate these images to reality.²

Whereas the development of technology and media has advanced our access to the complex layers of human diversity, we are still not encouraged to see outside of the mainstream and its limited depiction of the contours of our bodies. Highly focused on appearance, western society forces unrealistic body ideals into our consciousness.³

By comparison, people who might see themselves as different often can feel stigmatized. The media erases differences, encouraging uniformity; advertisements of cosmetic surgery present an ideal for conformity. While western society claims that body shapes are controllable with diet, self-discipline, and healthy living practices, the perception that one exists outside the range of the "normal" may be associated with failure, however subjective or objective that range.⁴ For those who are born with a physical impairment, these challenging messages inevitably lead to trauma and labeling.

Image

as

Spectacle

The contemporary body image is saturated with spectacle.⁵ Guy Debord writes of a society dominated by representation, where people concentrate on "the image" rather than the essence.

Ludwig Feuerbach writes:

"But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, ... illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness,"⁶



With the lack of authenticity and the cultural hegemony attached to the media, the more we focus on the screen, the more our perception of the images is distorted. Through the media, these forces preserve subjective ideology of body image, limiting objectivity. We no longer see an objective image of ourselves when we look in a mirror, further yielding to culture and the society to define reality for us with regard to body aesthetics. Our interpersonal relationship and self-observations become technologically mediated, making the audience nothing but a passive spectator.⁷

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"Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle as a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly)."⁸
Guy Debord

The spectacle is stimulated by illusion and fantasy. As in the film, *The Truman Show* (1998), life itself is a reality show, where we live in a world where the cameras are constantly running and we control and monitor our behaviors, aware of others' eye. Our society uses the spectacle of these media messages as a framework for defining issues such as power, privilege, control, and conformity.



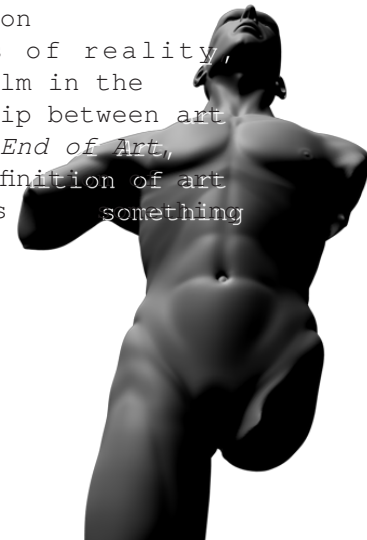


Image in Art

+ *"Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is."*⁹
Georg W. F. Hegel

29

The context of western consciousness led to "the earliest theory of art as a mimesis and imitation of reality."¹⁰ During the span between the 14th and 17th century, Renaissance art promoted a "rebirth" of classical ideals of beauty, evoking awe and magnificence and reiterating absolute standards of beauty. While the perfect ideal of beauty in Greek sculpture raises the question of the significance of art's mimesis of reality, the development of photography and film in the 19th century redefined the relationship between art and mimesis. In his essay *After the End of Art*, Arthur Danto sought to answer the definition of art beyond imitation but as something that could serve a new purpose.





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“...the master narrative of the history of art—in the West but by the end not in the West alone—is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes.

...In our narrative, at first only mimesis [imitation] was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be.” Arthur Danto



Renaissance art as the “rebirth” of classical ideals of beauty evoked awe and magnificence, reiterating absolute standards of beauty. Contemporary art has extended its territory beyond the attainment of beauty, to encompass political, philosophical and more dialectic concerns. Contemporary media, such as photography and film has moved beyond the value of authenticity. The visual is now a domain to ‘read’ the meaning of aesthetics in broader term than simply “seeing”. Whatever art is, it is no longer something primarily to be looked at but to find out what it means you have to turn from sense experience to philosophy.”





The Young Ladies of Avignon, Pablo Picasso, 1907.

The linear perspective that was developed in Renaissance period offers a sense of equilibrium and stability within an image in ways similar to how we see the world in our everyday lives. In the 20th century, the linear projection was dismantled and transformed in both a metaphorical and literal manner, away from the conventional worldview of the Renaissance. This rejection of this traditional perspective allows us to further articulate the relationship between space and time according to changing viewpoints. Depicted objects are no longer bound by objective and physical limitation.

Pablo Picasso's paintings, for example, are a search for new visual language to represent how bodies move through space and time, resulting in a manifold structure.¹² The rejection of traditional perspective has led to the idea of rethinking and revision in new forms. A new interpretation of aesthetics exposed the limited perspective of former standards. Reality was now represented as the sum of a multi-layered diversity. How could these differences be viewed and tolerated?





Abstract Image—

Picasso led the way for abstraction, exploring essence and how to make forms recognizable by exclusion, a method that probed the core of being within contemporary society. Abstraction does not exist without reality. Such alteration yields to the meaning, and offers an insight into what we should "look for." The idea carries an equal depth of being theatrical and performative, absorptive and ideal.¹³

Kazimir Malevich, the founder of Suprematism, examined basic forms to "get beyond nature and define a new reality in which the part would merge with the whole and human and cosmic laws would be combined."¹⁴

Black Circle (1915), a study of pure form and absolute aesthetics, led to his theory of non-objective art by denying art as being limited to representational forms. Restrained and simplified basic elements of point, line, and plane isolated and enriched the philosophical reflection of aesthetics. The result was an unfamiliar beauty, less restrictive and producing work that traveled on alternative aesthetic paths.

This approach challenges the accepted stereotypical expression of beauty.

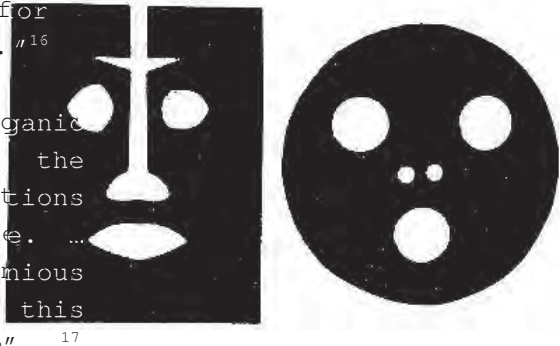
Black Circle, Kazimir Malevich, 1915.



Abstraction subverts the tendency towards mimicry by exploring the essence of things. It is a way to meditate reality through extraction and concentration of form. It opens a new way to critique the subject of the ideal image and a challenge to our consciousness and societal values. "There are no "right" answers to these questions: only a never-ending quest for greater simplicity and more profound truth."¹⁵

Designer, Bruno Munari focused on "the exploration of the perceptual and sensorial faculties, and the search for ways to overcome objective limitations."¹⁶

40 "His continual oscillation between the organic and inorganic, the figurative and the abstract, he aspired to find the connections that link each element of the universe. ... using precise mathematical and harmonious relationships...he was able to interpret this knowledge in his work in a poetic form".¹⁷



Our visualization process goes through a system of interpretation that we carry with us everywhere we go, a system intimately tied to the body. Depicting a human figure is the most intimate reflection of ourselves, an innate image that we hold in our minds, and project almost involuntarily. Our perception can, therefore, project surreality of seeing, as well as a semiotic level of abstraction. If abstract art, the "spontaneity of expression", relies on "a partially arrested development at the infantile stage"¹⁸ that everyone carries within themselves, it can provide a global platform and the means to creatively embrace diverse realities. It is not to correct but to develop cross-disciplinary new gestural languages.



Design As Art, Bruno Munari, 1966.



Dialect-Surrealis- *i-tic Im-* *cal Im-* *age*

age

Interpreting cultural images and artifacts is part of the process of excavating the complex layers of capitalism.

The image is a mental and subconscious form, a production of a historical condition and a lens to critique the preponderance of spectacles.¹⁹ Walter Benjamin describes Surrealism as a bridge between consciousness and subconsciousness, logic and illogic so that one illusion folds into another.²⁰ The mediation of surrealistic images between the objective world and a subjective unconscious world is a "dialectical movement that keeps these two worlds in a state of symbiosis".²¹



“Surrealism, seeks not only to assimilate all known forms, but also boldly to create new forms - that is to say, to be in a position to embrace all the structure of the world, manifested or not. It alone provides the thread that can put us back on the road gnosis as knowledge of the suprasensible reality, invisibly visible in an eternal mystery.”

Andre Breton

Breton, Andre. '3rd Manifesto', *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1969), p.304.

By the late 1920's, "Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the latent meanings and symbolism inherent in Classical mythology filled the Surrealist interest in the subject".²² In response to the cultural outline or the cliché of women, Man Ray re-images the head of Venus, the goddess of love, sex, and timeless beauty. In an *Untitled [classical head]* (1935) work, while preserving the classical sculpture, he elaborated the seductiveness of the image with the addition of makeup. Altogether, the resulting head of disoriented illusion made alive challenged the ancient beauty of the *Head of Arles*, which suggested ephemeral contemporary fashion mannequin.²³ As a dialectic image, this sets his image in opposition to a classical icon of beauty and perfection.

Designers, operating as critical questioners and image creators, are expected to embrace and adapt unexpected realities and make discoveries. Surrealistic vision is the inquiry on a poetic level of creativity through a link between psychology and the complex layers of reality. The blend of the two displays a non-linear, sequential process of layering experience; the outcome itself is the product of history.

Untitled, Man Ray, 1935.



Visualizing

Trauma

EMUSY T

The 20th century as a whole was epitomized by wars, technological development, and epistemological turns. It was ripe with trauma that demonstrated how the unconsciousness performs an inevitable and necessary duality. Trauma, whether collective and geopolitical, or personal "involves not only thoughts that flow in a temporal movement towards the future or the past, but also thoughts that stop in their tracks and, in trying to figure out the enigma of the world at a particular moment, assume something of an abstract, spatial shape."²⁴



Visualization of trauma is the process of excavating unconscious levels of memory into consciousness and translating them into tangible form. Traumatic memories mostly exist as potentials, present but invisible, which are activated through triggers that then appear as trespasses on everyday consciousness. Converting trauma into images involves liberation of the hidden context while connecting disconnected and fragmented memories. In her article, *Trauma in Translation*, Rina Dudai recognizes the metamorphosis of subconscious imagery to another medium as a guide to seeing things differently, "these images, in turn, lead us through unconscious stages of memory-processing up to the point at which the traumatic memory breaks into consciousness."²⁵ Thus, the use/choice of media provides an apparatus to leverage the experience of both personal and collective memories and which can be used to communicate these to a larger audience. Releasing the confined mind, the conceptualized images that render time and space in a way that evokes memories and speculative fictions holds an opportunity for new discovery.

While the cinema is familiar to us as entertainment found in theaters, adopting different presentation methods and venues can offer alternative and more personal experiences by shifting the stance and position of the viewer. Counter to the linear and story-based composition of typical movies, media and projection art offer a wider spectrum of poetic concepts and language with which to explore psychological expression and a means to experiment with the relationship between the work and the viewer. Configuring film and video in an installation format interrogates habitual anticipation of reading a narrative and escalates passive reading to active involvement.

“In this era of changing perceptions we’re responsible for creating new options with which to communicate”

Doug Aitken. 2000.





Tony Oursler's *Blue Husk* (2001) is part of his collective set of video sculptures that simulate human body parts through projecting on abstract and biomorphic objects; the project entails 'his examination of the media society and its effects on the soul of man.'²⁶ *Blue Husk* projects a video of a restless human face onto the surface of a ball which evokes an image of a head without a body, an entity that is unable to escape. The subtle motion of the isolated image not only activates an inanimate object but also triggers uneasiness. The head, confined by a transparent blue husk arouses anxiety caused by both the apparent imprisonment of the head and the surveillance by the audience. In addition to being located in the corner of the exhibition space, the unapologetic visibility of the technologies used in the work also creates a distance from the viewer, disembodiment of the body and the mind further. The fragmented body appearing as remnants of a larger entity displays a psychological relation of the mind, body and the media that points to alienation and torment.

In general, the image of a human figure creates an implied narrative of its own, mirroring its relationship to the world. In this way, the experience of looking at a human body embodies an intimate subconscious reflection of ourselves. Moreover, the practice of abstracting and isolating the body is a way to subjectively and objectively question images that adhere to diverse concerns of our understanding of our corporal and psychological existence. This challenges our traditional view of the human body, extending beyond the highly idealized, controlled images we are confronted with continually on our screens.



Blue Husk, 2001. Installation view. Tony Oursler.

By creating a participatory space using media and projection, installations can raise interesting questions concerning corporeality and the human body. Investigations of bodily perception can be sought through recognizing the viewer as both the actor and the spectator. By using real-time video technology, manipulation of the tangible presence of ourselves and others can provide the means to observe the self in different views. Through investigating these techniques to address content that deals with trauma, a projection can become a tool to overcome mental and physical limitation through elevation of experience. Confronting the viewer with direct emotional and physical presence promotes intimacy in contact with manifold connotations.

Notes

Body Image and Media

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4. Ibid.

Image as Spectacle

5. Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Book, 1994.
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7. Best, Steven, and Kellner, Douglas. *The Postmodern Turn*. Critical Perspectives (New York, N.Y.). New York: Guilford Press, 1997.
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12. Root-Bernstein, Robert Scott, and Root-Bernstein, Michèle. *Sparks of Genius : The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 79.

Abstract Image

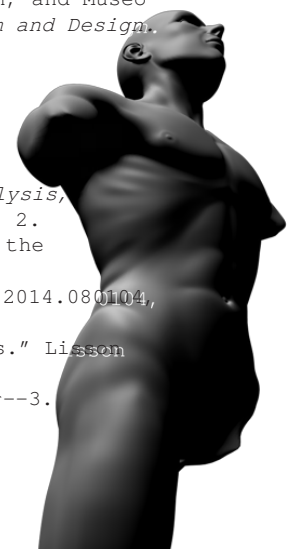
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Dialectical Image, Surrealistic Image

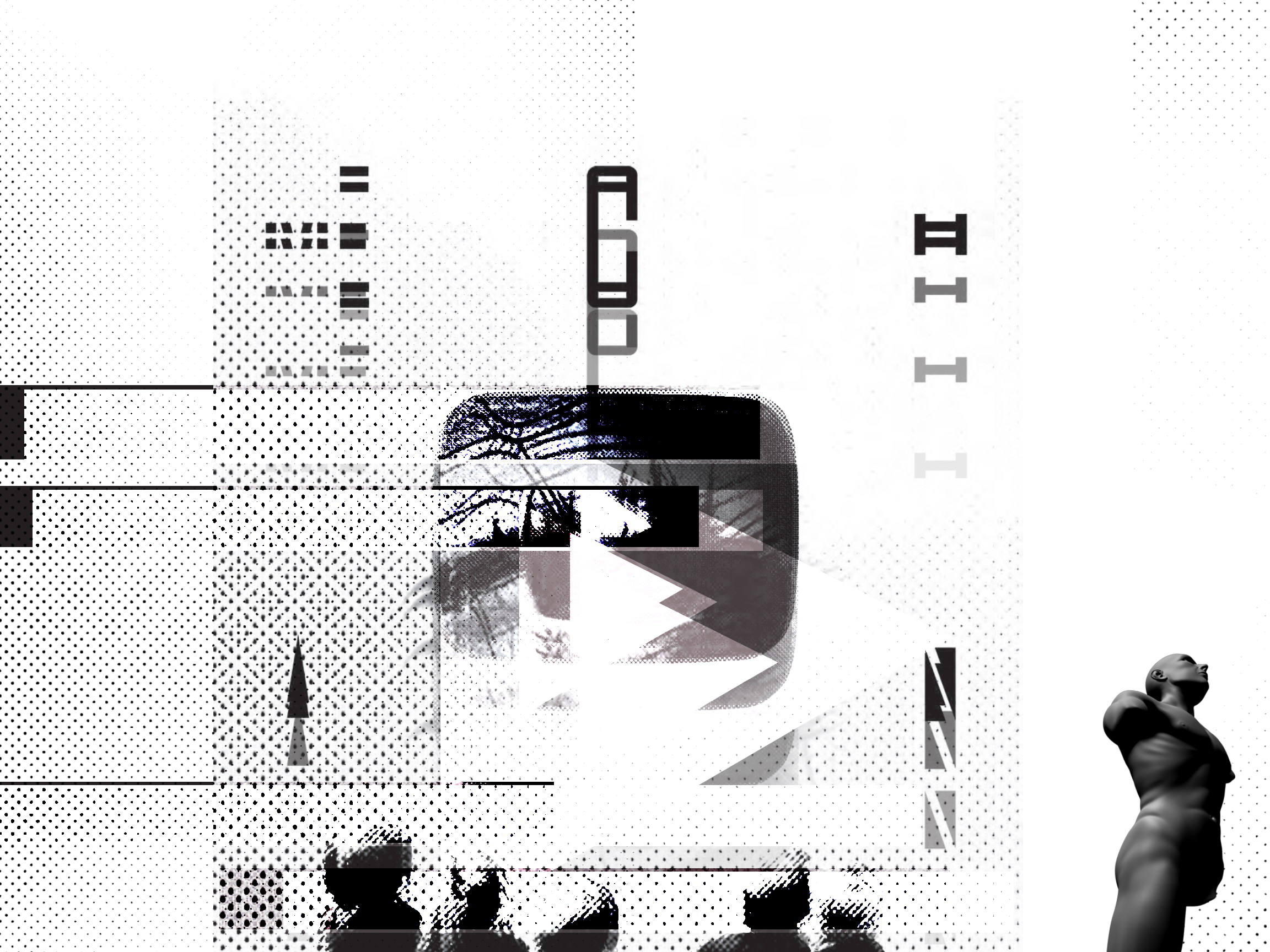
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23. Ibid.

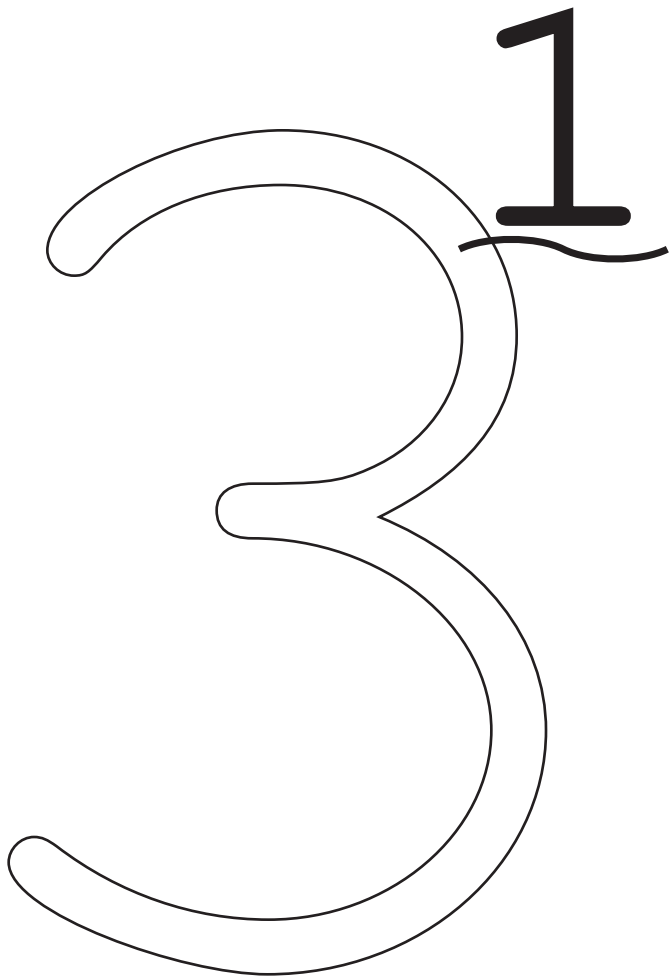
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*Process:
Diagram 1, 2, 3*

Our body can be thought of as a vessel with an opening—a container—storing information and experience with sensors gathering data from the world. The opening, the access point of a vessel is the eye of a lens that perceives only what we can apprehend or accept as true. We see and interpret the world by creating order and making connections. We read images, but can only do so within the limits of our reading ability and understanding. It is thus a matter of percolation and the choices that we make as we interpret, build perception, and develop our perspectives. Seeking ways to create a visual language to represent my personal process of perception and interpretation, I began with a series of diagrams.



Diagram I

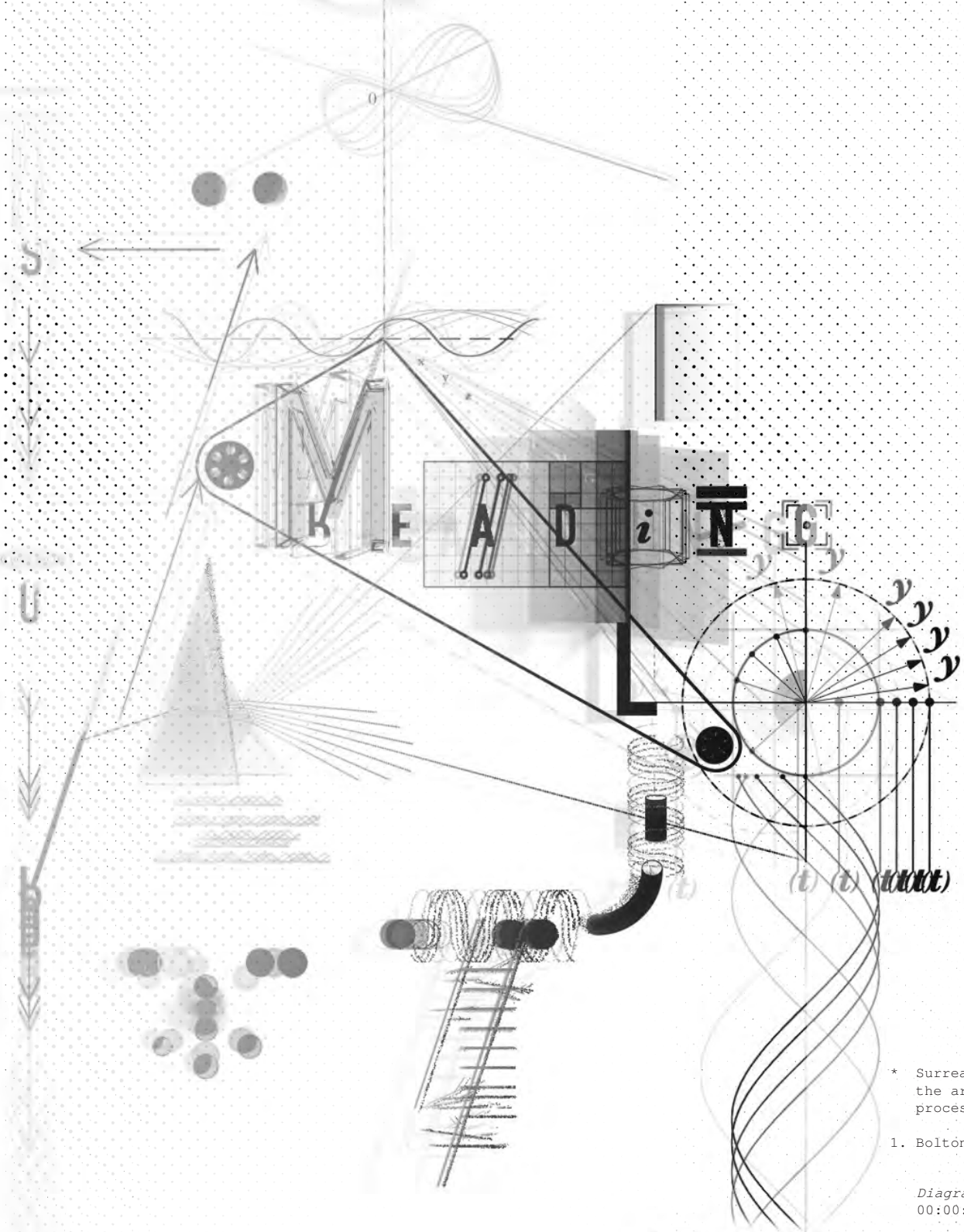


Diagram I is a collage of an animated gifs guided by the principles of Surrealist automatism*, diffusing my subconsciousness while mind mapping for relationship and order. I developed a visual diagram using gestalt theory to convey how my subconscious shapes understanding. While seeking order and connecting meanings I am finding new ways to grasp understanding towards reality, nonetheless, it does not suggest a linear reading. It is a journey out of a labyrinth of symbols, where I can connect with different levels of familiarity. "The chain of signification"¹ continuously develops and reshapes our relationship to everything through the way it is understood.

