2012

Through Process

Mitchell Goldstein
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Graphic Design Commons

Downloaded from

http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/2791

THROUGH PROCESS

MITCH GOLDSTEIN

THROUGH PROCESS

MITCH GOLDSTEIN

CONTENTS

PREFACE

WHY I WAS @ANGRYPAULRAND

Over three months in the Summer of 2010, in addition to my normal Twitter account @mgoldst, I had a Twitter account by the name of @AngryPaulRand. Like every designer I have ever met, I had some things I had always wanted to say, and using Paul Rand as a foil seemed OK to me—he was dead, after all, and had a reputation as a brilliant but tough personality. It also seemed like a fun thing to do while waiting for Graduate School to start. I created the account, tossed out a few funny, pointed tweets, and two months later I had almost 15,000 followers. 15,000 followers on Twitter put this account in the 99.87% percentile in terms of Twitter infamy. Many tweets were retweeted hundreds of times, and many, many designers seemed to be amused by the account overall. It was blogged, commented about, and generally well-known amongst design circles. On September 13th I closed the account permanently —more on that in a bit. I have archived all of the tweets from the account on the next four pages.

Being Angry Paul Rand was a lot of fun. The account started out as a combination of an irritable, disappointed "Mad Men" era Paul Rand with some George Lois and little Paul Sahre thrown in for good measure. A few weeks in, Angry Paul Rand had matured; it was 90% me with 10% historical context for purposes of humor and obfuscation. To me, Angry Paul Rand was a critique on design—or more accurately, a critique on designers and the profession itself. I have worked in a number of capacities as a designer, a design educator, and a design student since the late 90's and I have amassed quite a few opinions.

Designers are missing some things that we should be thinking about, and Angry Paul Rand was ready to point them out. Not individually, but as a whole, there is a lack of pride in what we do. I do not mean arrogance—there is way, way too much arrogance in design—but I mean pride. We devalue ourselves. We allow ourselves to be manipulated by clients. We do not present ourselves as the experts in our field. We have a hard time explaining, even to ourselves, what we do. I see so much design that ignores craft—just because we work digitally, does not mean we can ignore the craft of making, the integrity of the work itself, the manifestation of our ideas. Most of us take ourselves far too seriously. The best design I have seen is fun, not necessarily the deliverable itself, but the process. A designer should enjoy what they do. Not every single second, but at least most of it. Even if it is hard, it should be "the pleasant struggle" as Rob Carter likes to say. It is a wonderful thing to be creative for a living, to get to think and make every day.

I am not suggesting that being a designer should be all play and no work, but I do think we need to seriously consider what it is we are practicing—you should not be miserable in what you do for a living, especially as someone who is paid to be creative and poetic. There are many kinds of design to be had, and many kinds of designers to do it. As designers we need to reflect on what it is we are doing. What concerns me are designers who do not have a stance on design: designers who are not authentic in what they are doing, who they are, how they work, and what they work on. Design should not be about regurgitating trends, having a cool studio, or being an AIGA member. Design should be about how the designer relates to the world around them, and how they translate that into interesting stuff.

All of that sounds well and good. The problem is I am as guilty of doing all the bad stuff as almost everyone is—maybe even more guilty since I am the one saying all these things. Sometimes I think I am hitting the mark, but most of the time I struggle just like everyone else. Angry Paul Rand gave me an opportunity to step outside of my own struggle. I do not know if it changed anyone else's point of view, but it has helped me clarify how I want to spend my time as a designer.

So, why did I close the account? Simple—it became something bad and negative. Popularity is wonderful, and having one's thoughts rebroadcasted through a community of people in an industry you care about is intoxicating. Unfortunately, I was also starting to get more and more negative comments about what I was saying. I think critique is great. Critique is the cornerstone of improvement for a designer. But, you cannot critique in 140 character anonymous tweets on the internet. That is not critique, it is just negative, pissy sound bytes. What was slowly dawning on me is that Angry Paul Rand was equally guilty of this, too. My snarky aphorisms where just as bad as people telling me how unlike Paul Rand I was, or how full of shit my tweets were, or how elitist and ridiculous I was sounding. I was doing the same thing, but with a lot more followers. Then on September 13th I tweeted "Being a designer is not just a job, its a calling." This is something I truly believe, but I received a tremendous amount of negative commentary from that tweet. I took it personally, and insulted a couple of people right back. To those individuals I am tremendously sorry—it was uncalled for and really not the kind of person I am.