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* Surrealist automatism is a method of art-making in which the artist suppresses conscious control over the making process, allowing the unconscious mind to have great sway.
1. Bolton, Christopher, *Animating Poststructuralism*, 2012.

Diagram I, 2017. Internet art, video and online, animated GIF, 00:00:12.



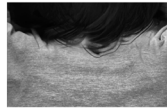
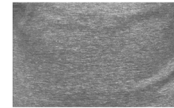
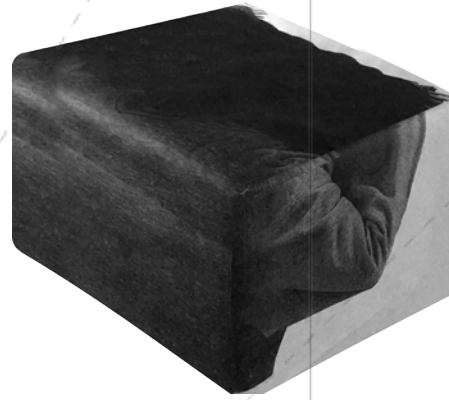
I open my eyes in the morning, a body alone in a square shaped room belonging to another rectangular building. The gestalt of matryoshka, the configuration of a structure inside a structure... just as much as how I am composed, it seems layers of walls compound this world. Although little do I synthesize the architecture of everything, the iteration of layers will continue to accumulate ceaselessly. They are all labyrinth to me. My consciousness is rather counseled by senses to walk alongside the events in front of me. My trails are as hazy as an empty canvas illustrated in the method of Surrealist automatism, I sublimate my confusions in art. I entrust myself to all the repetitions that later weave into a pattern.

Diamgram I Artist Statement.

The very primitive form of my consciousness performs a dichotomous way of thinking between chaos and order. To do so, a fine line is drawn in between. Throughout the time, a constant oscillation between the two is developed enabling a fluid tension that fosters uncanny relations. It makes a constellation-like composition, a cosmo field filled with meteors and never static.

Words are like confetti. They sparkle when it hits the right light but mostly scattered and hovering around in the air like dust. Its obscurity stirs up my mind wanting me to treat them as elements. With rhyme and assonance, I spur myself towards motion.

m.

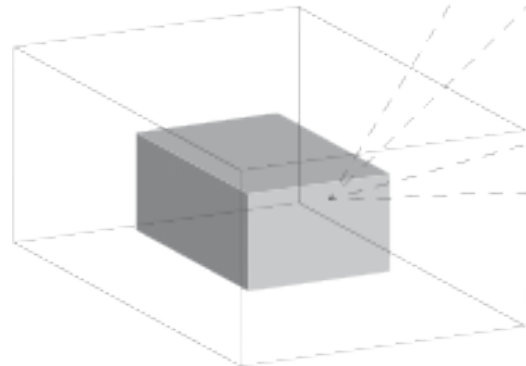


* Order: The arrangement or disposition of people or things in relation to each other according to a particular sequence, pattern, or method.

Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "order," accessed Mar 12, 2017,
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition>

To me, order is:

- * making sense, making things understandable
- * constructing form out of the void
- * seeking towards truth and value
- * navigating location and finding control from a state of being out of control
- * a logic that maneuvers in relations to others and therefore, it only exists and defined by another



Diamgram I Sketch, Projector Cover.

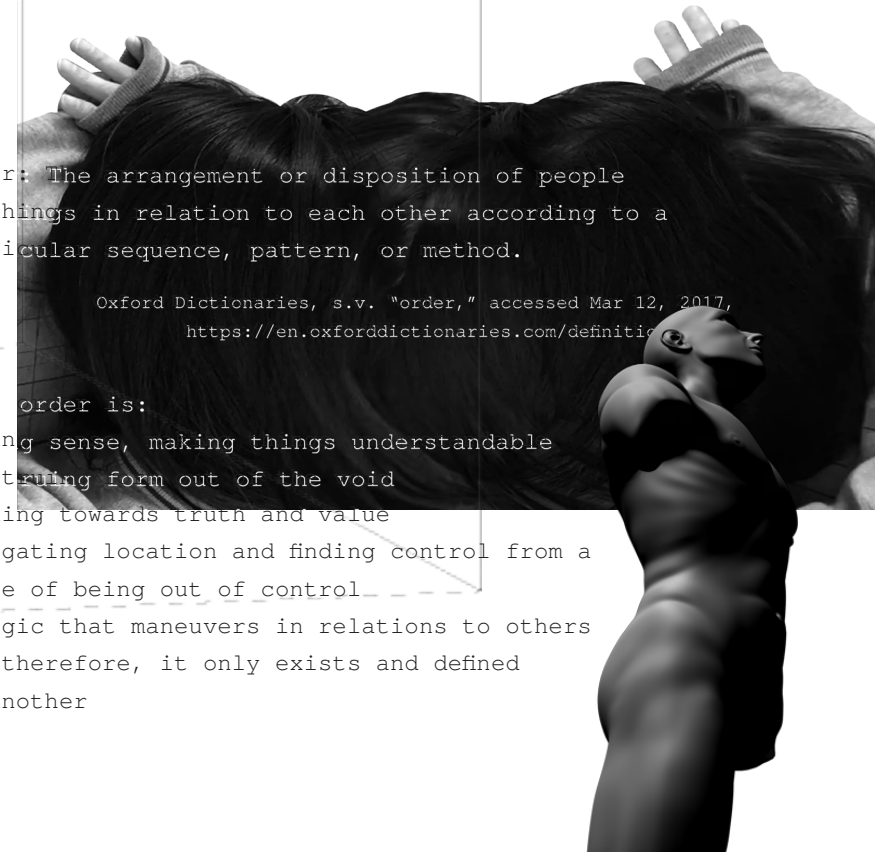


Diagram II

Diagram II is a series of three light boxes stacked one on top of the other, a sculptural version of a diagram. Each level reflects ideas around our relationship to the natural world which has a profound effect on developing our perspectives.

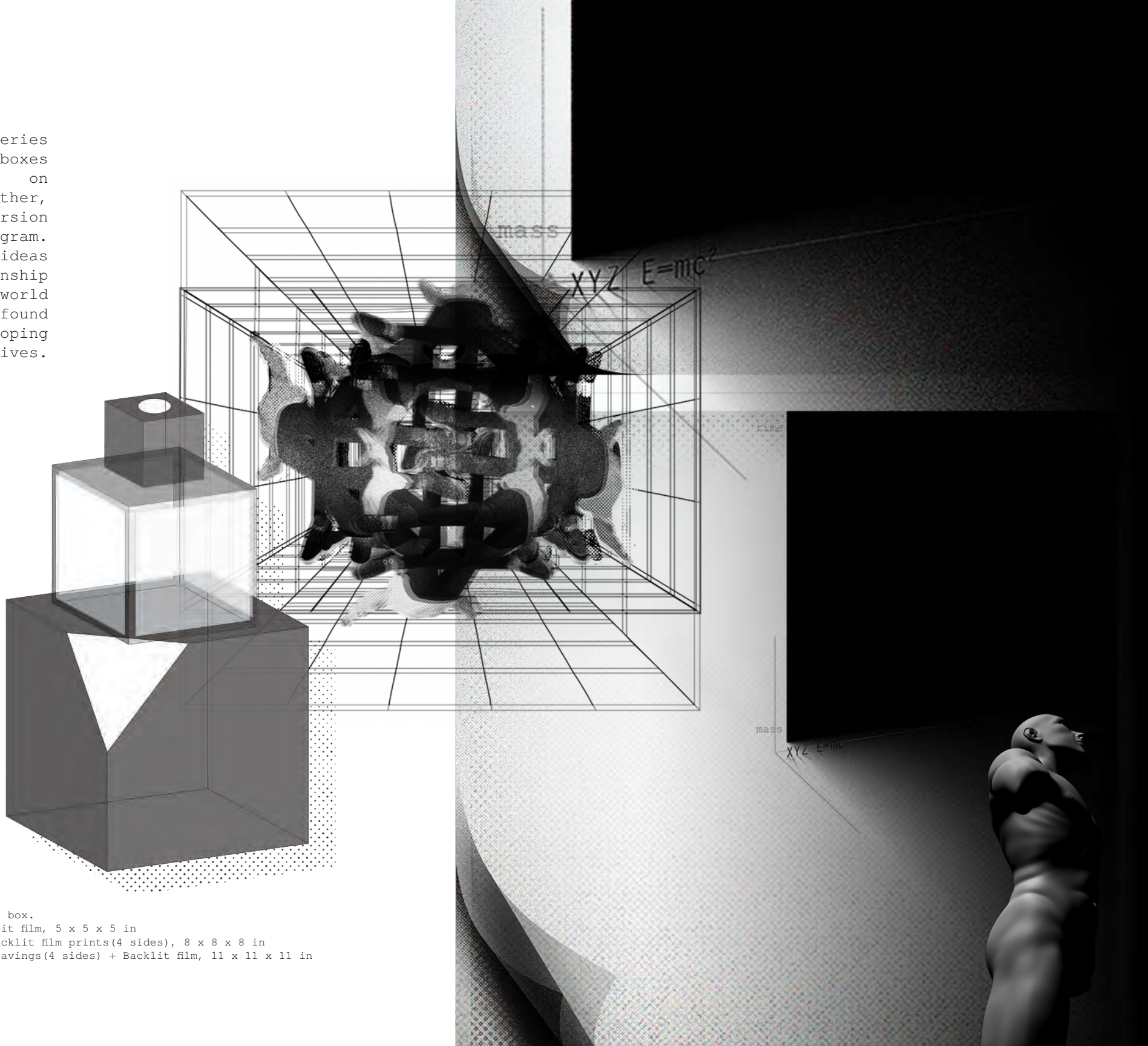


Diagram II, 2017. Light box.
Top Level: Wood + Backlit film, 5 x 5 x 5 in
Second Level: Wood + Backlit film prints (4 sides), 8 x 8 x 8 in
Bottom Level: Wood engravings (4 sides) + Backlit film, 11 x 11 x 11 in



The surfaces of the bottom box is engraved with fossils. Fossils are physical evidence of existence, a document of history. By considering them through the lens of science, we shape a paradigm that compresses past and present. So we may ask, where and what does it point to?



On the second level, different images are printed on backlit film on each of the four sides of the cube. Each image is the reflection of our relationship to the world through abstract visual language to convey the essence of the relationship between human bodies and the natural world. This relationship is intimately physical, connecting us through a shared experience of space, time, mass and energy. Our viewpoints are built on top of our learning and scientific rationales that embody the strict laws of physics. How we see this order becomes an invisible machinery that elucidates our perspectives in a novel and creative way. We look into existing materials as extensions of our body, and use this to grasp and gauge our place in the world.





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The top cube presents the idea of a "light". Light or the metaphor of light is essential to reading, permitting and introducing a legible area.

Everything we see through light is simply the physicality of reflection which is bounced back to our vision.

Historically, an in-depth understanding of the nature of light was made possible through the invention of lenses, introducing the world of macroscopic bodies and microsystems.

The resulting widened physical range of legibility revealed the mysterious harmony and order in every natural system.

Through orders and patterns, we are able to see the theory of gestalt that becomes a model to guide our relationship to this world.

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Diagram II, 2017. Light box.
Top Level: Wood + Backlit film, 5 x 5 x 5 in



Diagram II: Time, Space, Mass, Energy (series), 2017. Internet art, video and online, animated GIF.

Diagram III, Body

Diagram III, Body is a composite gif diagram of individual gifs created contemplating the following questions:

If we are drawn to an ideal image of a human form, then how can we use the process of abstraction to neutralize and counter this tendency and to focus on the reality of the imperfect, extraordinary human figure?

What do viewers read, and how do they fill in the gaps when the detailed depiction of a body figure is altered and abstracted?

How can abstract forms be utilized as a tool to generate positive reads and allow the various level of access points?

Can abstraction be a way to empower the subject, or disrupt the apparatus, or further re-configure the view itself?

How do people perceive micro/macro mechanisms of abstraction?

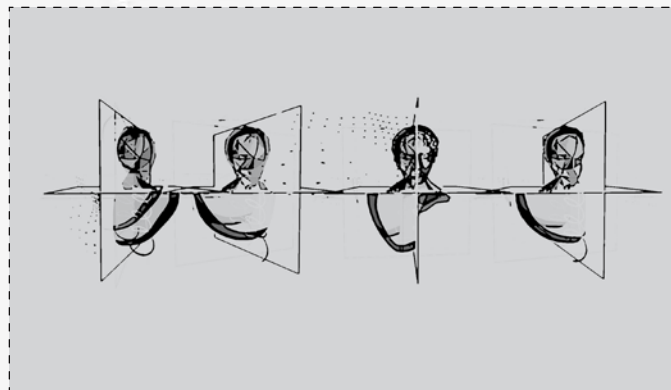
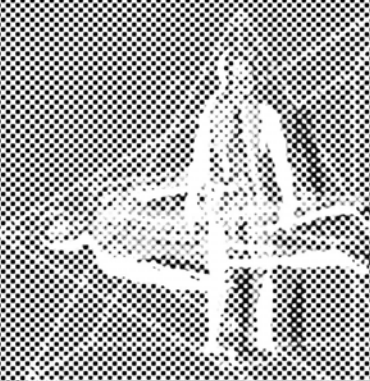
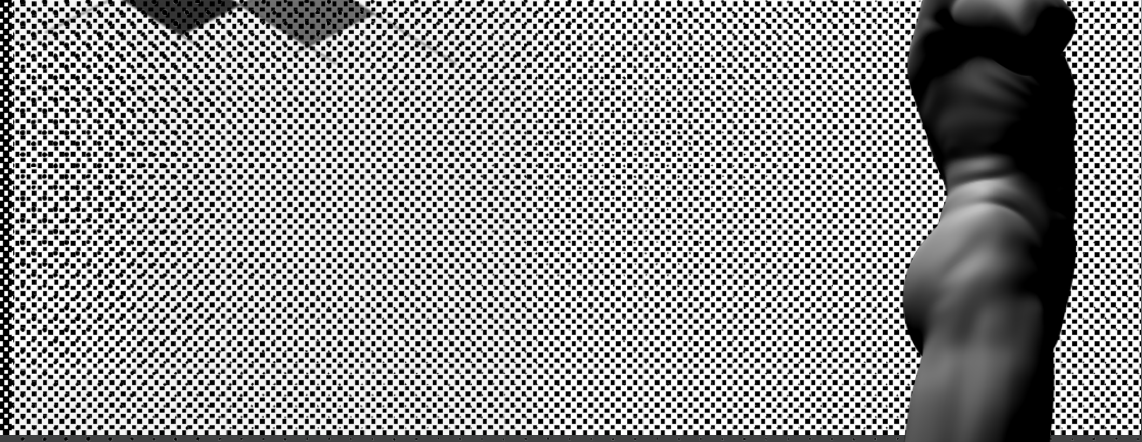
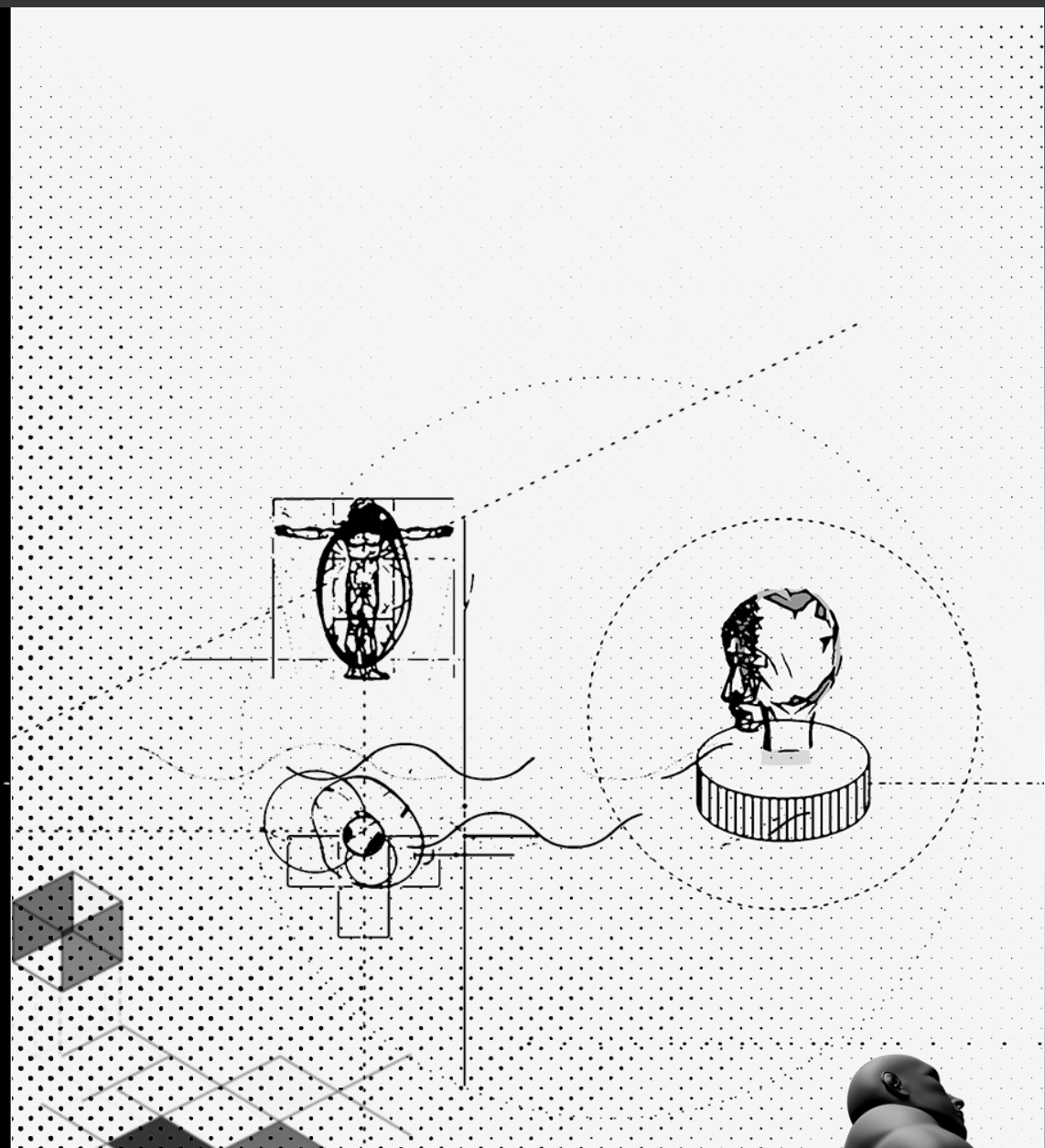
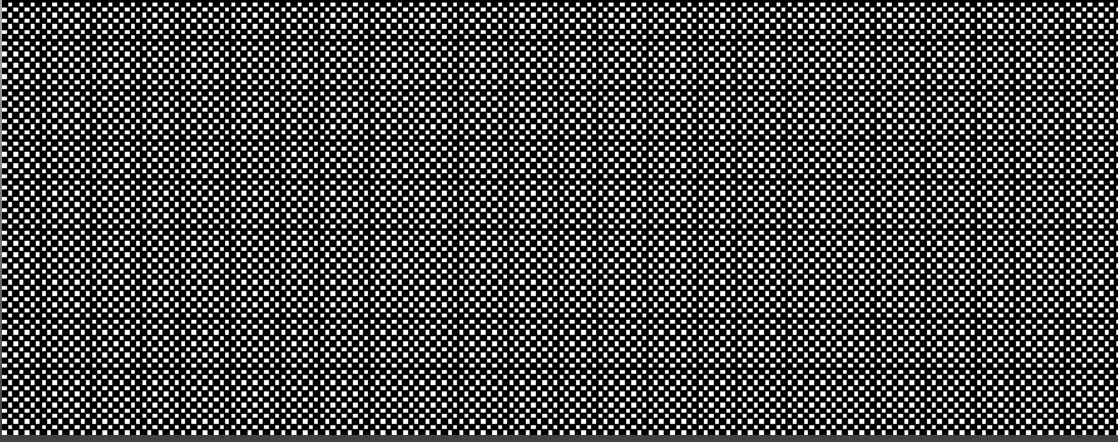
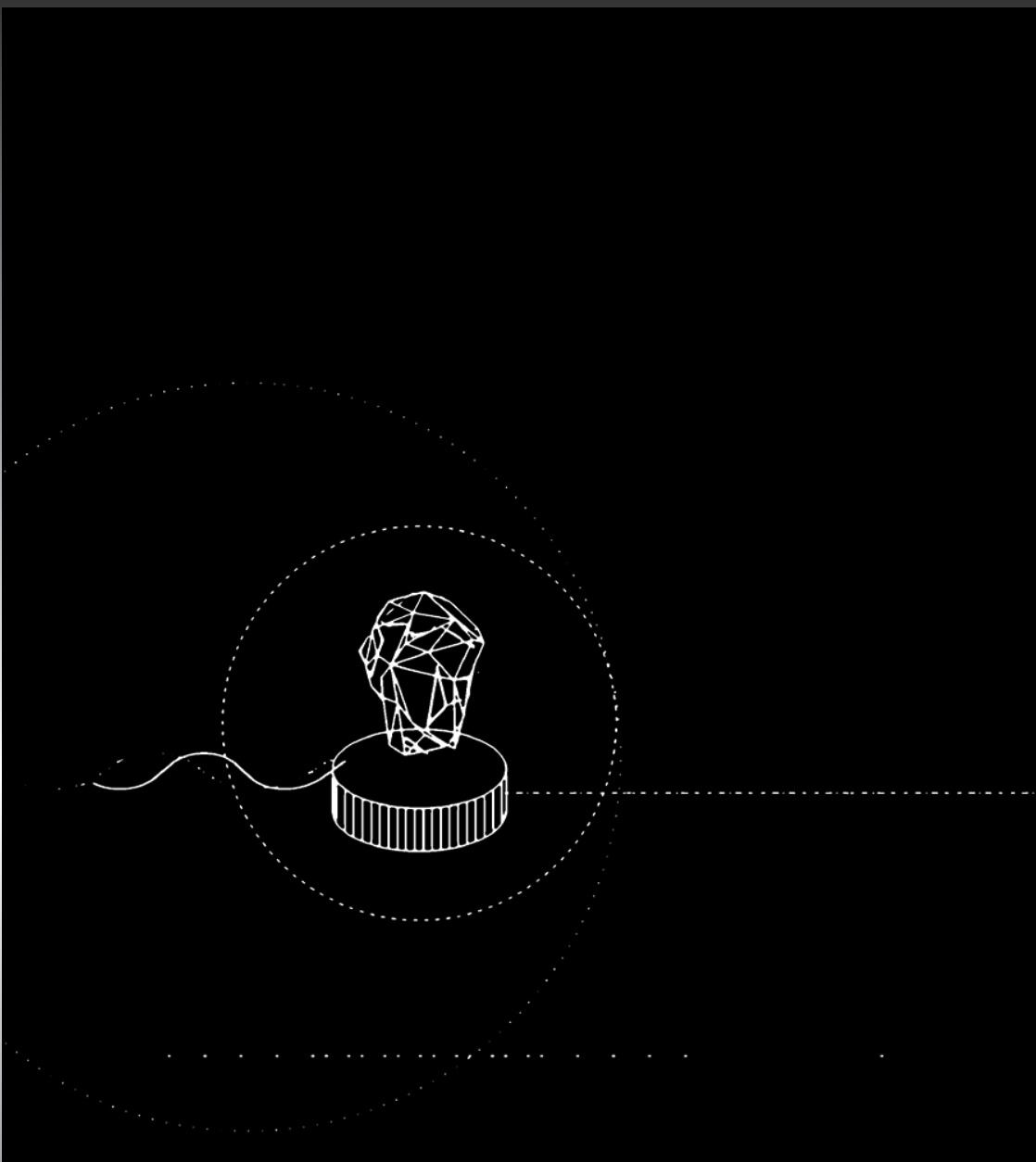
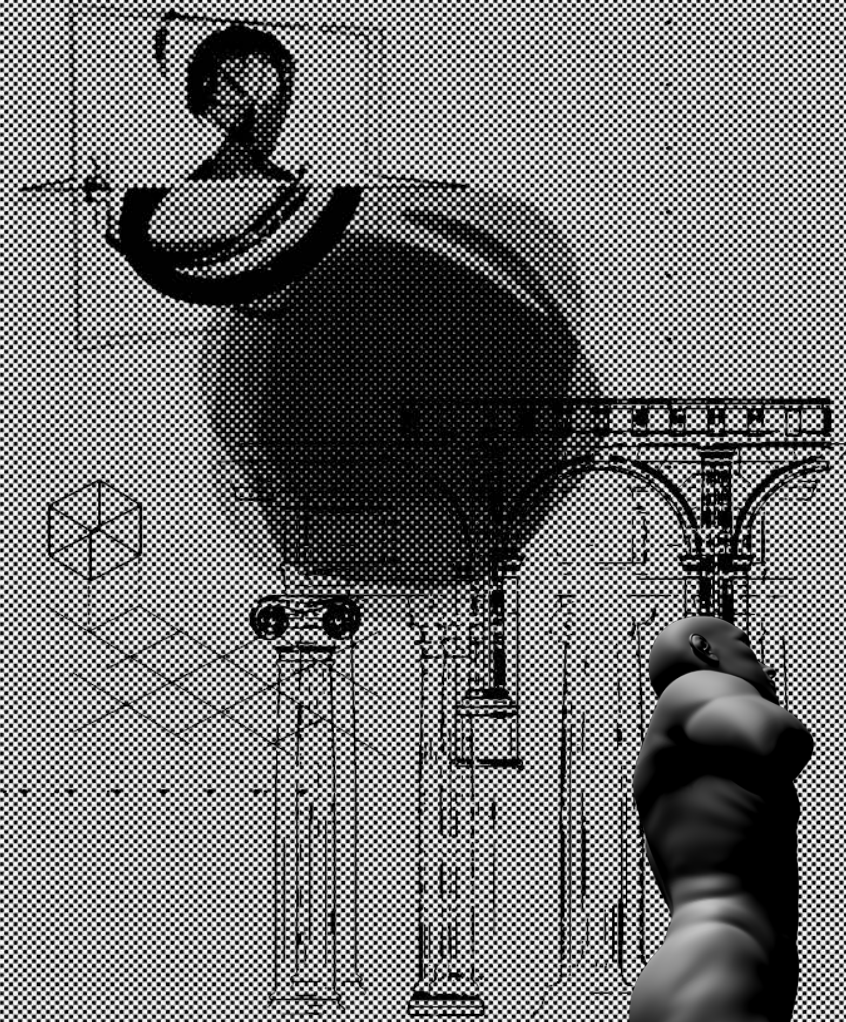
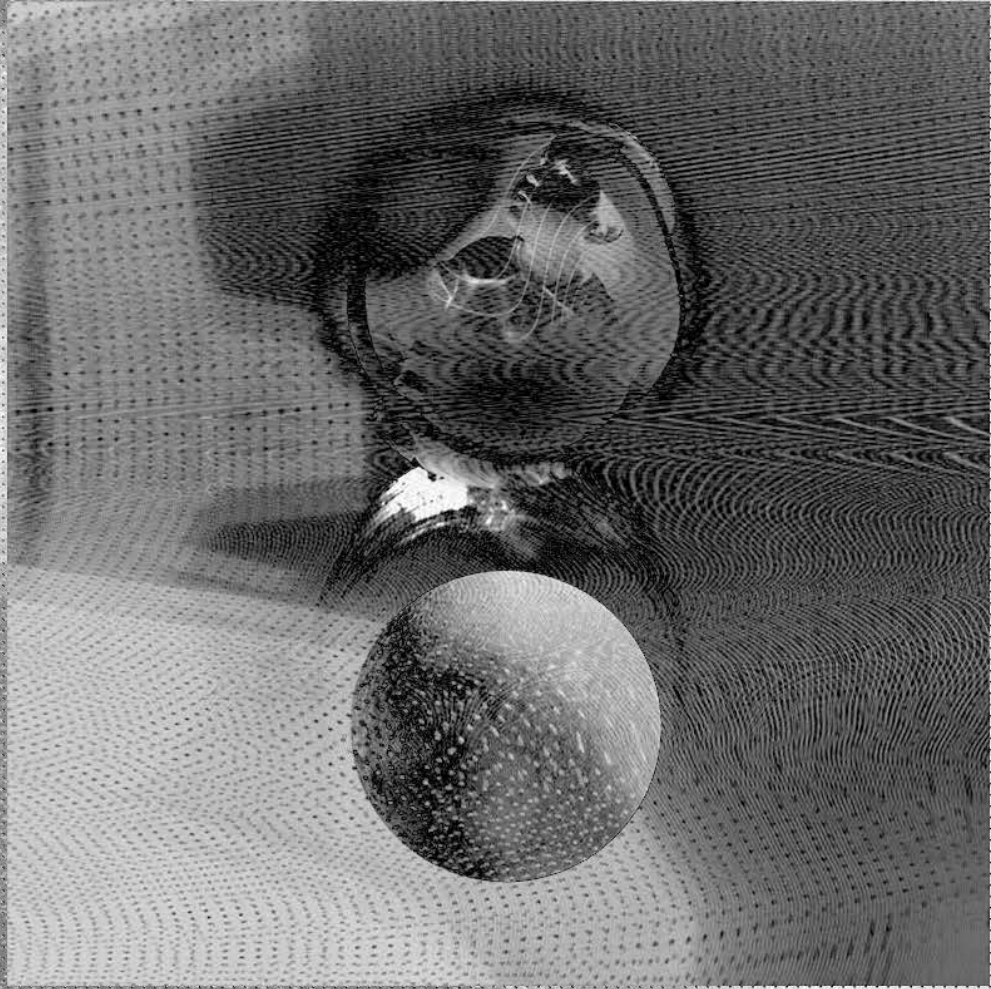


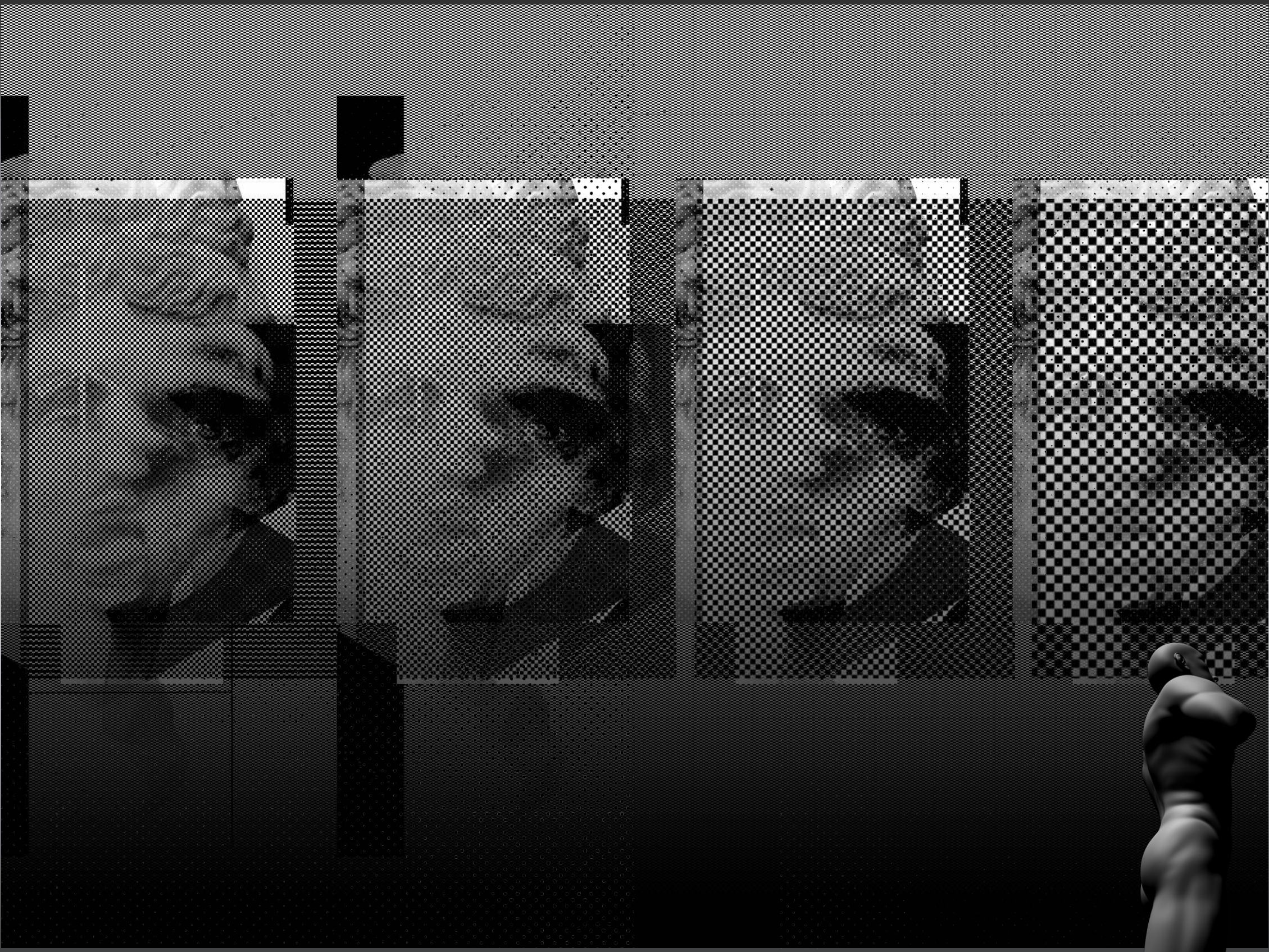
Diagram III: Body (series),
2017. Internet art, video
and online, animated GIF.

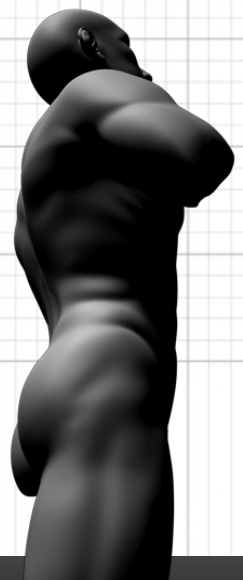
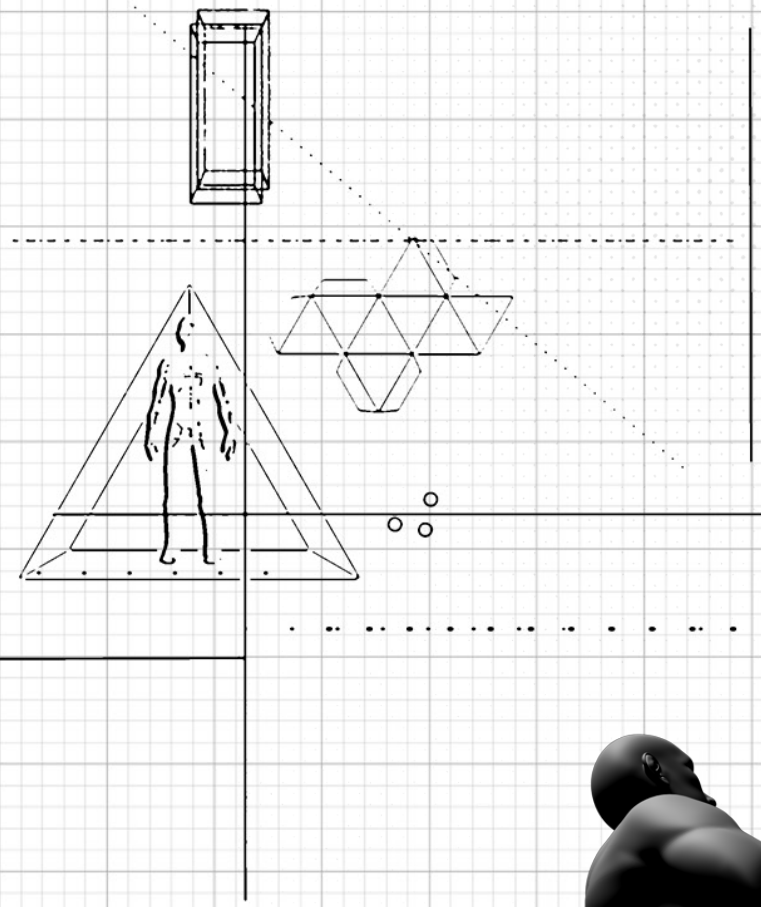
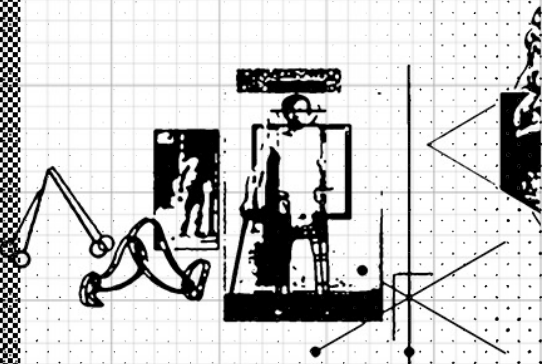
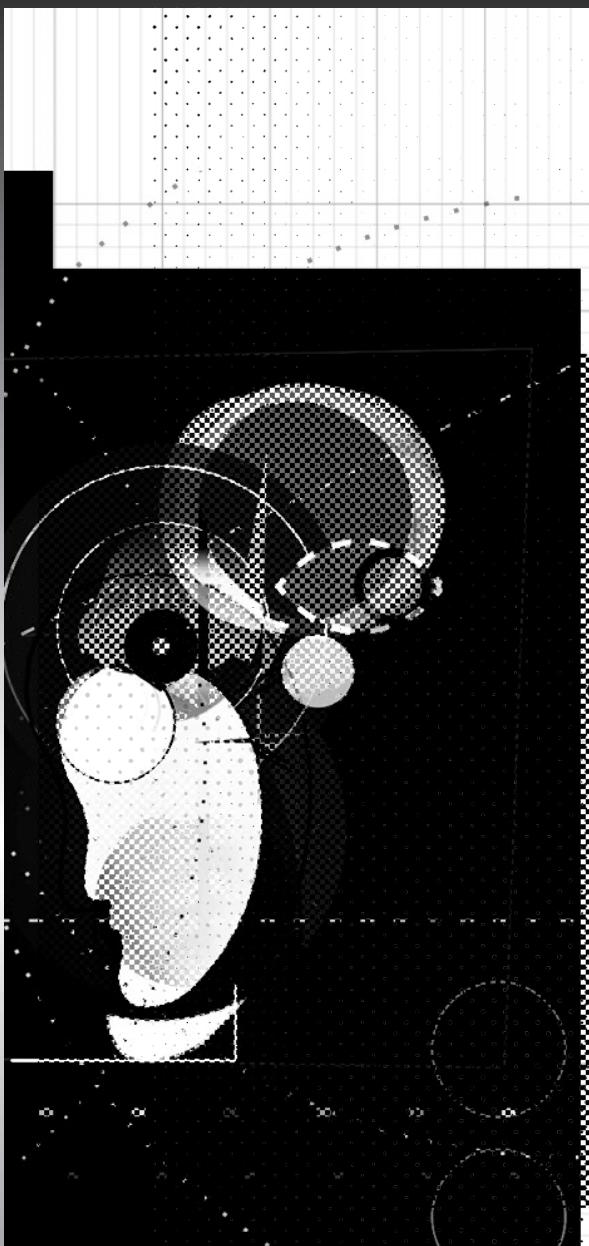


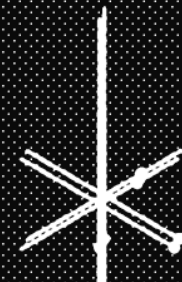
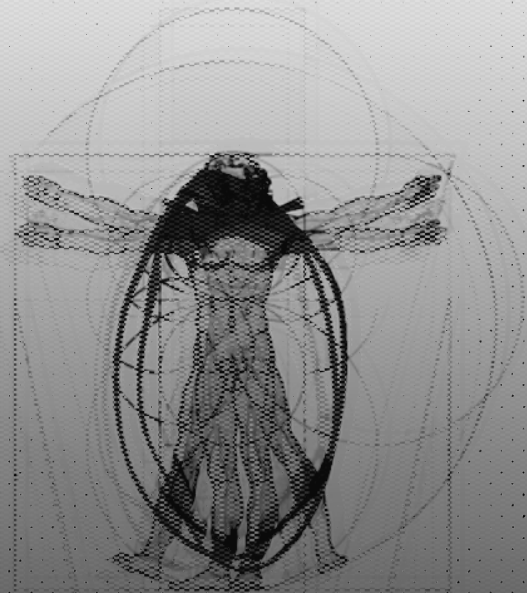










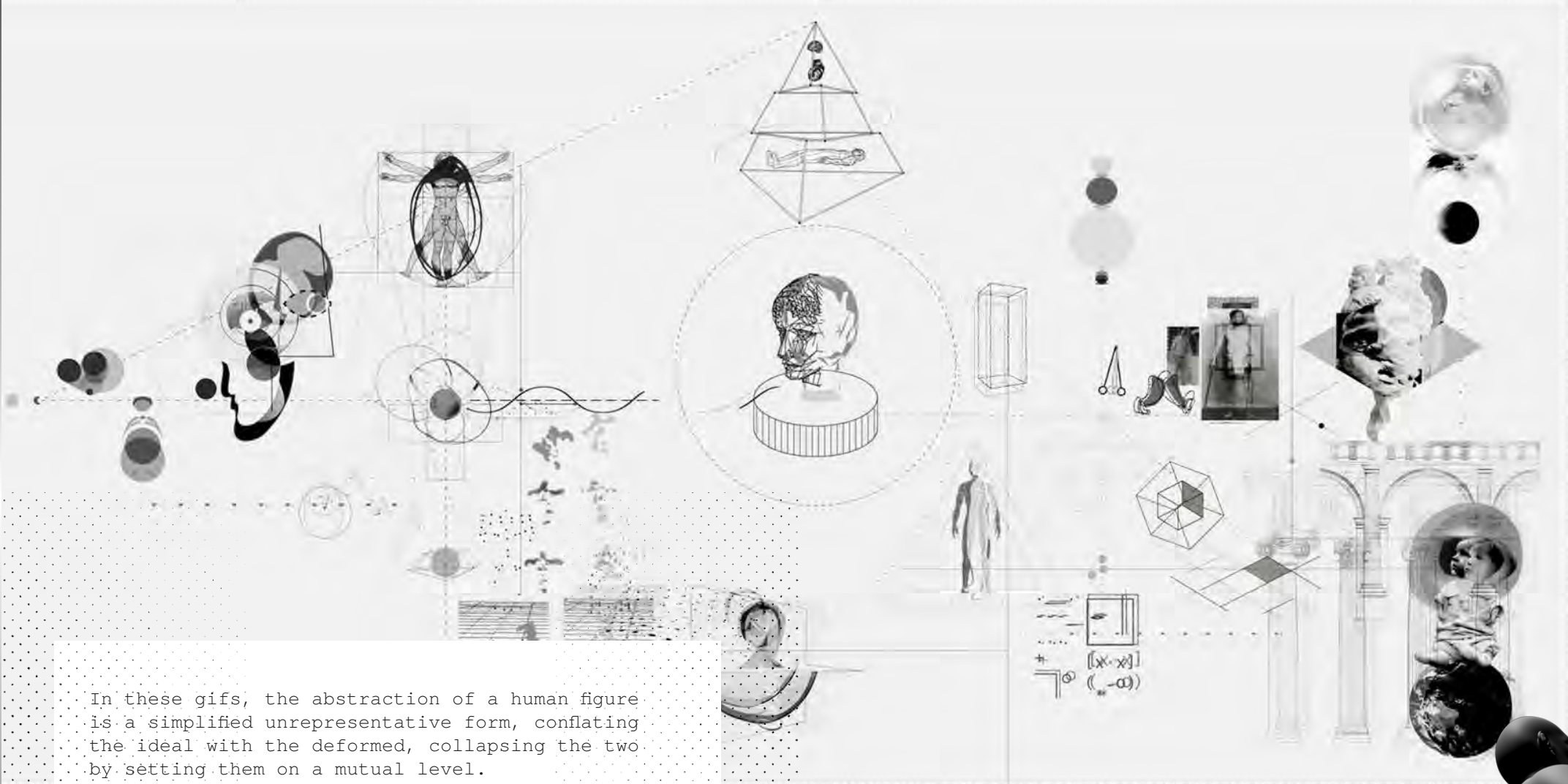


After making a series of looping gifs, I connected them to become a single large diagram. Each gif was the result of my analytical thinking process and connecting them helped me to arrive at new understanding and challenge assumptions. The diagram connects and organizes divergent data. From detailed image to abstracted forms, relationships are conceptually strengthened and further reinvented by their arrangements.

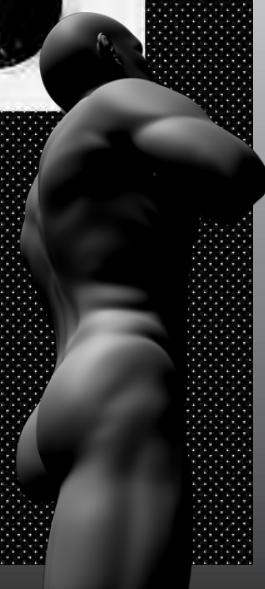
The loop of individual images encourages continuity. The open access points allow for oscillation of ideas beyond a directional reading.