That was when I knew it was time to close the account. Now I am at graduate school and I am trying to put into play for myself what I think is missing from design. It is a struggle to be sure, but, it is a pleasant struggle indeed.

My shits have more form and composition than most design out there today. And they are kerned better, too. #graphic #design

I made design with a fucking slide rule and a #2 pencil. In a cabin in the woods. That was uphill both ways. #graphic #design

All this postmodernist graphic design bullshit is over my head. Therefore it must suck. Where the fuck are the grids?

I was making the most amazing graphic design in history when you were still fucking around with Comic Sans and a Sharpie.

Infographics? Fuck that. It's all about pictographs. Don't you assholes remember how brilliant my Eye Bee M logo was?

Want to know why I'm angry? Look what they did to my brilliant UPS logo. And, I'll always be associated with Enron. Thats why I'm angry.

We had the Internet in my day, too. They called it "the yellow pages" and they delivered it right to you. Twitter was called a "telegram."

You can blame me for Steve's attitude with the iPhone 4. When I did NeXT logo, I told him "I'll give you 1 option, take it or leave it."

Of course I am. I'm brilliant after all. RT @Jared_Cullum: hahahahha oh my god, you're the best twitter account I've followed yet.

You bastards would not use so many goddamn gradients & dropshadows in your designs if you had to make the fuckers by hand like I did.

Hi new followers. About time you listened to me instead of that wackjob Sagmeister. I made words out of fucking bananas too. When I was 6.

Look, I'm not saying I'm a better graphic designer than all of you. It's so fucking obvious, do I need to say it? UPS logo FTW, bitches.

I had to use poisonous shit: lead type, spray adhesive, etc. And you fucking pussies worry about scratching your wrists on a MacBook Pro.

In my day you came to the studio wearing flannel & skinny pants, we assumed you were a fucking lumberjack. Goddamn hipsters.

David Carson set an article in Dingbats. I once downed too many vodka gimlets and puked on a press sheet. At least mine made fucking sense.

Being famous on Twitter is like being a famous graphic designer: almost nobody knows who the hell you are.

This graphic design gig would be great if it wasn't for all the fucking clients.

Sometimes, Müller-Brockmann and I would get shitfaced and design stuff *off* the grid. We were such crazy bastards back then.

This Justin Bieber kid reminds me of some of my annoying students at Yale. Only my students at Yale had talent.

I turned Esquire magazine into the most beautiful printed publication ever. Thanks to the goddamn Internet for fucking that up for me.

You kids still use pasteups & Letraset for graphic design, right? I'd shoot myself if I had to use that unreliable Adobe shit every day.

This Sarah Palin chick sounds like a typical client: full of half-assed ideas & no direction. However, most clients aren't as bangable.

Was reading that "S M L XL" Bruce Mau book in bed and the fucking thing fell on my head. It's so much bullshit I actually got hurt by it.

Damnit! RT @brendamontreal: you do know that you have been busted by Jessica Helfand for being, umm, well - nice? http://bit.ly/9CkD6U

I think BP hired the same idiots who touched up that photo of Lee Harvey Oswald holding a rifle. That worked out fucking great, too.

I don't know about this sustainable design crap. When I worked I just wanted my designs to sustain 3-martini lunches & my expense account.

A big #followfriday to all the people that follow me. I think of you all as my special interns. Now go get me a coffee.

Zwart? That hack! RT @siborg81: Also if you are such a design great why don't you have your own logo like Piet Zwart?!

You all obviously need to follow @AngryRandPaul. He's like me only without talent. And evil.

You have got to be kidding me with this crowdsourcing & spec work bullshit. In my day we preferred to actually get paid for our work.

As a designer, my favorite clients are the ones who are smart enough to know how stupid they are.

I should mention I make a cameo in tomorrow's #MadMen. Look for me playing "Art Department Alcoholic Misogynist Asshole # 3."

The problem I have with "Mad Men" is all the unrealistic bullshit. We smoked, drank and womanized way more than that.

You kids need to get your hands dirty when making design for a change. Spilling a fucking soy mocha latté on your MacBook doesn't count.

You kids keep worrying about what tools you should use for making design. You know what I used? A pencil, a dry martini and some balls.