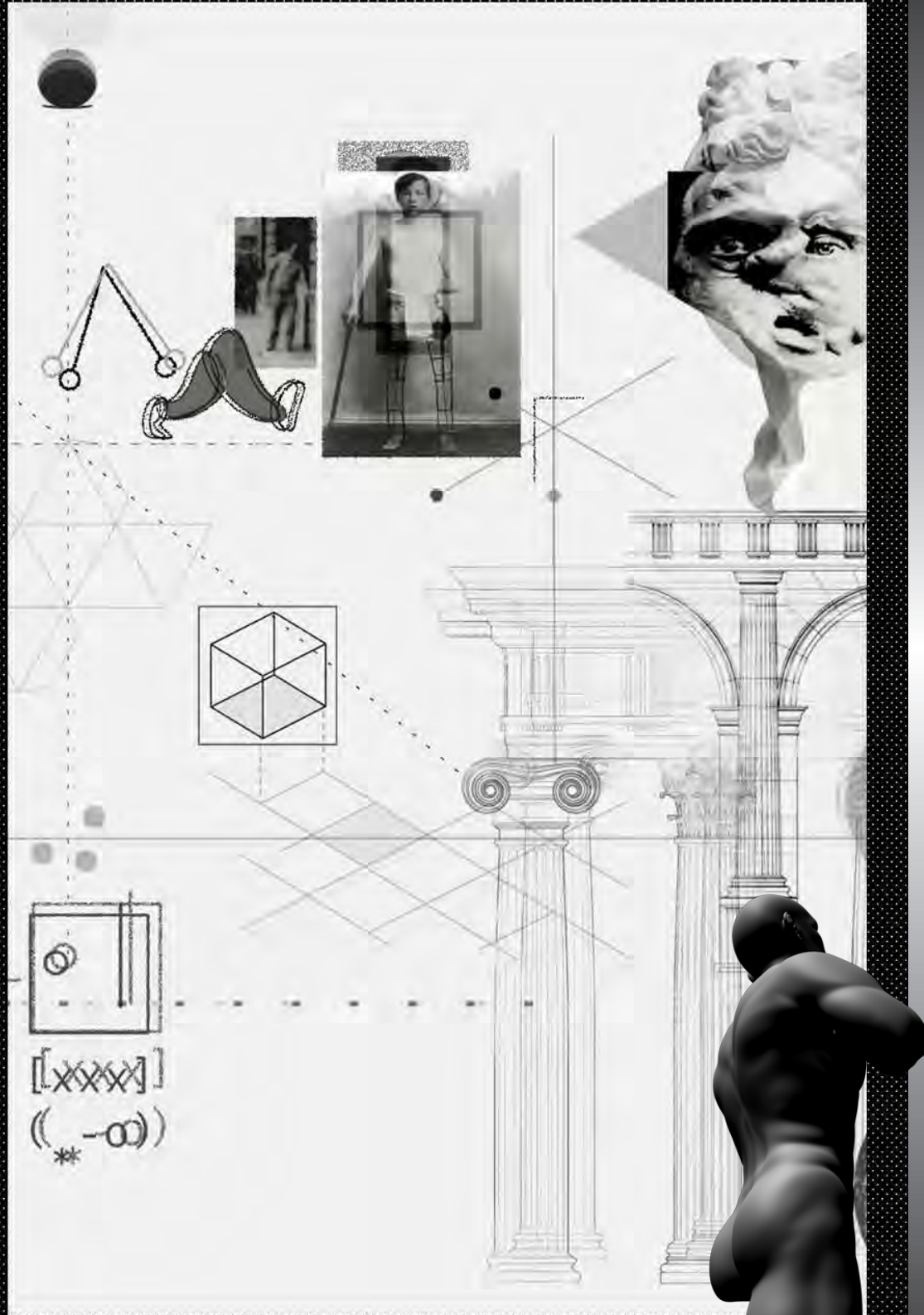
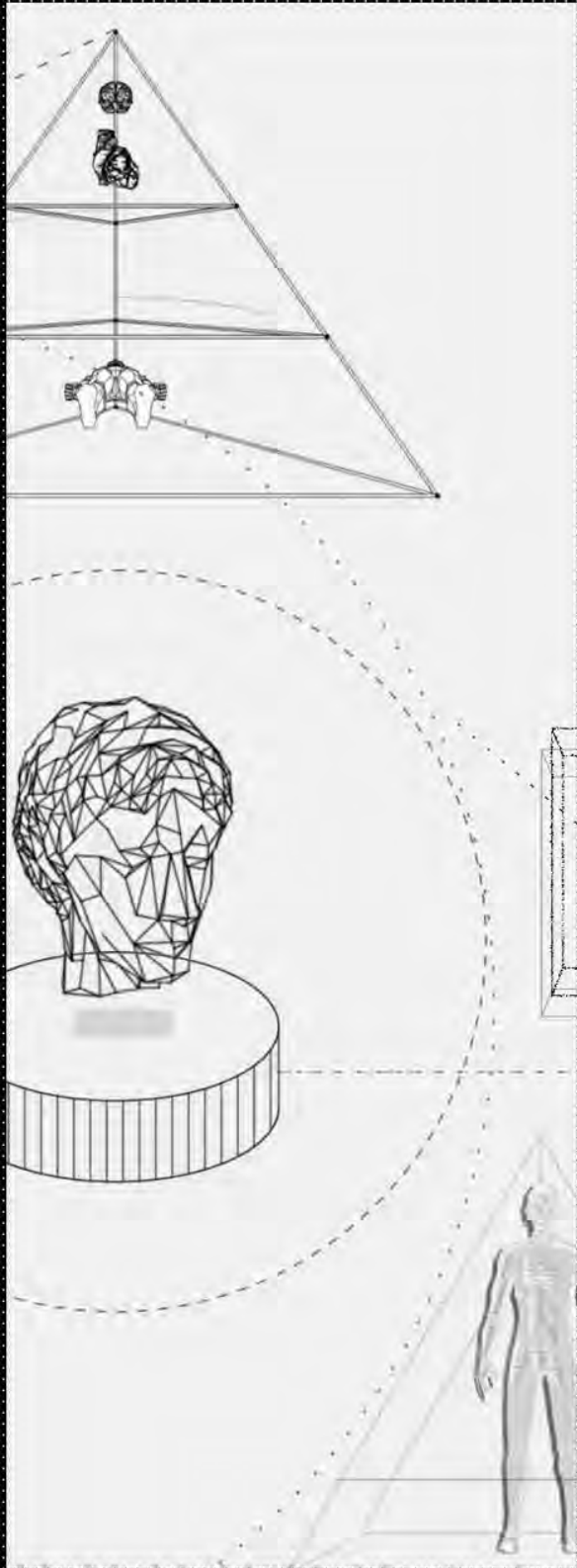
As a whole, I connect with gestalt theories to bring a powerful synthesis while making attempts to seek order and find relationships.

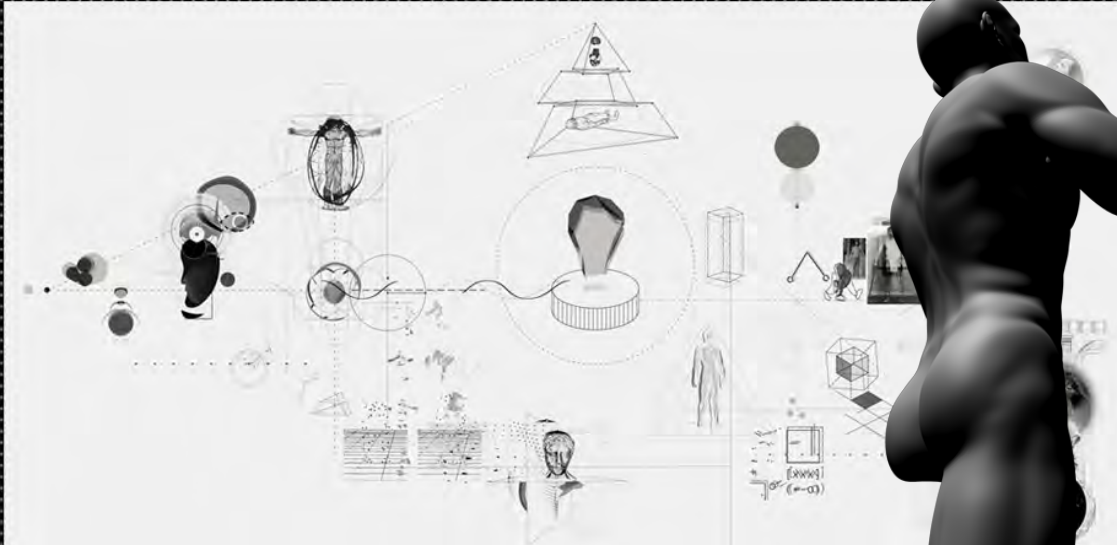
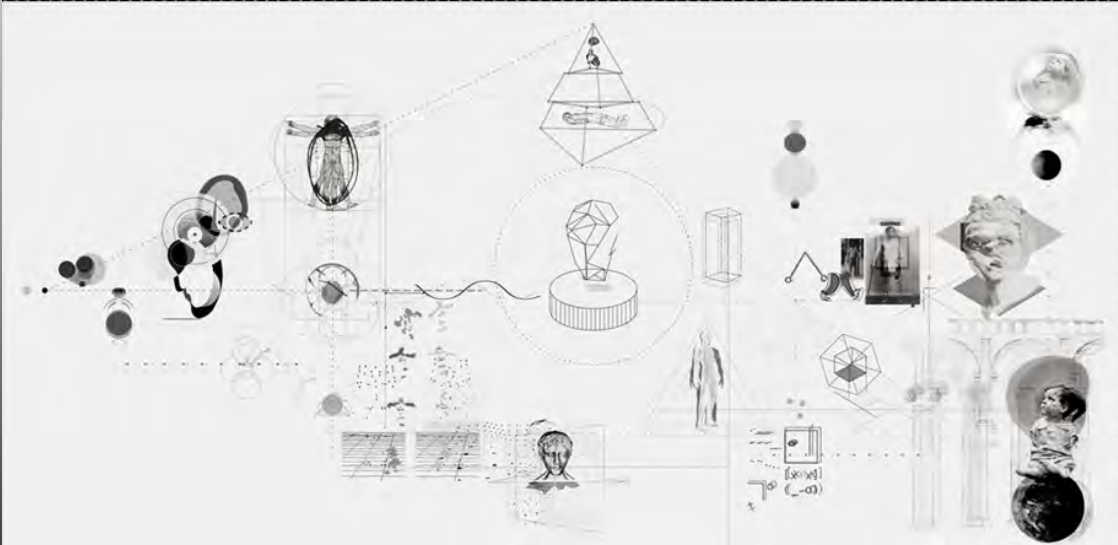
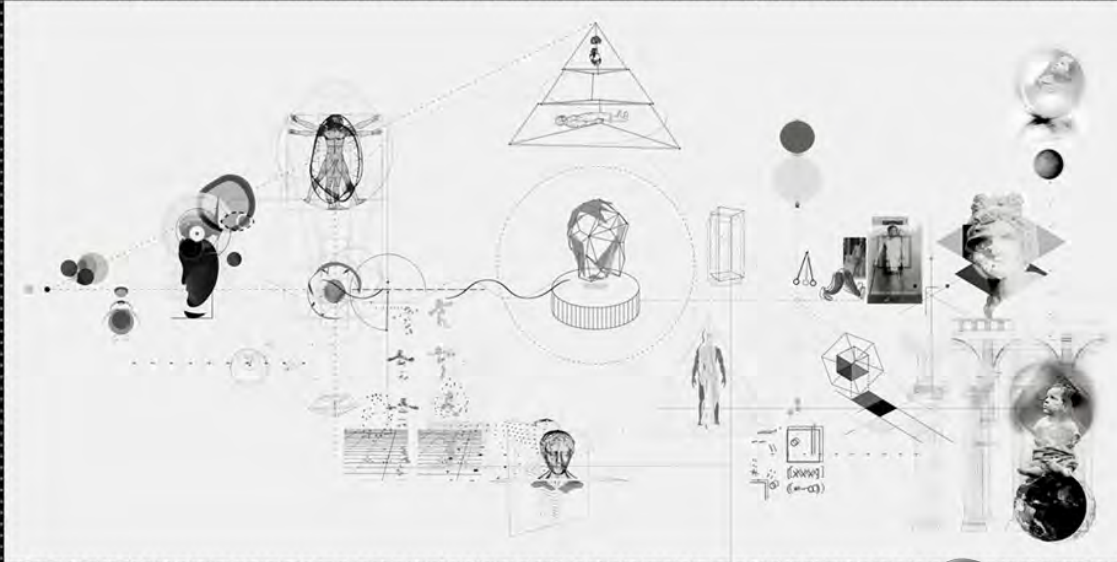
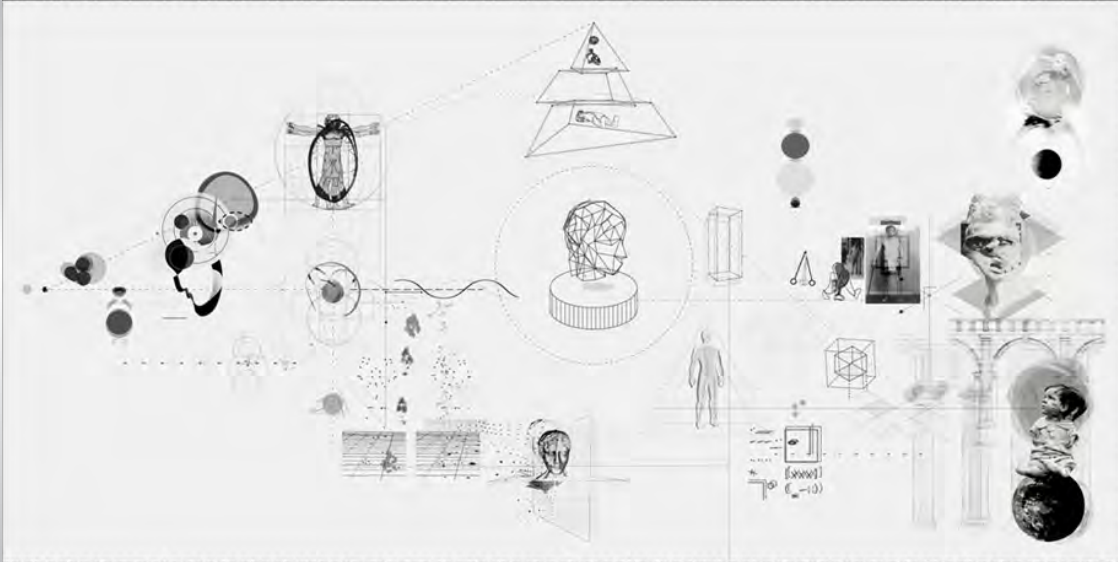
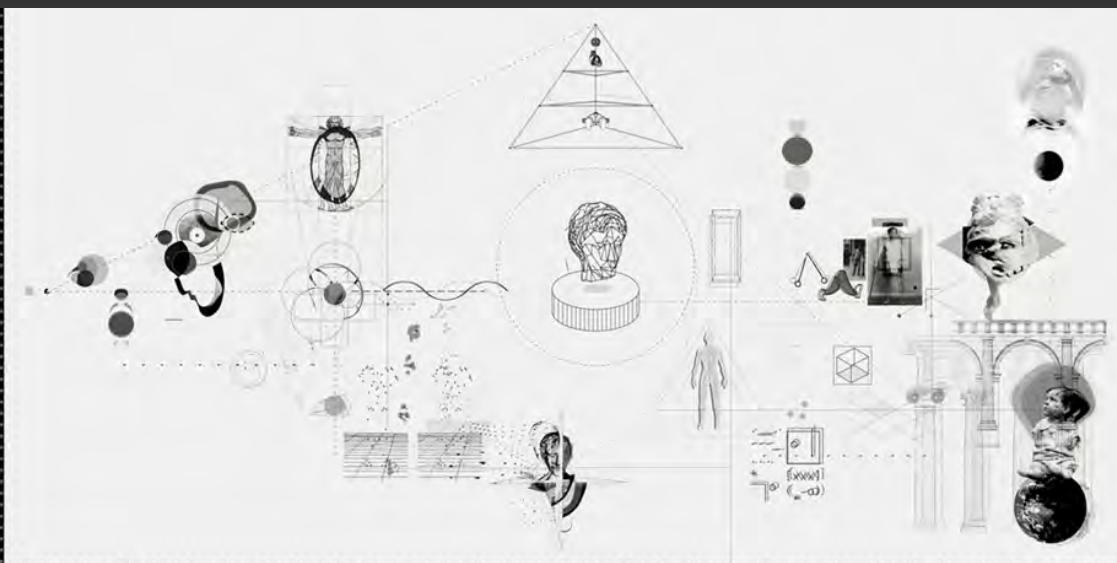
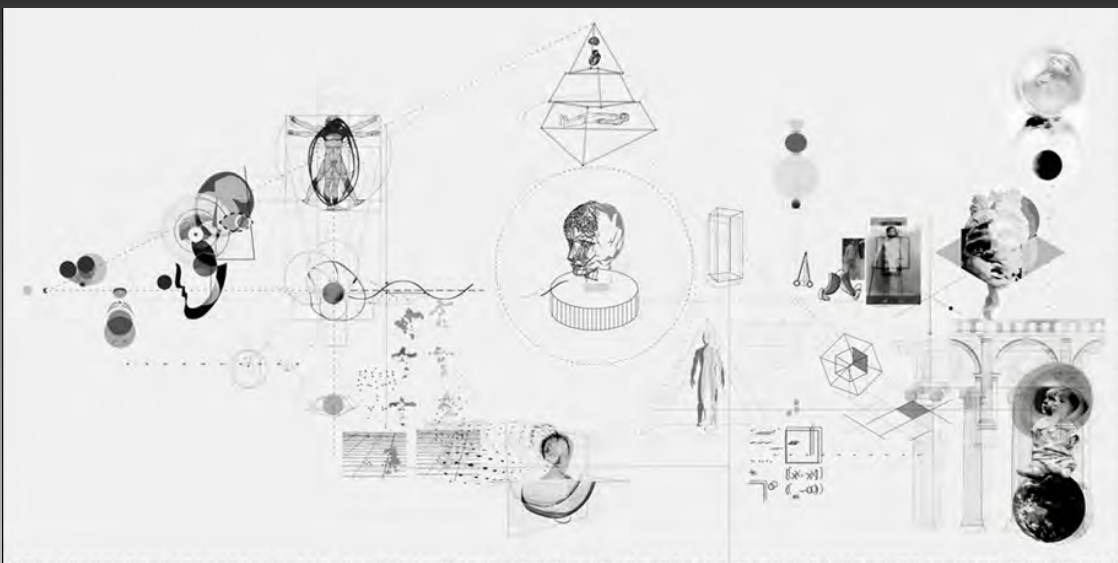




In these gifs, the abstraction of a human figure is a simplified unrepresentative form, conflating the ideal with the deformed, collapsing the two by setting them on a mutual level. Therefore, the use of abstraction is a creative approach to body perception. More than an attempt to correct prevailing stereotypes and discrimination, I am interested in exploring new ways of viewing difference and questioning how altered properties can shape a meaningful reading without the reading of what is "normal" and what is "not normal". The project questions what you expect to see, and what perception you would create when encountering the unexpected. Time-based media allows the manipulation of an object's dimensions.







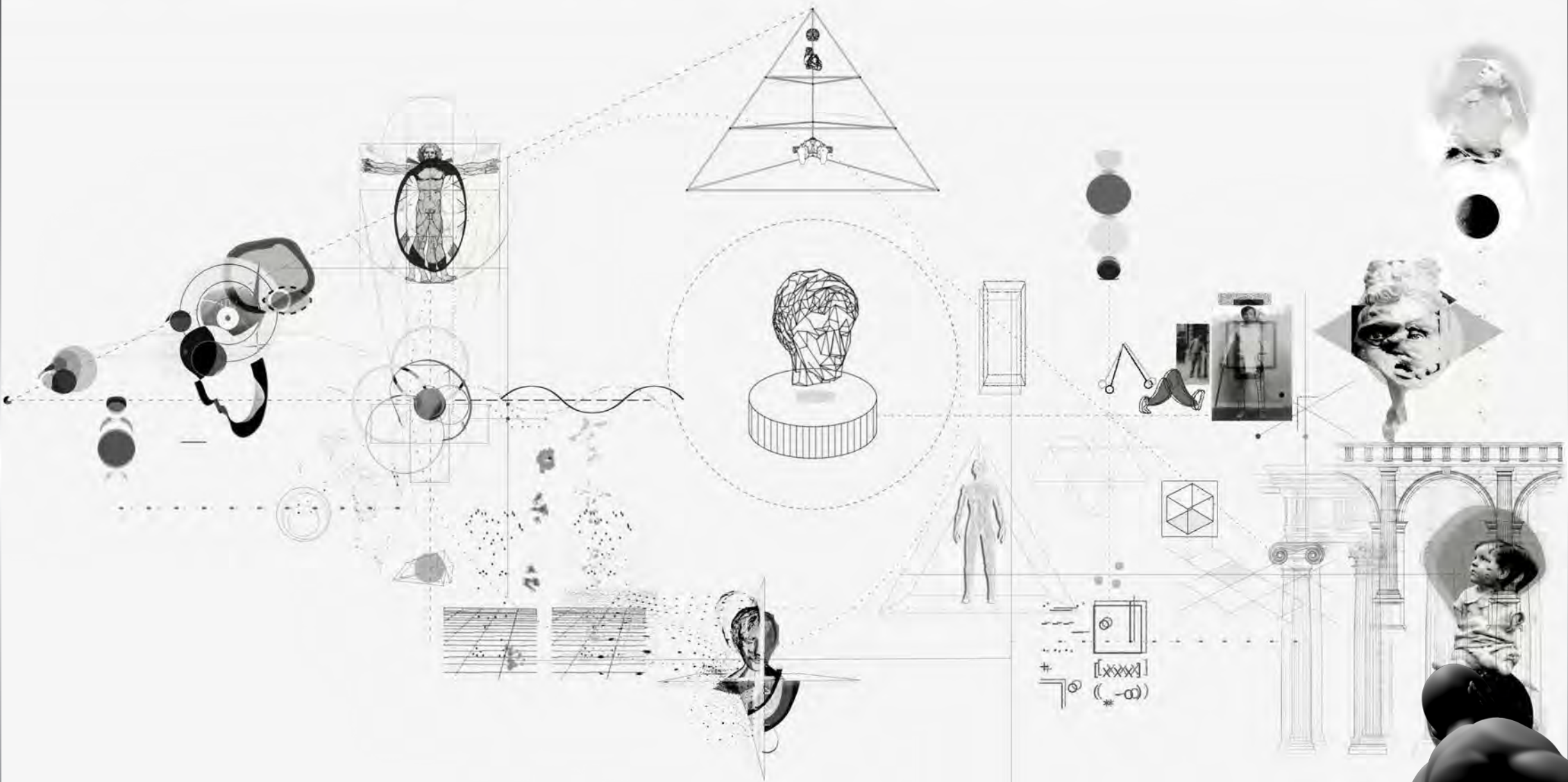
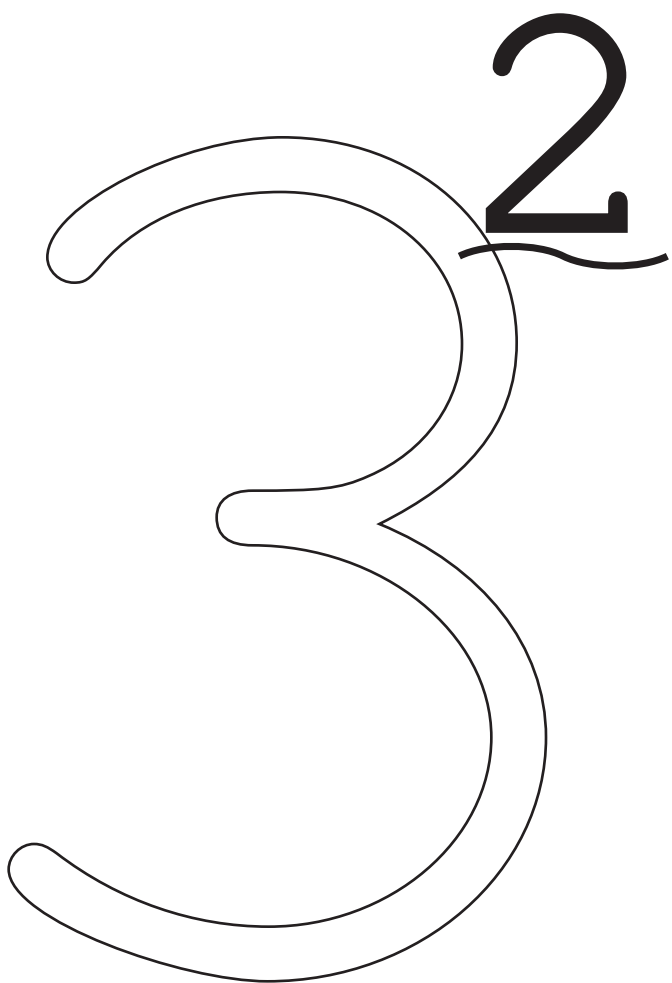


Diagram III, Body, 2017. Internet art, video and online, animated GIF collages; 00:00:12.



Process:
Hand 1, 2

Transforming the *Diagram* series into a linear sequence, I continue to explore dreamlike filters with unusual transitions to challenge the safe and familiar, and to create ways of seeing through varied frames. My employment of abstraction and ambiguity neutralizes the negative attitudes toward the imperfect body image, specifically through the use of just hands in this series. Both works arise from the personal childhood experience of trauma—exploring what it means to be different and how these differences are viewed.



Hand I

Hand I is a surrealist narrative that endeavors to examine our cognition with regards to unexpected, extraordinary images of hands. This work is inspired by two works: Plato's cave and the writings of Kenya Hara.

In his masterwork, *The Republic*, Plato presents the allegory of the cave, suggesting, among other things, a dialectical tension between instinctive emotion and social repression. The allegory represents existence as a visible phenomenon where our perception of reality is limited by our senses and our experience. It postulates that the world outside of these limits is inaccessible to us.

Kenya Hara observes that the basic form of a hand when combined with the mirror image of the other hand, creates a vessel, and the hand becomes an object and an instrument to shape an alternate view.

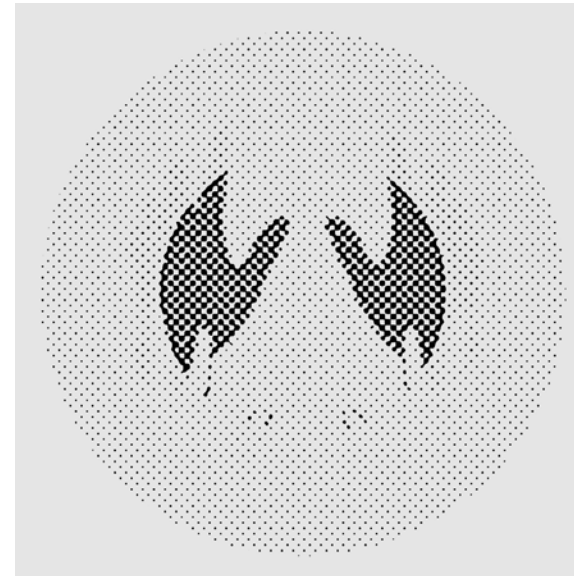
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"When the palms are lightly folded together, the space within is so small that a butterfly can barely flap its wings. Here, in this empty vessel, ready to hold something, is the origin of one more tool, a vessel."

What is Design, Kenya Hara.

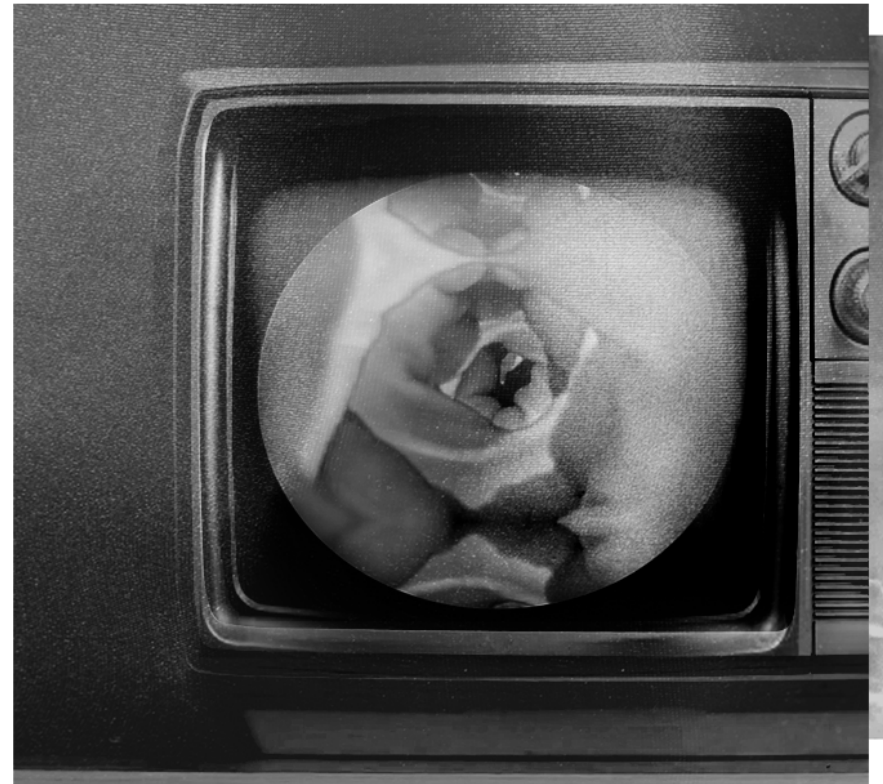
I isolate and manifest my hand to foreshadow an image that defies expectation and opens up a wonderment of disfigurement and fracturing. The childhood trauma can be revisited by connecting to fantasies and new ways to communicate. In a greater sense it offers a framework for understanding the outside world.

Hara, Kenya. *Designing Design*. 2nd ed. Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008, 412.



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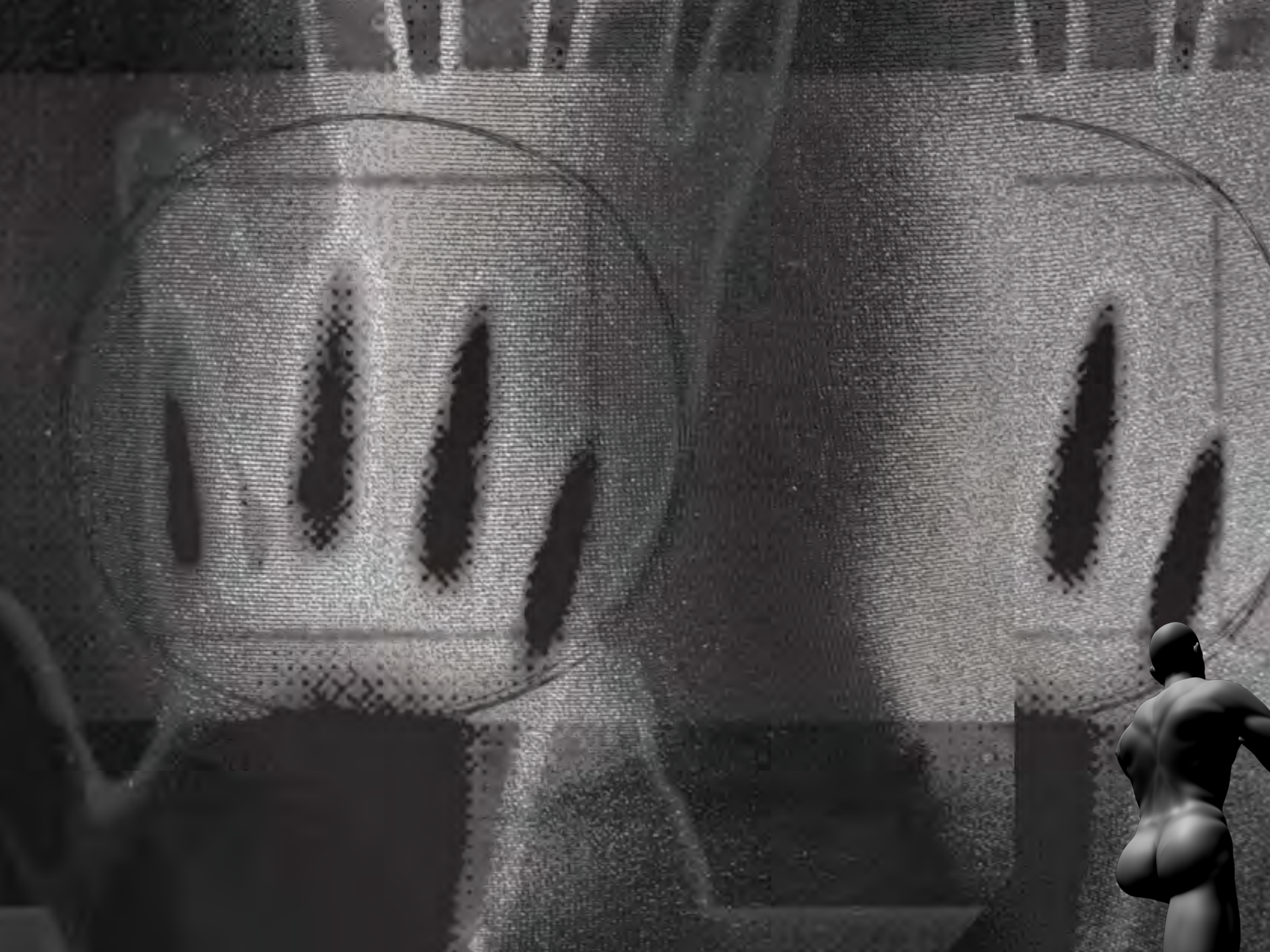


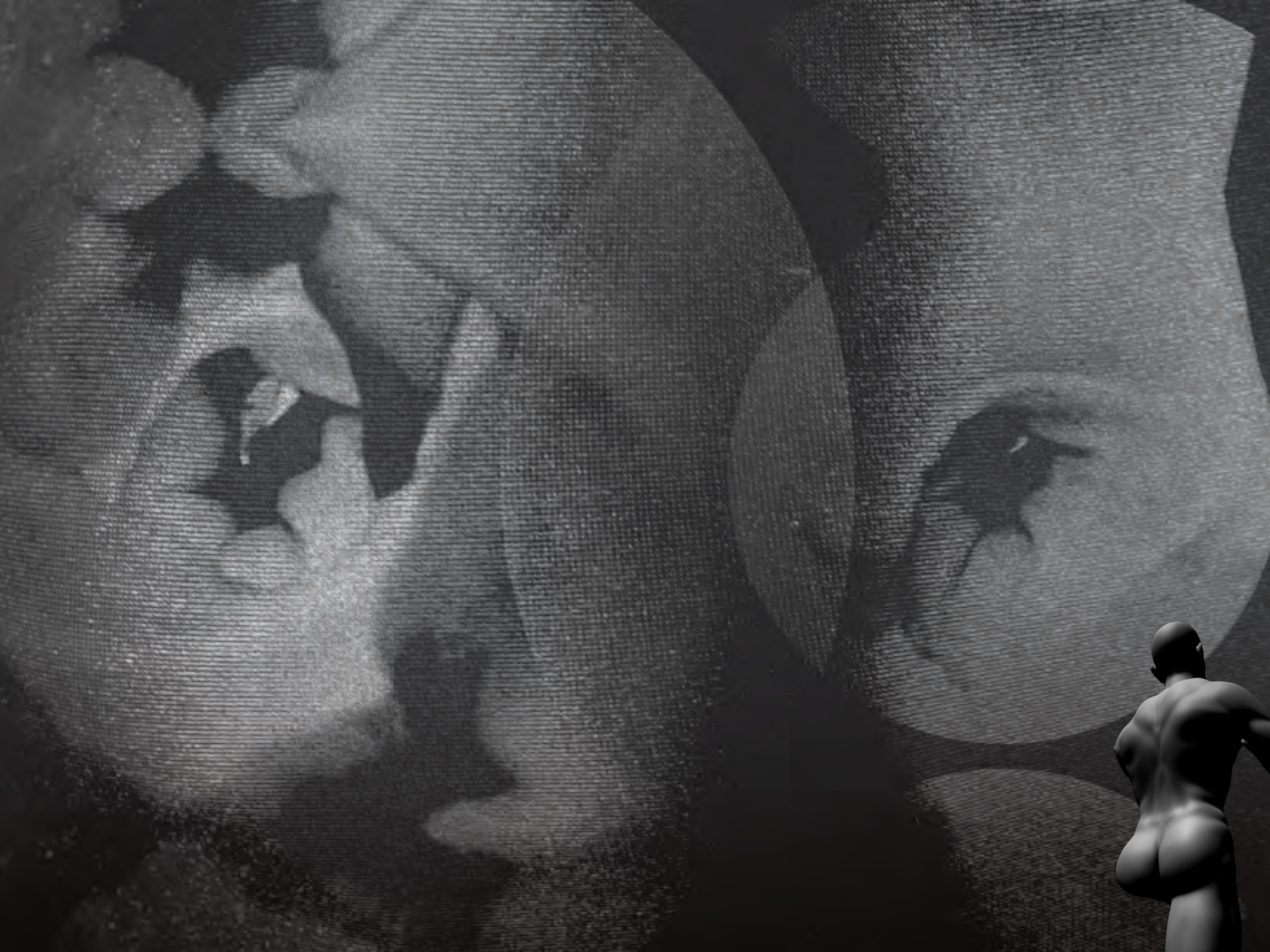


Hand I, 2017. Video installation: black and white, silent, loop;
00:00:36.











Hand II

Hand II is a collection of nonlinear memories, capturing moments of the past while creating new moments. Visualization of trauma is the process of excavating unconscious levels of memory into consciousness and translating them into tangible form. Converting trauma into images involves liberation of the hidden emotions while connecting disconnected and fragmented memories. The video starts with a scene where the viewer is confronted by a television, directly channeling into the content. "Point of view" is an important part of the narrative. I give the hand agency to represent personae, challenging the ontology of the subject. The hand assumes the role of investigator, moving from curiosity to connection, fragmentation to comparison. With the image of the hand, I am shifting the role of protagonist, crossing and blurring the boundaries from first-person to the third-person point of view.

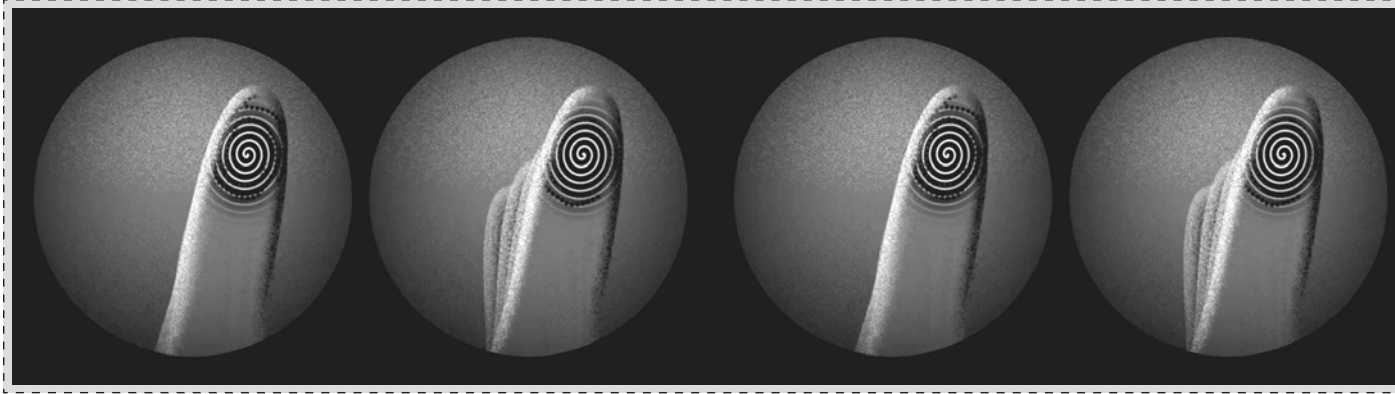
Specifically,

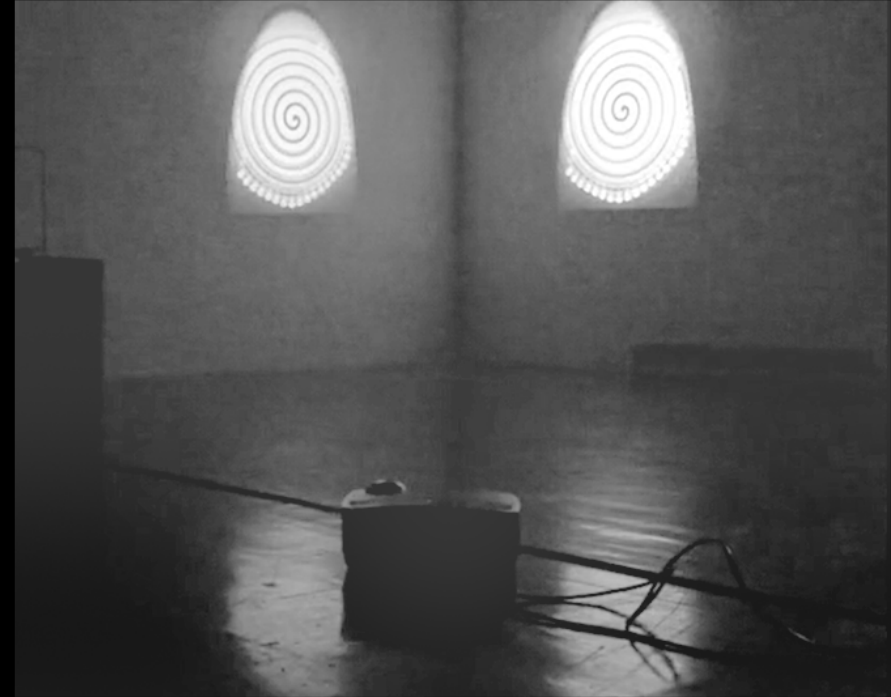
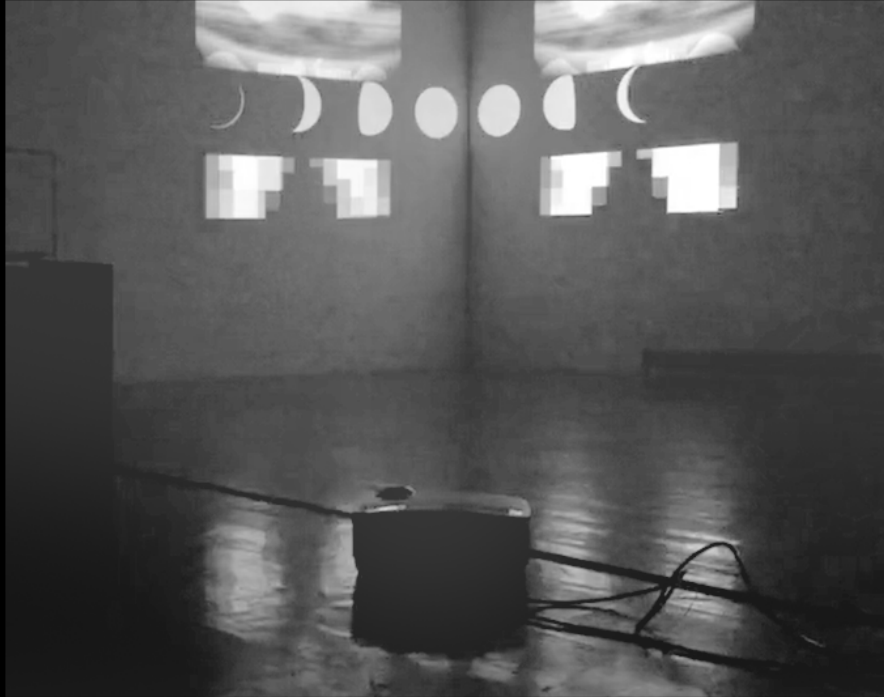
In the first-person view, I am telling
my own story.

In the second-person view, I am telling the
reader what to do, what to think about.

In the third-person view, the presentation
becomes highly subjective,
but synthesizes the whole event.

Through these shifts,
the tension points to destabilize, and disorient,
calling for examination. An illusion is created
by the psychological gap.





Installation view: *Hand II*, 2017 (single-channel, projection mapped on two walls, color, sound, loop; 00:01:48).



A Cold Read of Minjee Jeon's, *Hand II*

By Taylor S. Stewart

Hand II uses the familiar tension of this barrier as a point to destabilize. This destabilization setting, the audience up to be immersed in a dissociative environment. As soon as one feels settled into the dichotomy between themselves and the single television projected in front of them, two hands appear within the TV frame. They are positioned within the static.

They float without attachment to a body. They present their backsides to viewer, calling for examination. It leaves one to speculate who may be peering at the palms? Who is sitting on the other side? The in between of the fingers become active points of exploration. They propel from each other, as if being pried open. Whether the prying comes from an internal desire or external force, it demands that any object in relation be called into question. The moment one settles into their relation between the object projected in from of them, the narrative splits in half. All of a sudden, the viewer is destabilized.

Casted into the corner of the gallery, the familiar television is fixed left of the vertical axis and the other to the right. The image projected to the right of this vertical axis, introduces the silhouette of another voyeur. An anonymous figure, you sit beside and behind simultaneously. A figure that has breached a barrier that you can not pass. This figure quickly becomes a beacon, by breaking from the two color stylization presented throughout the video.

Slight shadows presented on the silhouette offer a point a realism.

The figure seems to navigate this space with ease, but seems vulnerable in juxtaposition to the density of what is flat. With help from probing whispers, this ethereal being brings into question a flat figure, silhouetted in a profile view.

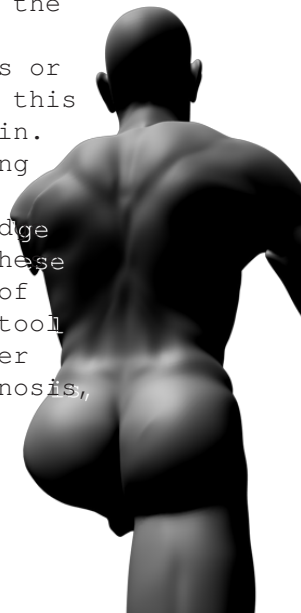




The figure remains static even when confronted directly by the beacon and audio. The audience, although outside of this interaction, are left to ask them selves, of the direction of the investigation and if they to are being called into question.