In my day interns never slapped me across the face & gave me the finger when I asked them to work. Unlike this crappy Adobe software.

I prefer real books to reading on an iPad. Real books look & feel better, plus I don't look as douchey when I read one in a Starbucks.

Designers ask me "what's the difference between design and art?" I tell them, "when you are talented as I am, not a damn thing."

#FF all of my followers. Best. Brownnosers. Ever.

Don't get all the hating on Apple for making new, innovative stuff. Tho, when I invented graphic design, people gave me a lot of shit, too.

You kids are wrong, I don't hate computers. Take the new 12-core Mac Pro; now bad designers can make shitty design 12 times faster. Amazing.

Like your parents, I am not actually angry. I'm just... disappointed.

Designers should spend time making better design, and not trying to be hip by writing "witty" bullshit about themselves on their websites.

#FollowMonday @kibrly since she was my 3,000th follower. The kid has good timing.

I guess these days you kids call it "design by committee." In my day we called it "stupid overbearing clients fucking up the project."

The smell of fresh ink on a press sheet turns me into Happy Paul Rand.

Pulling a design out of your ass at the last minute is fine, if your ass is as brilliant as mine is.

Even something as hideously freakish and fucked up looking as Comic Sans can be used well. Just like Sloth in "The Goonies."

People already think designers are pompous dicks. Pics on your site holding up your poster designs by the corners is not fucking helping.

In my day it was more fun to bitch about clients at a bar, not on Twitter. Also, they couldn't find out what we said about them on Google.

Microsoft's expertise is in making other people's work look like shit. RT @onespeedjeff: what do you think of PowerPoint presentations?

Treat graphic design like hooking up at a bar; you don't want to be disgusted at what you did when you see it the next morning.

Best part of design school? Not worrying about clients or budgets. Worst part of design school? Not worrying about clients or budgets.

Everything is design. Everything! Except for that London 2012 Olympics logo. I don't know what the fuck that is.

Seems like you kids love stupid, annoying shit these days. Or maybe JWoww is actually a brilliant designer and I'm just cranky.

Sorry, had to delete some tweets, Armin Hoffman is here & got onto my comp after too many Rob Roys. Drunk bastard should stick to posters.

In my day I had a name for stupid clients who would not listen to my brilliant design advice. I called them "David Carson's clients."

My advice for designers & design students: fuck the rules, if your work is good enough to get away with it.

Bad design clients are like dogs: you spend a lot of time cleaning up their shit, and they are easily distracted by anything loud & shiny.

Lots of you asked what I think of the 2014 World Cup logo: http://bit.ly/a4Sdzu I love it. The World Cup is a circle jerk, right?

You kids and your computers. Any idiot can learn Photoshop. That doesn't make you a designer, it makes you an idiot who knows Photoshop.

Web designers, your job isn't to hide information people want behind bells & whistles and other flashy crap. That's a politician's job.

You kids should make design like you make love; passionately, attentively, and hopefully not by yourself with only a computer.

Lazy fucking designers need to think a lot more and look passively a lot less. This kid is right on: http://bit.ly/bK8tOQ (via @behoff)

A portfolio website done entirely in Flash is the graphic design equivalent of a vuvuzela.

Back in my day, the weekend was a great time to get drunk at home instead of getting drunk at the office.

Fine by me, but I want my name first on the letterhead. RT @debbiemillman: @AIGAdesign Can I be co-president with @AngryPaulRand? Please?

Having a mastery of typography is like having a mastery of breathing; without it, you're fucked.

6800 followers; that's a hell of a lot of bitter, angst-ridden designers. You kids should get outside more. Or get a puppy.

Designers care about the journey. Clients care about the destination. Bad designers care about stopping at Waffle House.

Happy birthday to me. http://ow.ly/2pLAm My birthday wish is for you kids make better design. And a Porsche would be nice.

If graphic design was Star Wars, then Adobe would be Jar Jar Binks.

Since you kids asked: If graphic design was Star Wars, then crowdSPRING would be Darth Vader.

Like a cop, a designer is on duty 24/7/365. Only instead of eating donuts we like croissants and other fancy crap.

Just because you design does not mean you are a good designer. All this shitty work has to come from somewhere.

If you can't make it good, make it big, if you can't make it big, make it red. If it still sucks, find another fucking profession.

Design students, pay attention: just because a teacher tells you something, doesn't mean it's right.