Hands seem to take on different personae, including that of investigator. There are many moments in which we are asked to the examine the hands, as they themselves examine. Delicately, they come into contact with objects in a range of motives from curiosity to connection. At the peak of the video, the hands are turned in on themselves. On the left is displayed a deduction of skin. The single hand become skeletal, referencing the growing pattern of a tree. On the left, viewers witness the hand meld into a crescent moon. It moves through the phases of the lunar cycle until whole. These two transitions, elude to the connection of identity to nature and time. This is a pivotal moment within the video. Past this point, what was once visual fragmentation begins to stabilize.

One of the markers of this stabilization are abstract spirals, that act as a symbol, pointing to hypnosis and a representation of fingerprints. The finger branded with the mark of the spiral steadily rocks from side to side, whether split by the axis or laying directly on its center. Through this process, time slowly becomes liner again. In the end, this symbol and accompanying motion, transition the viewer out of immersion. It is important to acknowledge the distinction in difference between these hands that hold control and the hands of the investigator. The hands used as a tool for stabilization become a new character introduced to the narrative. After hypnosis, one is anchored back into themselves.



Questions that sit with the viewer are as follows:
whose hands are exploring
and why do they gravitate towards certain objects?
Do the hands sense the presence of the viewer?
Is someone reaching in to
their own memories and editing them, through
repositioning and the shifting of perspective?
When we as viewers are rocked steadily out of this
immersion is the ethereal being,
we have come to empathize, still investigating?

Through, *Hand II*, Jeon uses iconography, audio,
and destabilization to create an environment that
seems void of the normal understandings of time and
narrative, as a linear happening.

The tense is lost. Unaware of past or present,
the narrative unfolds in what seems to be a loop
of fluxing content. All visualization pulling
from what is previously there and intertwining to
create repetition. The video seen through this lens
becomes a container full of evidence.

Data collected from a specific event, question or
trauma, to obsessively investigate.

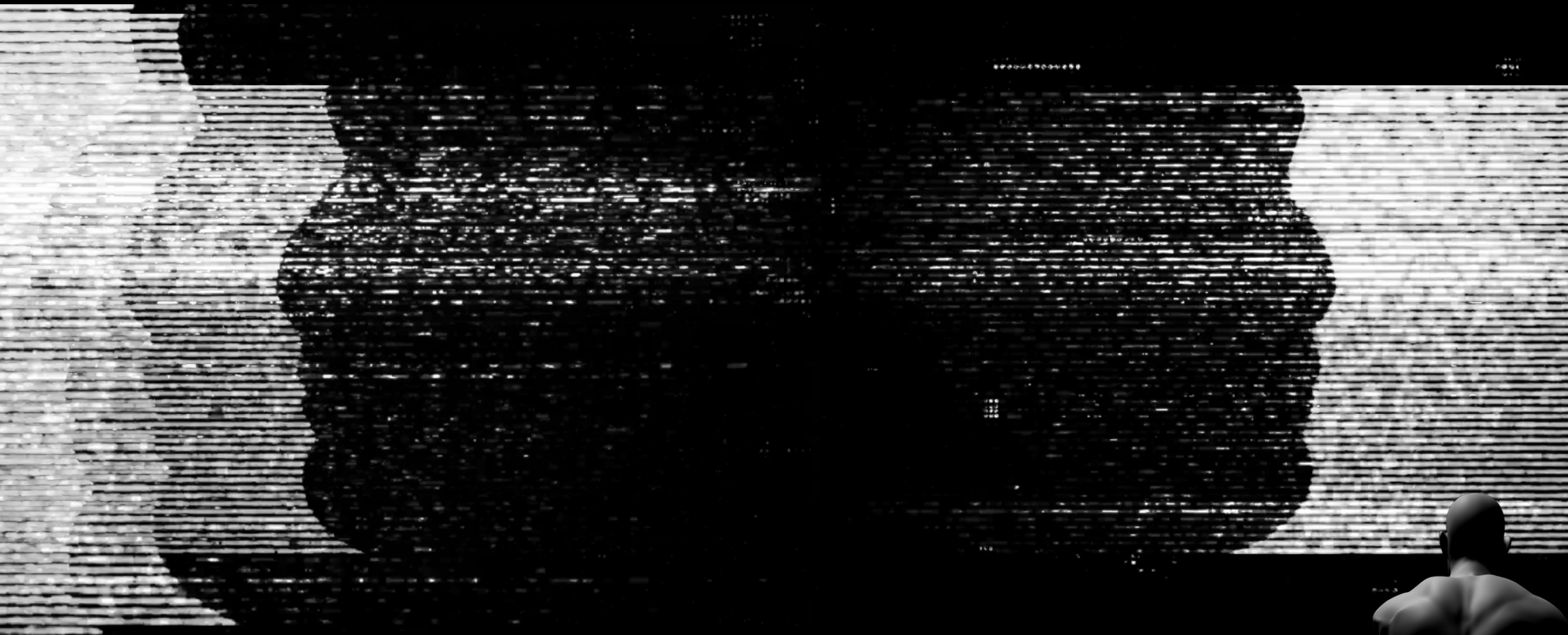
There is a feeling, that this loop would be playing
regardless of the viewers presence.

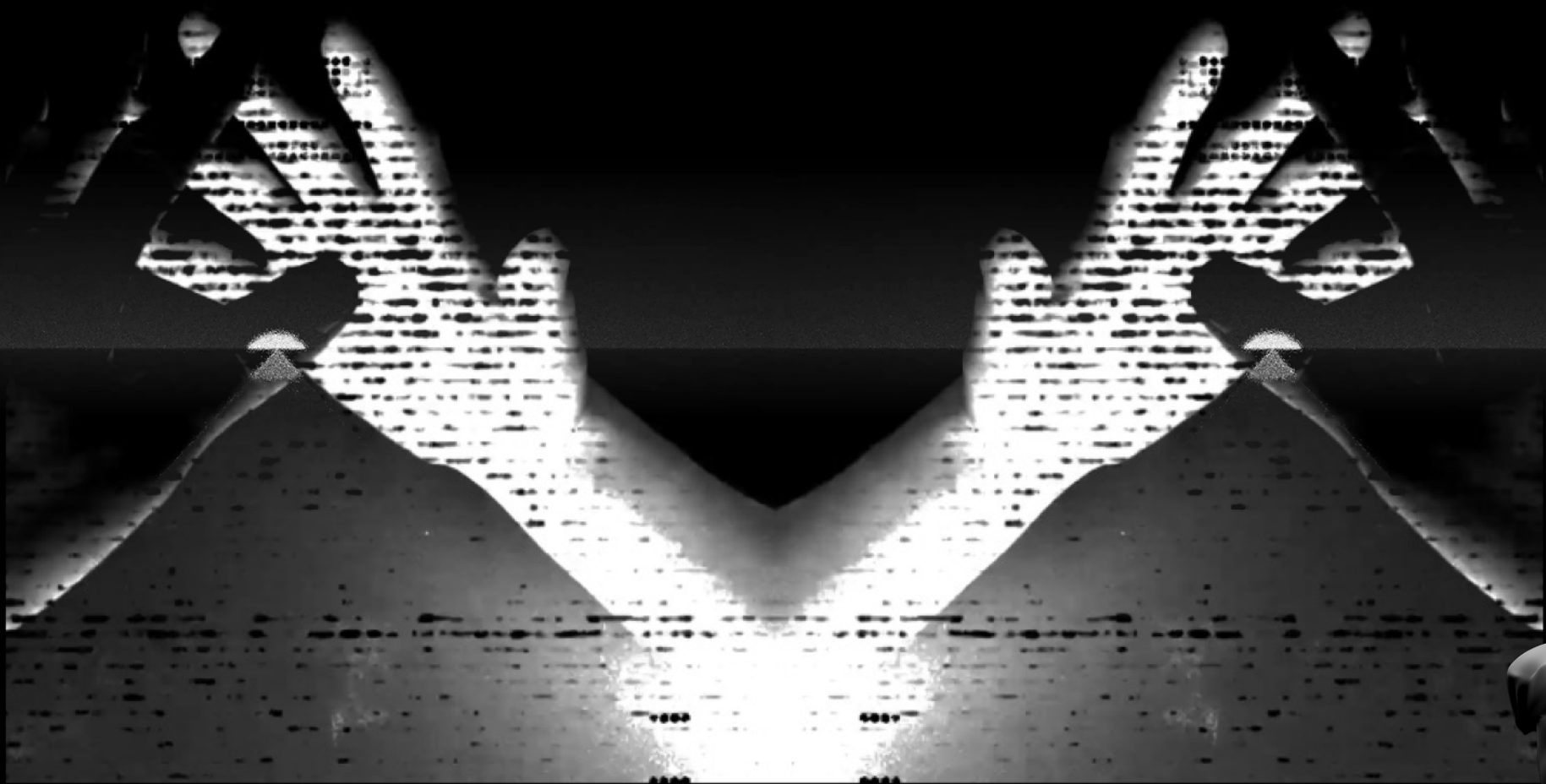
For just a moment, we are privy to enter a space
that exist outside of the frame of our interaction.

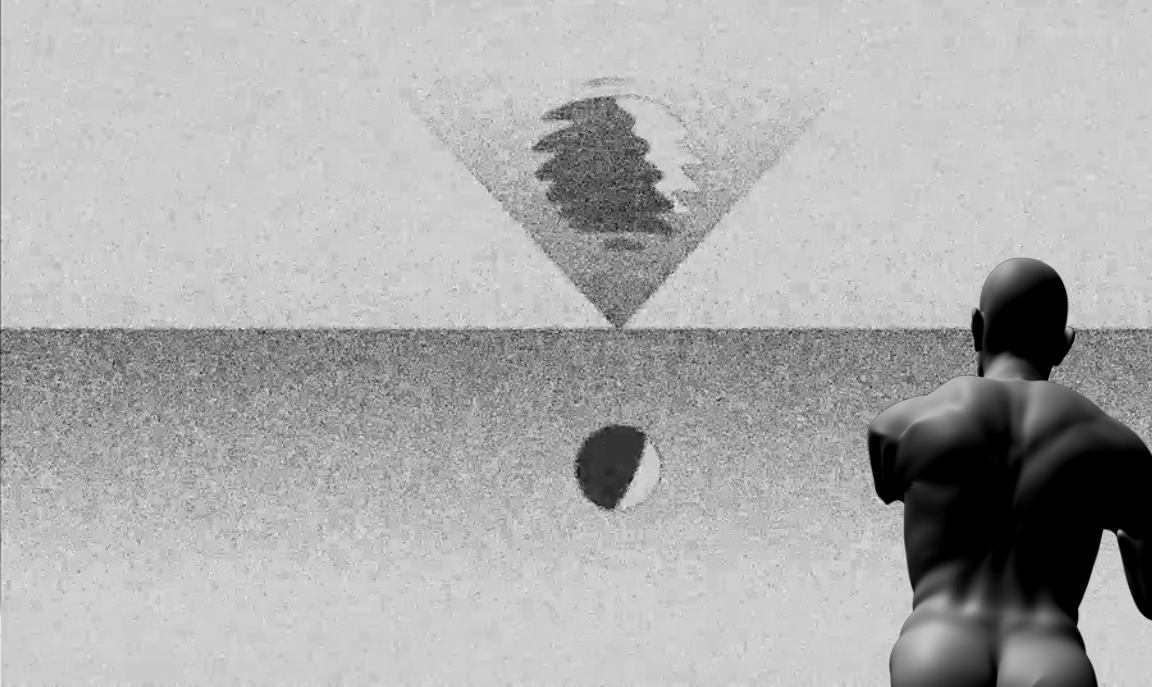
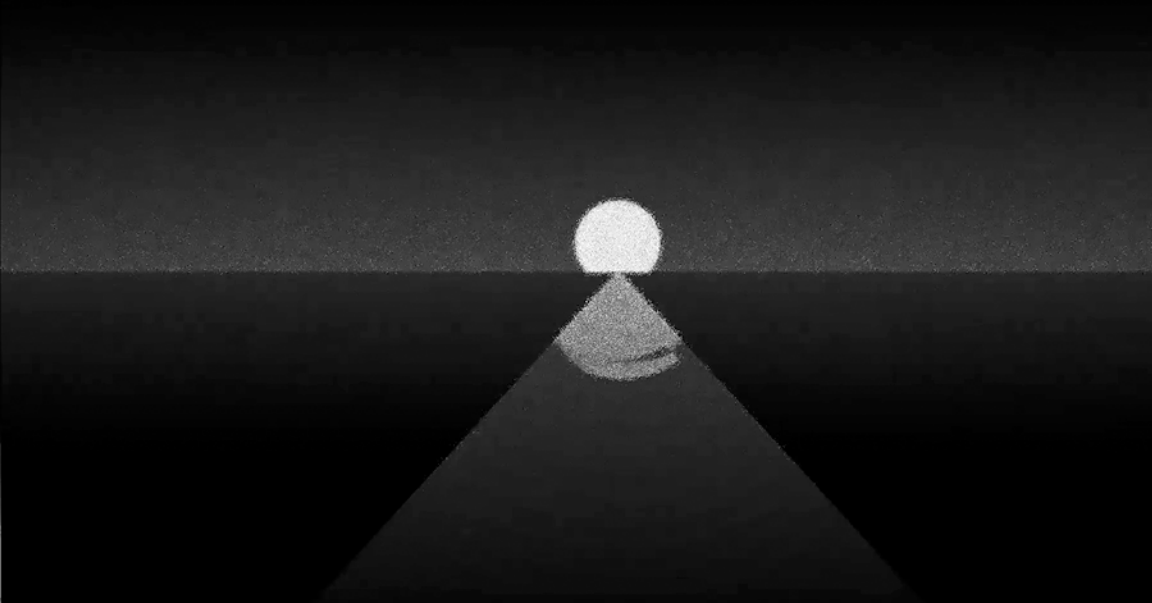


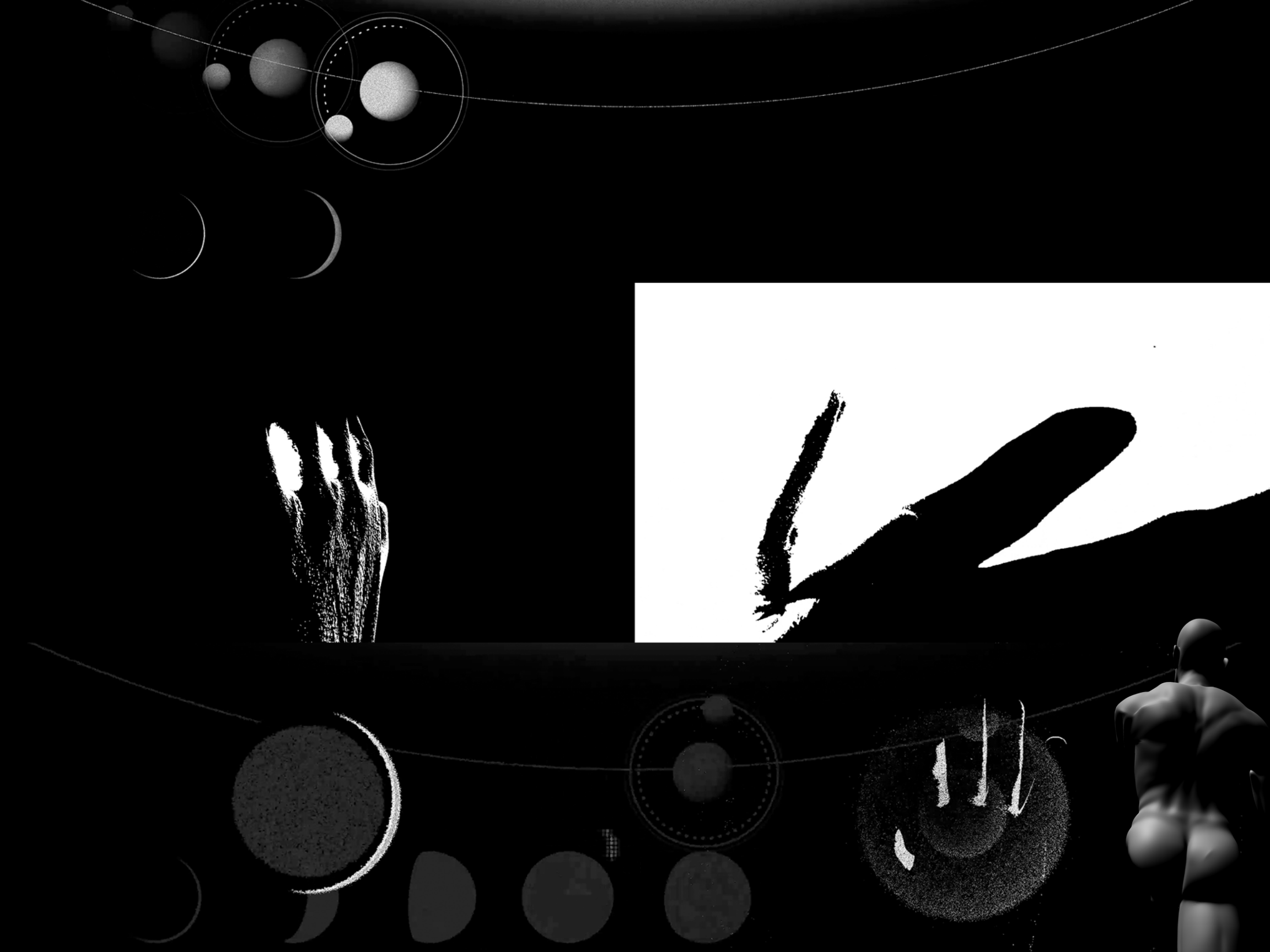




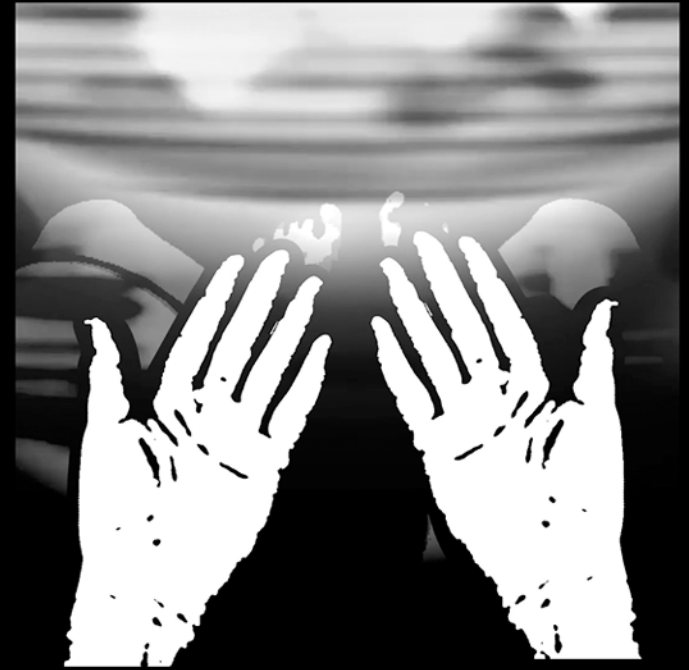




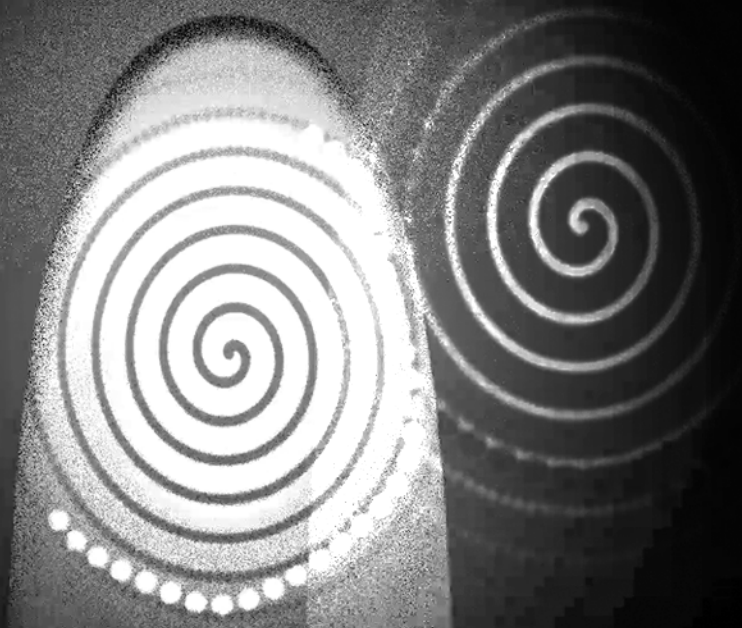


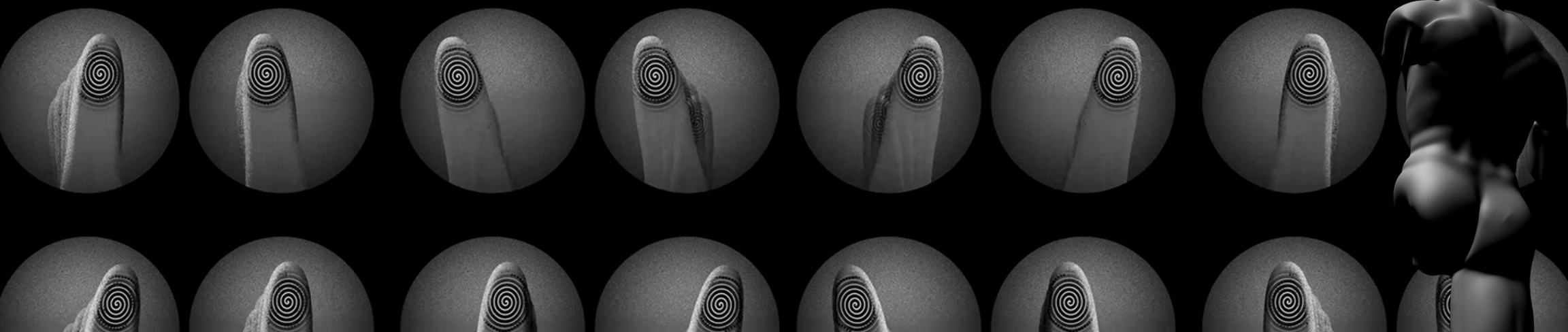
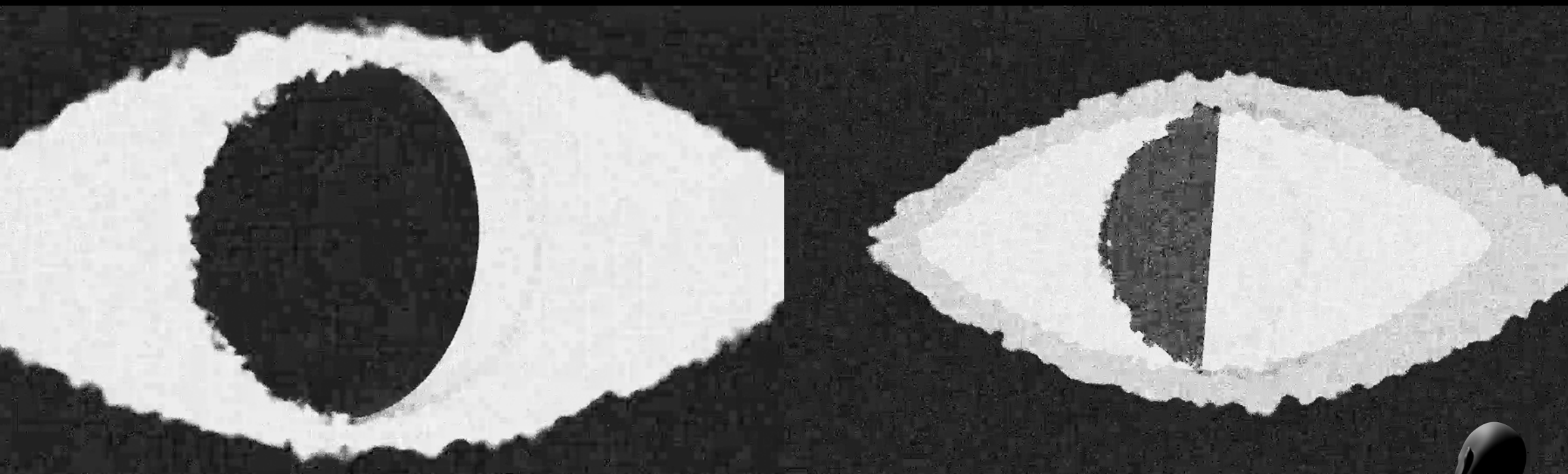
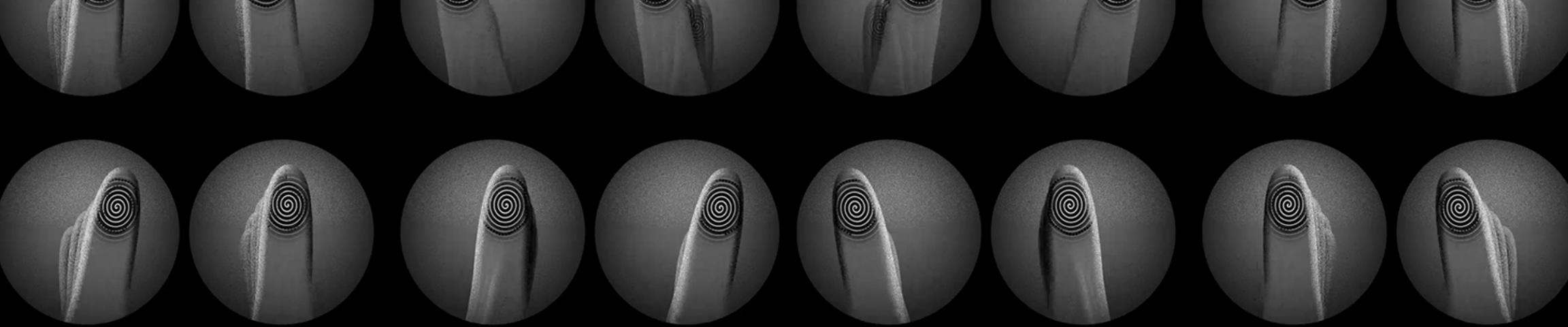