Photoshop filters are the graphic design equivalent of "Jersey Shore."

When a small business owner asks you to design something for free, that is NOT "pro bono." That is "cheap asshole."

Design students, pay attention: being passive & predictable is the best way to guarantee your place as a mediocre designer.

The next one of you bastards who puts a Flash intro on your website is going to get my highly designed foot up your ass.

My favorite thing about being a graphic designer? Not being an accountant.

Design is hard. You want something easy, MIT has an Theoretical Physics department you should look into, pussy.

You are a designer. If a client just wants someone who can push a mouse around, they can get a fucking cat.

Spec work is like going to a strip club; you get all excited, but it almost never pays off in the end.

Bad clients tell you how to do your job. Good clients let you do your job. Great clients write a check and get out of the way.

3 easy steps to being a successful designer: 1) Do great work. 2) Don't be an asshole. 3) There is no step 3.

Design can be art. Design can be aesthetics. Design is so simple, that's why it is so complicated.

(By the way, my last tweet: http://www.haughtpixels.com/paul_rand_influential_graphic_designer.html)

Design school is like dating: confidence is king. Being a good bullshitter helps a lot, too.

Making your resume layout "edgy" and "creative" is like having sex at church: fun but inappropriate.

If God is in the details, then the Devil is in PowerPoint.

#FollowFriday nobody at all. Instead, go out and make something amazing.

That scary, panicked feeling when you start a project and just have a blank page? That's graphic design Viagra.

Glenn Beck is the Comic Sans of politics; except Comic Sans doesn't want to lynch Gotham.

There's so much shitty design because you kids making shitty design are not good enough at design to know your design is shitty.

Design school is just like "the real world," except there's no shortage of interesting work, and you have a lot more sex.

Design like your life depends on it. Because if you're doing it right, it does.

Learning to be a designer online is just fine, if only aspire to make work for porn movie packaging or the Yankee Swapper.

I predict that tomorrow Apple announces something nobody needs but everyone has to have. Also, it will be shiny.

The real reason designers use Macs? So we can be smug and elitist about our computers, too.

The only thing winning a design award proves is that you are good at winning design awards.

Especially in design school: Do first. Apologize later.

If your fucking hip infographic makes the data harder to understand instead of easier, YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG. http://bit.ly/9V1WaX

#FollowFriday @AngryPaulRand. Why? IBM, Westinghouse, ABC, Esquire, UPS, etc... I'm fucking brilliant. That's why.

In my day we had a computer we used for design, too; only back then we called it a "brain" & the mouse was called a "pencil."

The 1st rule of design is there are no rules. The 2nd rule of design is you should ignore lists of rules of design.

The only thing worse than the new iTunes logo is managing movies, TV shows, podcasts, apps & books through something called "iTunes."

Stories about how late you were up working on your project are like Foursquare tweets: nobody gives a shit but you.

Being a designer is easy. The hard part is being good at it.

Infographics are graphic design's Auto-Tune.

Some of you kids are excited about being a designer, instead of excited about making great design. Big difference.

The best thing about computers? You can turn them off.

Using a template and calling it design is like filling out your 1040 tax return and calling it Dada Poetry.

Fear has no place in design.

Actually let me amend that last tweet...

Fear has no place in design. Unless you are designing for horror movies or the Tea Party.

Apple's Keynote is the presentation equivalent of chugging a 12-pack of Budweiser: it makes anything look sexy.

Dear Adobe, stop making design more fucking stressful than it already is. PS: the new CS5 icons suck.

Layout by hand was a pain; but unlike software, Letraset didn't stop working randomly just because it felt like fucking with you.

My favorite way to enjoy the VMAs is to not watch them.

Being a designer is not just a "job." It's a calling.

@elaineinspired If you really think that is all design is, I feel sorry for you.