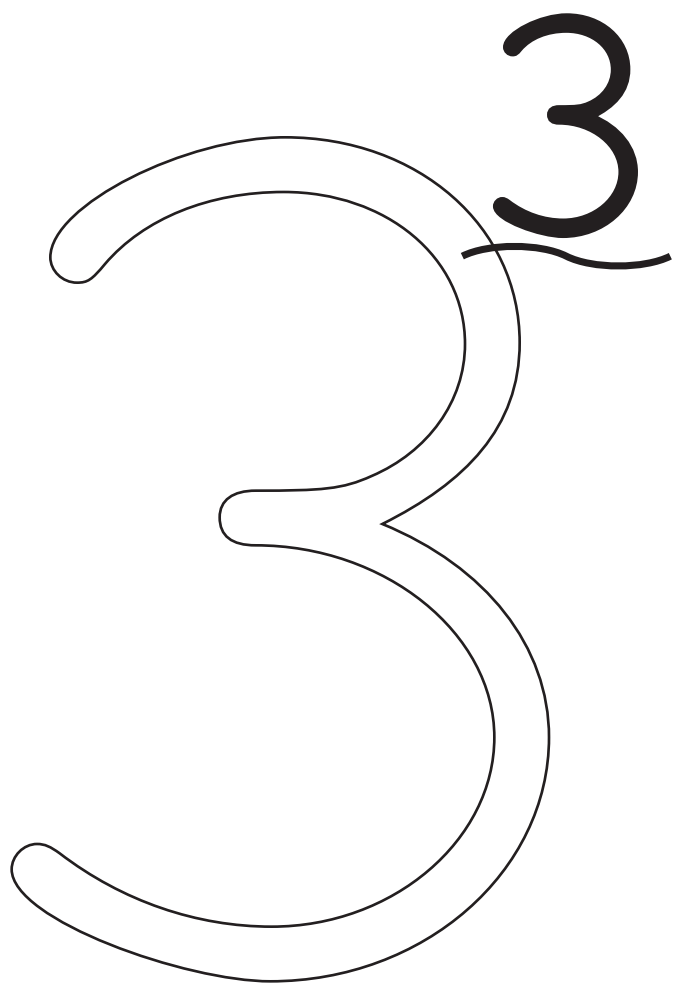












Process: Ultrasound

In this installation, I am inspired by Dunne and Raby's¹ methodology of using design as a form of critique to challenge people's underlying assumptions and ask questions rather than being a means to solve problems. In this speculative narrative and participatory space, I encourage participants to reconsider their perception of the body and its relation to time and space. The notion of speculation is further developed by exploring projections on multiple surfaces that deviate from conventional readings and challenge the safe and familiar, suggesting new meanings and presenting new ways to read. By introducing new ways to look at a human body, the immersive space will provide an experience that can reshape and liberate conventional modes and interpretations.

1. Dunne, Anthony, and Raby, Fiona.
Speculative Everything : Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming.
UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE. 2013.





The installation consists of a series of animations presenting different images of the body rendered in 3D, including images of Greek sculptures, human fetuses, and deformed body figures. Played on different screens side by side, the exhibition space invites comparison to review and examine.



The Greek sculpture animation draws on the tradition of Hellenic culture, representing a well-established period in art history and its hegemonic structure, wherein the Western consciousness it exemplifies "the earliest theory of art as a mimesis and imitation of reality."² Whether the works are seen as depictions of reality or evocations of awe and magnificence, the perfect ideal of beauty in Greek sculpture raises the question of the significance of art's mimesis of reality. Therefore, the visual articulation of Greek sculptures heightens the trope of idealism while creates disparity in less ideal figures. *Venus de Milo*, a sculpture symbolizing goddess of beauty while displaying the natural decay with the loss of both arms, performs a compelling reading where we override our visual perception and still connect with the idea of perfect beauty. Whether through depictions of natural decay or fragmenting the models, I am examining the idea of dominant beauty with a lossy and reduced amount of data and further objectifying the object as it rotates in space, similar to vehicles at an auto show.



2. Sontag, Susan. *Against interpretation, and other essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007, 3.

“The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.”

Hito Steyerl

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Even with the highest resolution, there can be multiple readings of an image depending on the viewer's interpretation. Our readings may diverge from one another but still, the building blocks of our framework always reveal and gravitate toward reality. Unlike high-resolution reproductions of artworks, a poor quality image is a degraded representation, limiting access, and legibility. There is devaluation not only in the display but also in value, especially in a class society where appearance is linked with rank and value.³ A lossy image delivered through a mechanical device reveals the stain and processing of digital language. In a visually (technologically) sophisticated culture, we can read both the cause and effect of the digital degradation as well as the origin and essence of the image. Understanding the relationship between the machine and the transmitted image by the machine can serve as a system that allows us to see beyond what is visible where we apply chance and possibility to our vision.

3. Steyerl, Hito. "In Defense of the Poor Image." In *Defense of the Poor Image* - Journal #10 November 2009 - E-flux. Accessed March 01, 2018. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.



The animation of an ultrasound scan and the image of fetus probe the relationship of the mechanical image and our reading.

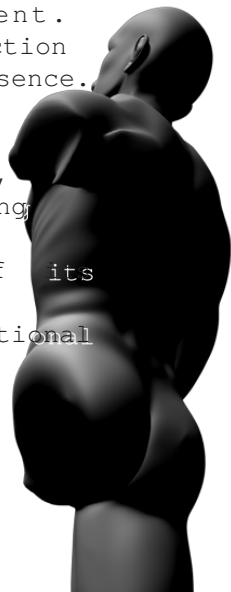


Viewing an immature fetus through low-resolution ultrasound images gives impetus to focus on the essence (a human being) over the image itself, where we can reflect and apply in the digital age a modern way of seeing. Despite the ultrasound image's fall-off in shape and quality, we tolerate it by acknowledging that the medium makes it possible to easily observe the internal system of the body, something that cannot be seen with the naked eye. This happens in spite of the sonogram's monochromatic, digitally-filtered display.

The undeveloped human form and the poor quality of the image reduce the legibility of the image. We practice and learn to read images as a matter of fact, professionals like gynecologists assist us in distinguishing and reading the figure. We pay attention to the essence regardless of digital intervention. Aware of mediation, therefore, we are less disturbed by a system where the machine generates a poor rendering of the image.

The fetus is both a form and message of life in both a social and biological context, arousing emotion and wonderment. Starting from a simple cellular organism, a similar embryonic form, shared by all humans enables our perception and understanding of the image. The not-yet-fully-formed biomorphic figure comprises growth and potential that we assume and expect will continue towards development. Thus, the emotional experience of viewing the figure is amplified through reduction of form, alluding to a hidden possibility. Although the image is quite alien to what we will become we are cognitively aware of its impending evolution and withdraw hasty judgments of its form and appearance. In seeing the abstracted and underdeveloped form, our system of interpretation overrides our vision and connects with empathy and imagination, stimulating curiosity and wonderment. After all, the key to abstraction is fundamentally an inquiry of essence.

Studying the effect and its meaning between ultrasound scan and the image of the fetus, I created a series of fetus animations using 3D models from normal to abnormal figures. Whether it displays a progression of its development or it remains the same figure I intend to question our emotional experience in observing fetal images.



Another animation presents fragmented and disfigured 3D figures of a grown man. However distorted or abstracted through the filters, do we apply to this figure the same value system we use in reading the ultrasound?

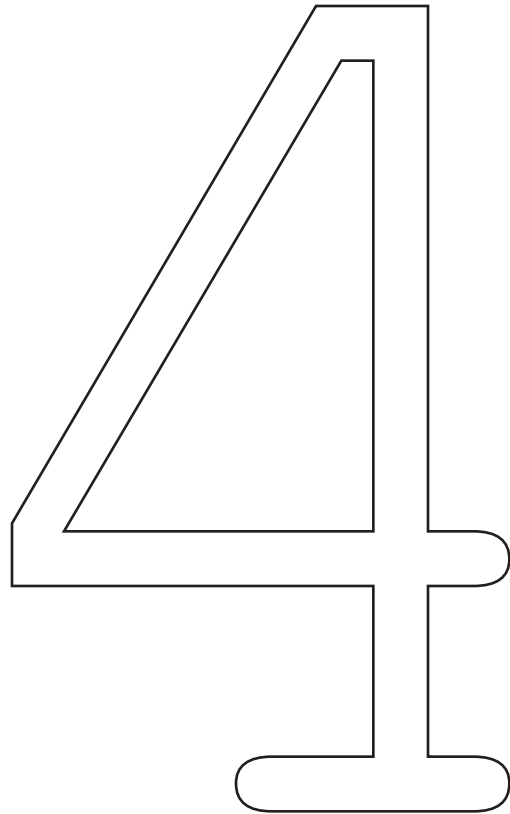
“Abstraction is in equal measures theatrical and performative, absorptive and ideal.”

Charles Bernstein

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The concept of the poor image leads to a framework for the merging of biology and technology and simulation as re-creation. The fetus figure dismantles the logic of beauty; the uncertainty of the form and image yield to emotional experiences such as bliss and sublimity. The metamorphosis of the image is rather spontaneous and goes beyond aesthetic bounds. When we view ourselves as fully grown forms that have no mediation, we are more likely to be judgemental and use different kinds of references to understand each other.





*Exhibition:
Ultrasound*

"Installation Art has brought a new dynamic where narration moves to being spatial and three-dimensional, willing to activate the viewer within it. Installation has thus answered a psycho-social question : giving the viewer an active role to play in the piece in which he becomes one of its parameters."

Lina Laraki

"ESSAY I." Lina Laraki.
Accessed February 10, 2018. <http://linalaraki.com/texts>.



In the realm of obstetrics the prenatal sonogram is used to identify potential problems with the emerging fetus. Examining the phenomenology of ultrasound, I infuse this fundamental concept to my thesis exhibition, *Ultrasound*. The use of this title conveys the potential of the participatory installation site to identify images, compare and diagnose existing conditions, and "to explore ideas about humanness, alterity, and alternative imaginaries in relation to new forms of representation".¹ The structure consists of three panels of screens connected by a central axis, allowing each to remain erect.

The images are presented in animated loops foregrounding human bodies, crossing boundaries, and building relations with other panels.

158 The separate panels both activate and critique dichotomous ways of thinking while the mechanism of comparison not only contrasts the binary representations, but also oscillates within and between each to foster uncanny relations.

The structure and images connect surrealistic ideas concerning time and complex narratives while questioning established boundaries, and locating alternatives. By introducing new ways to look at the human body, the immersive space provides a heterogeneous experience that can reshape and liberate conventional modes and meanings of what it is to be "normal."

1. Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, 33.

"Bodies are sites in which social constructions of differences are mapped onto human beings. Subjecting the body to systemic regimes – such as government regulation – is a method of ensuring that bodies will behave in socially and politically accepted manners.

The body is placed in hierarchized (false) dichotomies, for example, masculine/feminine; mind/body; able-bodied/ disabled; fat/skinny;... and young/old."

Nadia Brown & Sarah Allen Gershon.

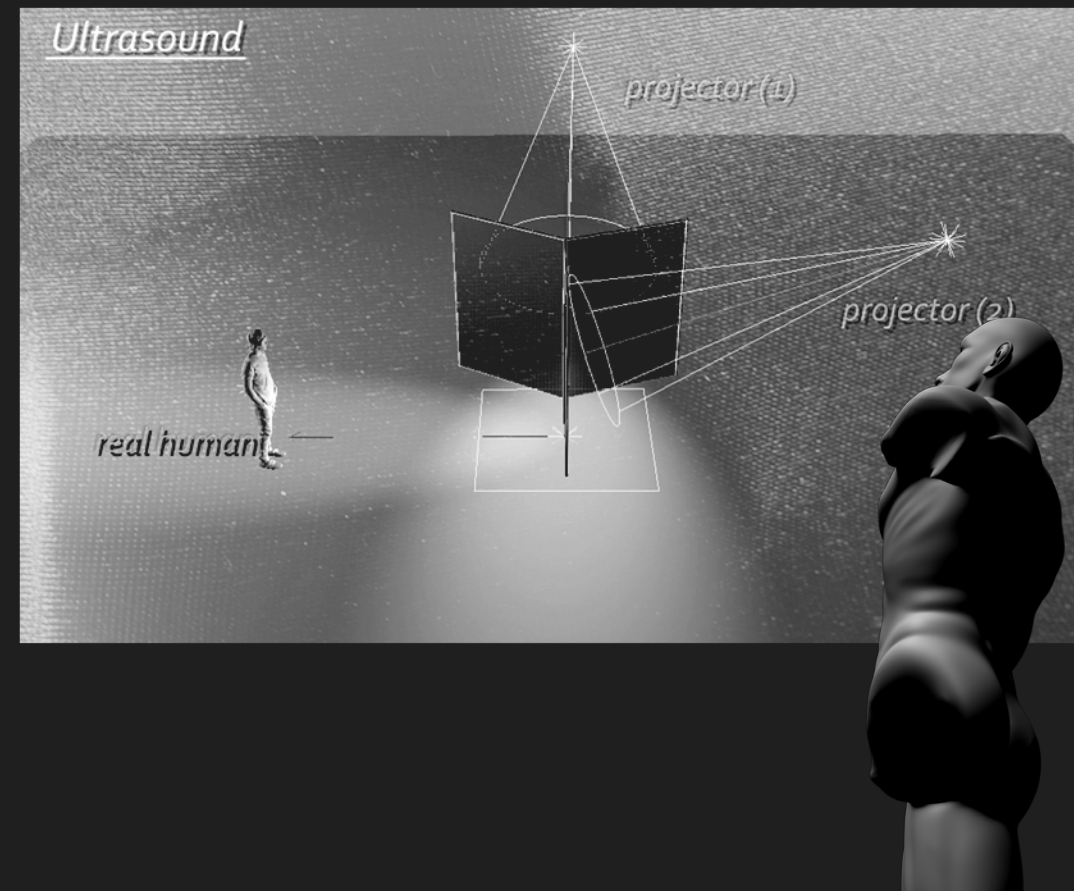
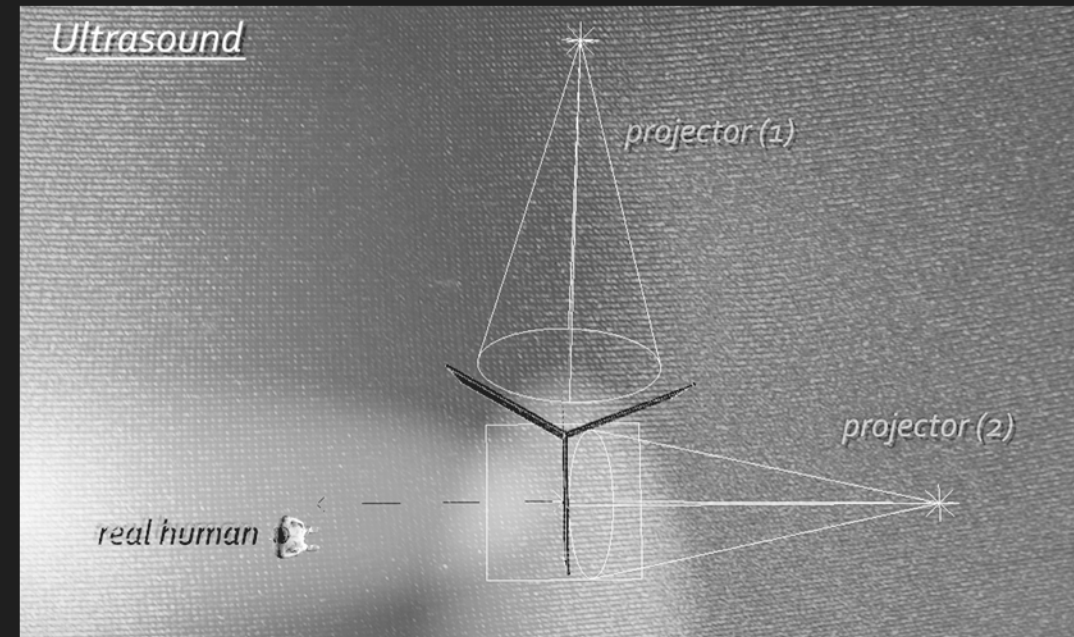


While two of the panels project my series of animations, the third panel projects a live-feed of the audience in abstracted and filtered image. Through Microsoft Kinect, I built an interface that captures video from a webcam and generates unique real-time output. This demonstrates how technological filters profoundly affect our view of ourselves and our relationship to others. The use of multiple screens juxtaposed with the manipulated reflection of the viewer is used to:

- (a) acknowledge the viewer's essential role in the work;
- (b) define the viewer's relationship in the space and recalibrate their experience; and
- (c) compare the corporeal body with the connotation of normalcy and embrace the ideas of tangible presence that are random and beyond control.

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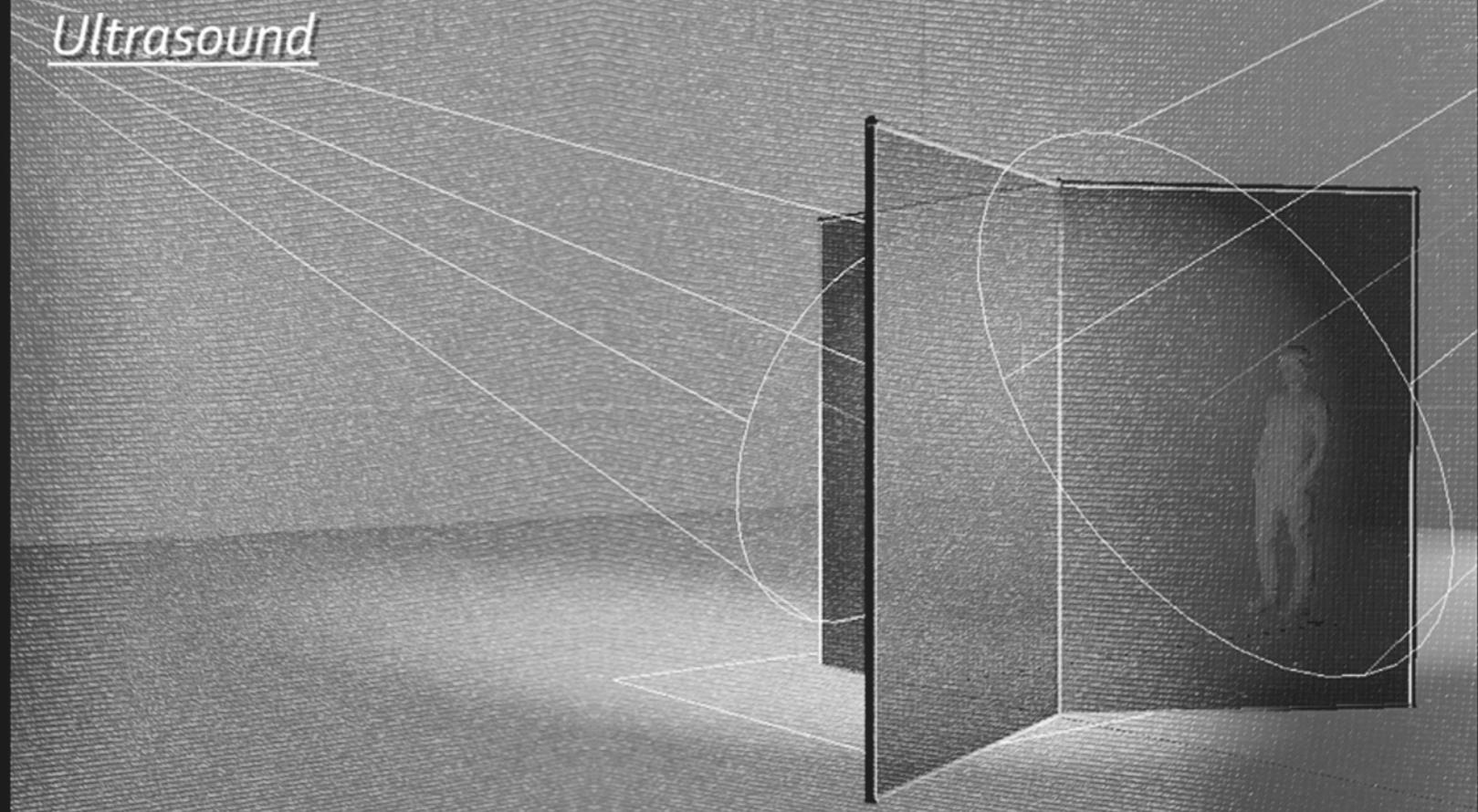
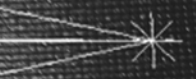
The live-feed output simulates the audience similar to an ultrasound scan, a monochromatic and low resolution image. Parallel to the 3D animations, the output constantly rotates a scanned image, creating a dissonance of the viewer's reflected image and allowing for an other-body experience. The audience becomes both an actor and a spectator, and is encouraged to observe, compare and be engaged beyond mere fixation.