Holy shit. I just realized I died in 1996. What the fuck am I doing tweeting? Goodbye, you bastards!
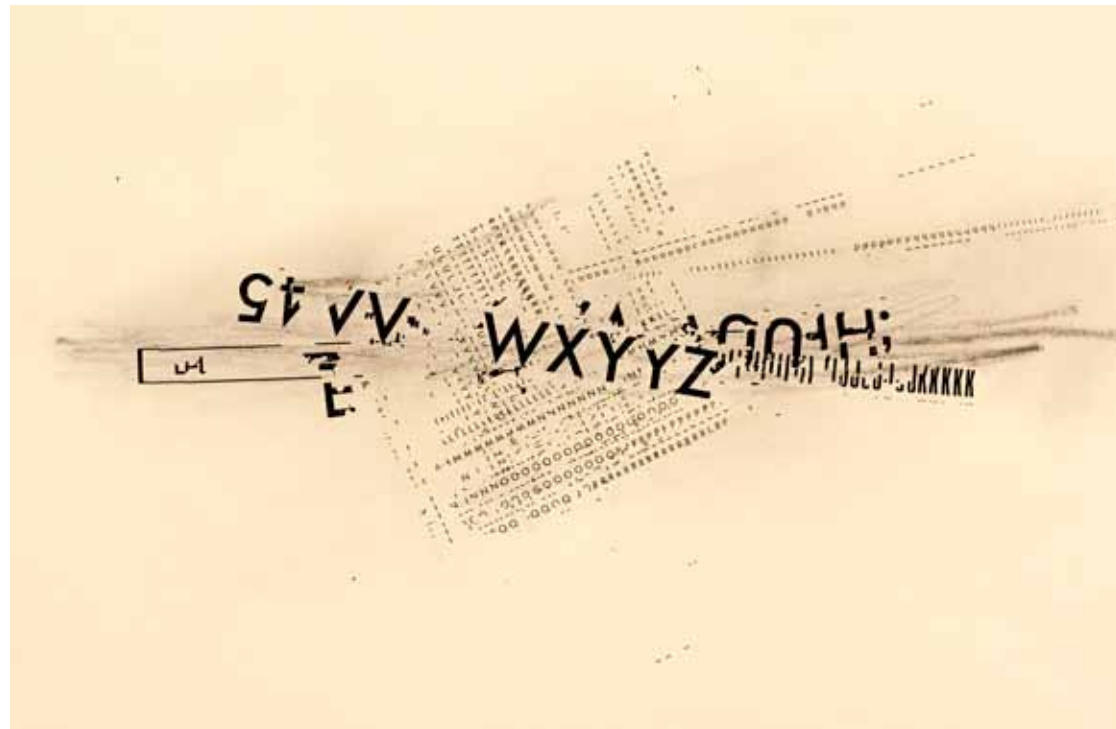
TYPOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE

Studies of typographic landscape using typographic form and structure. These are created by "painting" with Letraset dry-transfer letterforms and pencil on Rives BFK paper. I used the rigid, structured typography as it appears on each Letraset sheet as a paint that I then adhered to the canvas in an unplanned, gestural application of pressure with a bone folder.
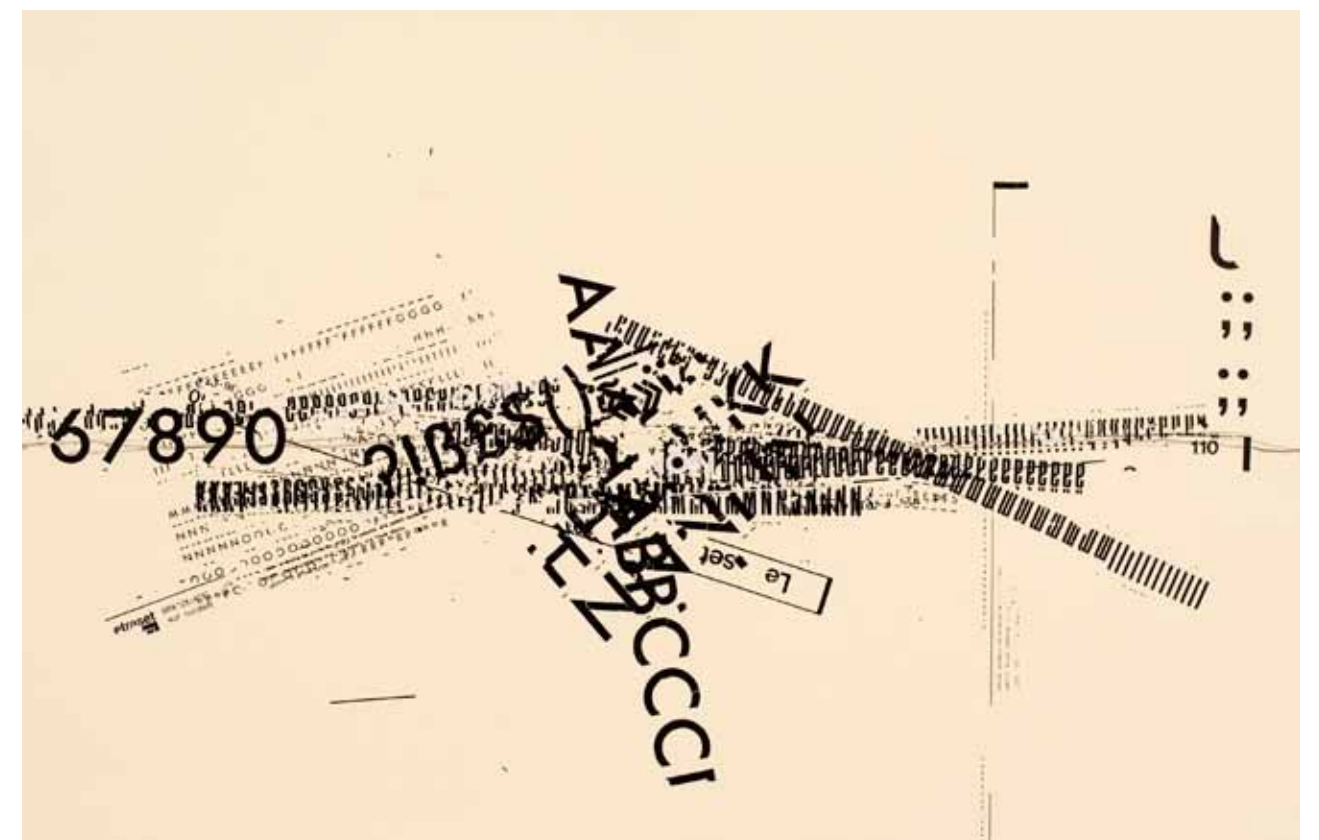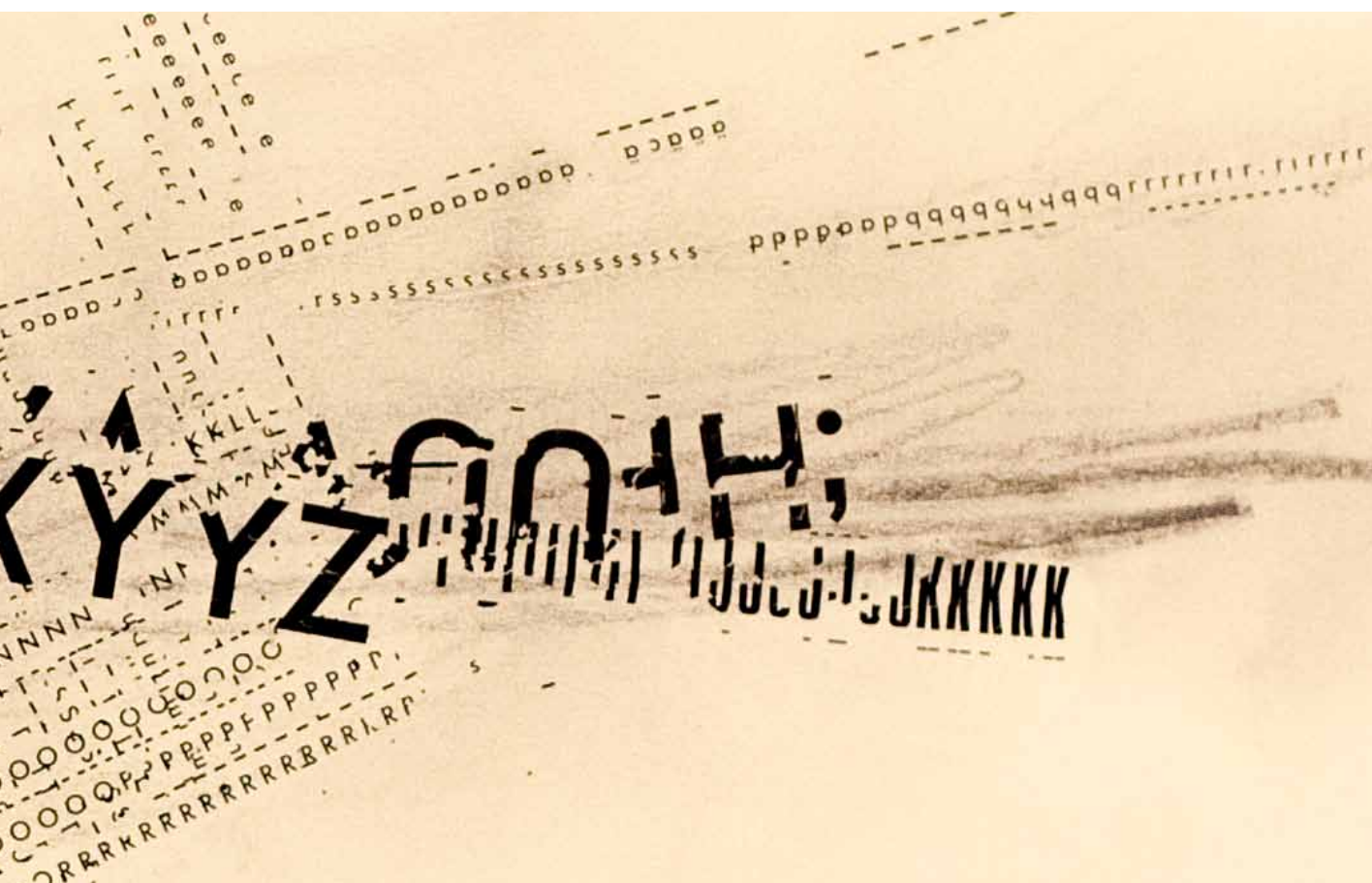
TEN QUESTIONS