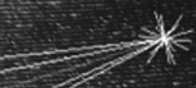
Ultrasound Installation prototype.

Ultrasound

projector (2)



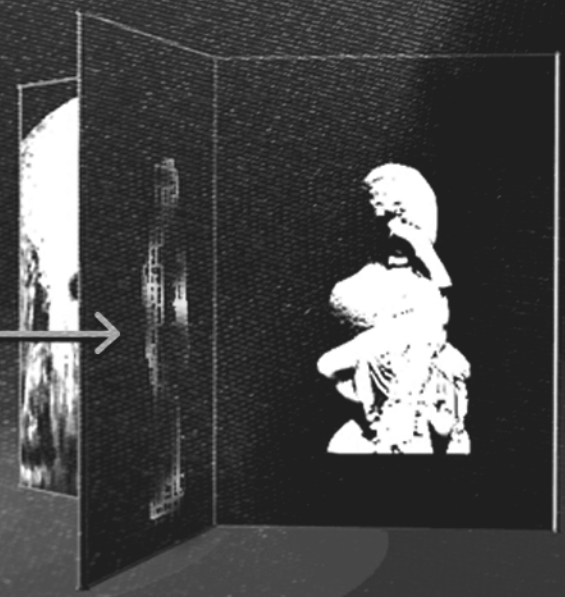
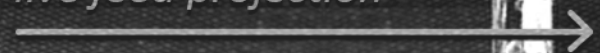
projector (2)



real human



live feed projection





Ultrasound, 2018. Interactive installation. Installation view, projection mapped, color, sound, loop; 00:16:01.



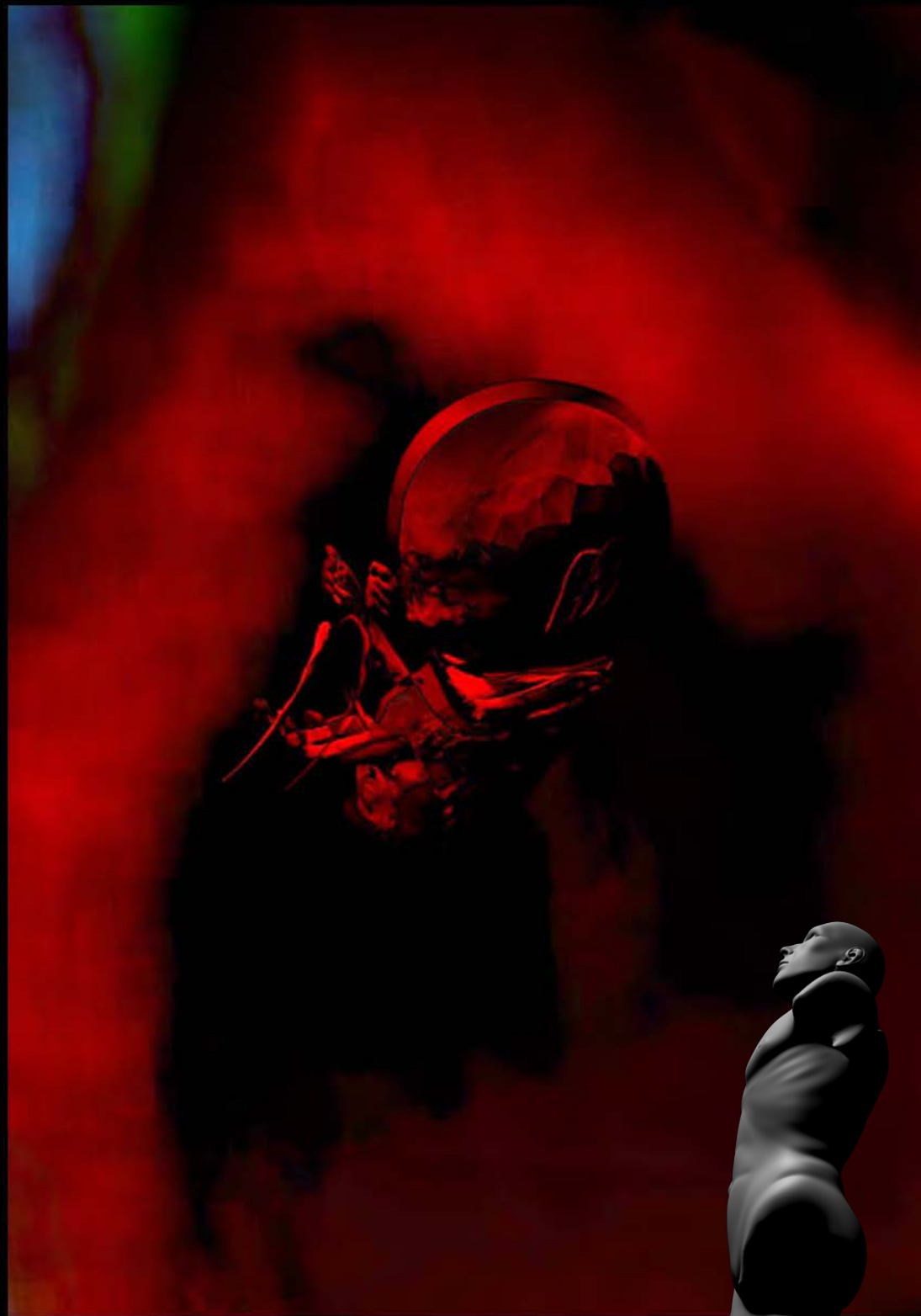
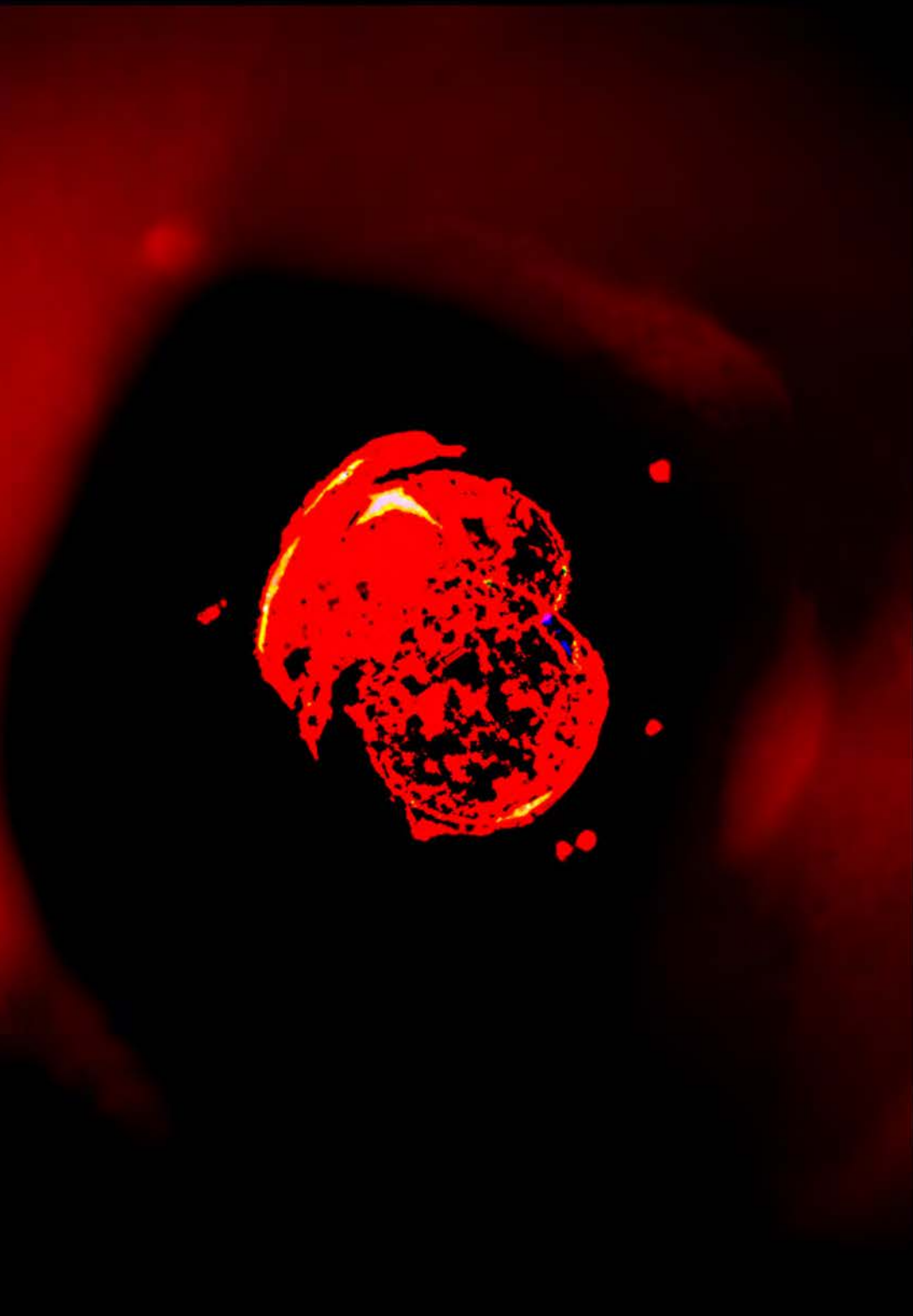




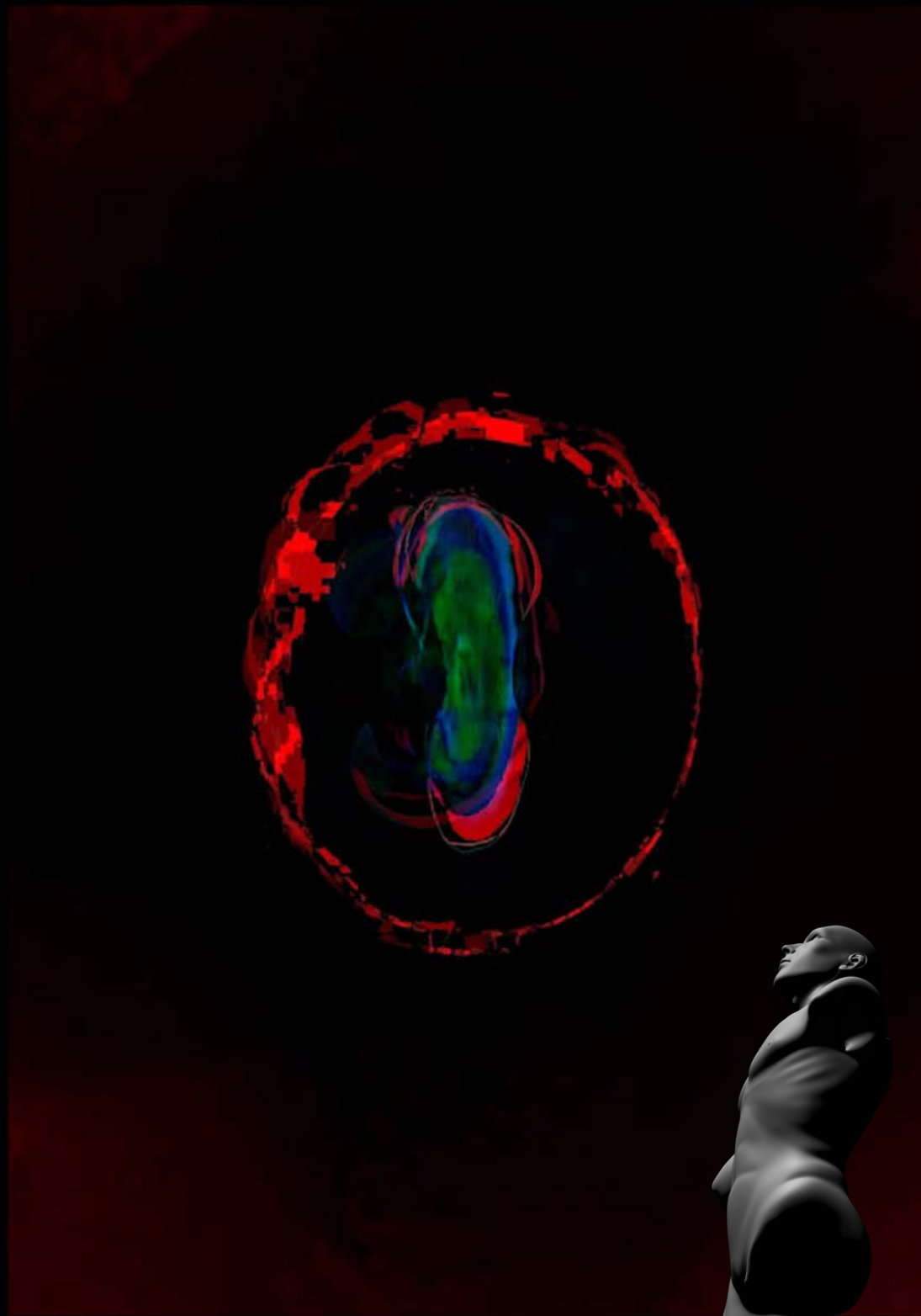
















The disruption in the image implies the ever-present influence of media, technology, and the representation of the spectacle. The input of abstraction presents a nonlinear output and sequence. The rupture and displacement in images, space and time makes the flaws and the failure of the forms visible, and provide the critical distance that diverts conventional reads. The continuous motion towards development and regression instill unsettling emotions while at the same time building stability through the looping of the animations.

"Through the use of manifestoes, a range of political tactics, and new technologies of representation, radical utopians continue to search for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another."

Judith Jack Halberstam



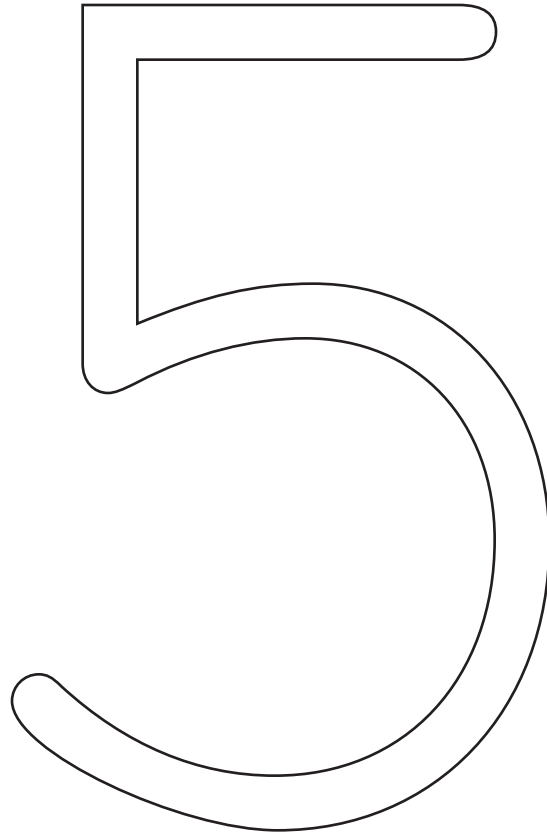


Freud's theory of the uncanny describes an uneasy repression of, or "strangeness" ascribed to, a familiar form or idea.² In my piece the familiarity of various human tropes provides a recognizable access point that vacillates between differences and similarity. By making a device that projects uncanny digital motion images, I ask the audience to consider how the infusion of the digital environment and its products alter our relationship and perception of ourselves and others. It is both a concept and a way of seeing and thinking about humanness and the marginalized conditions of our culture that deviate from its hegemonic structure. The work demands us to review and re-view the habitual patterns of our viewpoints. Uncanny bodies and images are a quest for new bodily forms as well as "forc[ing] upon the viewer a darker reality about the human and about representation in general."³ Did uncanniness provoke possible realities outside of our assumptions of normality or did it simply reinforce the established structure that leads to critique? What are we missing when we retreat from the uncanny and follow our assumed readings?

1681



2. Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." 1919.
3. Halberstam, 178.



Evaluation

By contextualizing my perspectives and values through work, the making process has led me to learn about myself; How can I use design to talk about humanity,
to be considerate to others, to practice and liberate cultural conventional forms and meanings of "normal" bodies, to embrace and ultimately celebrate differences?



Throughout this process, initial questions lead to new ones:

Is it about trauma?

Revisiting my personal trauma and its disclosure has been an uneasy process. I originally defined trauma as coming from feeling different and being excluded. Although the work exists in the terrain of trauma, it was no longer directly about trauma but the effort to understand the causes. Thus, instead of my original goal of diffusing tension around binary differences and trauma, I changed direction to create tension to form a critique of mechanisms of comparison. I chose images that represent various ways of seeing perfection and imperfection. By setting these images up for comparison, I am trying to evoke the idea of "essence" underneath the form.

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How do I seek new meanings?

Early in the process I was equating new forms with new meanings. I was still left without answering what new meaning meant. This led me to the use of filters and technology to generate new forms and amplify the message and our perception. I was abstracting and fragmenting conventional and fixed points of view to generate new interpretations of familiar forms or tropes. These images were projected in the exhibition space. I am trying to connect the audience to these fragmented forms to have them see them in a different way and relate to them personally. By introducing the live feed of the audience in the space and fragmenting these images, I am creating new meaning for the audience so that the abstracted projections are no longer strange.

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What is the role of creating filters?

In the platforms of the digital age and their related products, our body is reviewed and constantly interpreted. When cultural norms give way to uniformity, the mechanism of abstraction distances individuals from seeing themselves as different and outside the norm, even abnormal. Abstraction in the sense of reducing differences also removes the uniqueness of human forms. However, through the filter that removes details and generates a poor image, the image is both strange and familiar. It shifts the participant's perception of self, from the first person to a position outside of the corporeal which leads to abstraction of self. Through the interaction of technology, a new system of communication encourages active modes of participation that appeal to larger themes of social, political, and human conditions.

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Is difference bad? Does my work answer the question?

No, it is beyond our control. What can we do besides attempting to understand the differences? The political realm of differences creates judgment and exclusion. So with my work, I am raising the issue of power imbalances through comparison and judgement by addressing the broader issues of differences and focusing less on the experiences of trauma. Breaking down comparison refers to how we see ourselves; how we connect to our perception. The images I chose to work with brought up various presumptions about the complex relationship between our mass culture and current society. Stigmas and conventions are tightly linked with culture. I stress the importance of new meaning as an inquiry to see comparison in a different way and address power imbalances.

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Design is not merely a vehicle for expression or a tool to fix sociological problems but a medium to transmit ideas that shape understanding and work towards coexistence. My work starts with a question but will continue to question, not to fully resolve but to interrogate our expectations and behaviors.

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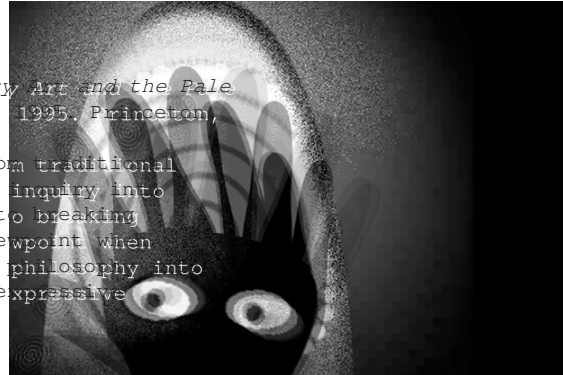
Bibliography

Best, Steven, and Kellner, Douglas. *The Postmodern Turn. Critical Perspectives* (New York, N.Y.). New York: Guilford Press, 1997.

Delineating Debord's analysis of the spectacle, this book revisits the term to examine new stages of postmodern paradigm. The theory of "the interactive spectacle" as a new form of seduction and domination offers a profound vision in my work to consider the relationship between the device, the message, and the spectator.

Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art : Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts ; 1995. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Danto examines the changes in art theory from traditional perspective conjoined with art history. The inquiry into the definition and the purpose of art leads to breaking the biases of aestheticism. I adopt this viewpoint when building the content of my work, collapsing philosophy into an object, and expanding the definition and expressive possibility of art and design.



Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Book, 1994. This is a treatise on modern human condition which finds itself saturated with the image in consumer culture. The conception of the "spectacle" is examined in the forms of mass media, encouraging us to focus on the appearance that alters our relationship to reality. My acknowledgment and aspiration for creating technological apparatus are developed from Debord's observation of human interaction with the "contemplation of the spectacle."

Dudai, Rina. "Trauma in Translation: Crossing the Boundaries between Psychoanalysis and Film." *Projections* 8, no. 1 (2014). doi:10.3167/proj.2014.080104.

This article reviews representations of traumatic memory within the context of psychological and poetic domains, especially cinematic languages. It examines the opportunity in the process of translating and awakening unconscious traumatic memories into images.

Dunne, Anthony, and Raby, Fiona. *Speculative Everything : Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE. 2013.

My work is practiced through the methodology presented in this book which outlines theoretical perspectives used in design as a form of critique to challenge people's underlying assumptions and ask questions rather than being a means to solve problems.

Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

This book retheorizes failure and its relationship to the process of knowledge production and being in the world. It offers different archives of "failure"—how it is represented in different forms of representation. I practice Halberstam's reframing of failure in my work to question established boundaries and introduce new ways to look at the human body.

Jorgensen, Darren. "Uses of the Dialectical Image: Adorno, Surrealism, Breton, Benjamin." *Continuum* 28, no. 6 (2014): 1-9.

This article presents theory and application of surrealism and dialectical image as a means of unlocking illogical dimensions of production and as a medium to critique capitalism. From these visions and studies, I applied the concepts to my image making process.

Sontag, Susan. *Against interpretation, and other essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

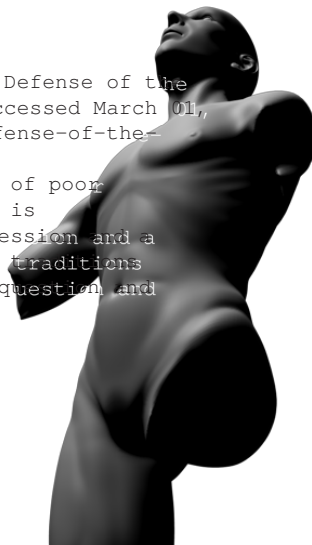
Sontag rebukes interpreting art in the cradle of aesthetics and traces the origin of this idea back to the earliest theory of art. I refer to her essay to challenge our assumptions of aesthetics.

Rodgers, Franko, Donovan, Cousineau, Yates, MCGowan, Cook, and Lowy. "Body Image in Emerging Adults: The Protective Role of Self-compassion." *Body Image* 22 (2017): 148-55.

Kirkwood's work explores the human body as subject matter to deal with issues of the media, and a focus on aesthetic appreciation of the human form. Sharing similar interests with my work, his work and writing inspired me by suggesting ways to approach the issues with an artistic aspect.

Steyerl, Hito. "In Defense of the Poor Image." In *In Defense of the Poor Image - Journal #10 November 2009 - E-flux*. Accessed March 01, 2018. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.

In this essay, Steyerl traces the "economy of poor images," how their usage has developed and is perpetuated. I take this as a form of expression and a means for critically questioning existing traditions and structures of visual language, and to question and understand our contemporary experience.



Ultrasound—Re:viewing Bodies

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