What is "taste"?

Taste is an individual or group's observation and organization of disparate artifacts sharing an aesthetic sensibility.

Does art criticism count as an art form? An art form in the true sense, i.e. not in the sense in which mixing drinks nor designing shoes is nowadays proclaimed to be right up there with panting the Mona Lisa.

If you think of art as being preoccupied with process then criticism is not an art form, as it is about the final piece — the narrative document in which the author provides a critique. The primary point of a criticism is to make understood the author's point and opinion. Unlike art, it is not about the interpretation, nor about the serendipitous dialog between creator and viewer. The reader is meant to make a clear line from the work being talked about, to the criticism, to the reader. Art is meant to take a circuitous route from the artist, to the work, to the viewer. This ambiguity separates the art from the critique.

Can you cite emulatable virtues you find in some of your role models?

I am always appreciative of the patience and tenacity of my role models as they create and critique design. Attention to detail as well as exhaustive research are also traits I find very admirable in those I look up to.

Whom do you read? Writers, perhaps unlike you, who in their own way seem exemplary and mean something to you?

I love the fiction of Douglas Coupland; his work often features an interplay between humanity and technology that makes you unsure if humanity is winning. Chuck Palahniuk creates interesting and confusing alternate realities just slightly different than out own; a kind of nihilistic pornography.

Cite five works that changed your life and five during your career, that changed the world.

Works that changed me start with (1) Daniel Libeskind's book *Countersign*. The is a series of models, drawings, words and other constructs of a purely theoretical, fanciful kind of architecture unlike anything I had ever seen. This along with (2) Michael Heizer's *Dragged Mass Geometric* and (3) Morphosis's *Buildings and Projects* got me interested — to a fault — in deconstructivist architecture and theory, which was ultimately the downfall of my career as an architect. More than a decade later I saw (4) Bruno Monguzzi's poster for Fausto Gerevini 1988 and (5) Skolos+Wedell's poster for Lyceum 2002. These pieces were the first time I saw and understood how a graphic designer could use photography as a way of not just representation, but of authorship and abstract formal creation.

Works that changed the world in my lifetime and career have to start with the (1) World Trade Center twin towers. While I would never call what terrorists did to them on 9/11 a work of art I would say that the buildings themselves are, and their recontextualization that day was clearly profound beyond words. (2) Stephan Sagmesiter's 1999 poster for his lecture at Cranbrook where he cut the worlds into his body have gone on to influence — badly — thousands of designers who think that being daring is better than being good. Sometime before November, 2000 a designer laid out (3) the voting ballot for the state of Florida that resulted in George HW Bush being President — a tangible result of bad design decisions. Wolff Olins painfully bad (4) London 2012 Olympic identity brought bad design to a forefront in the design community. (5) Shepard Fairey's "Hope" Obama Poster was partially responsible for the USA electing the first African-American President — something I never thought I would see in my lifetime.

How is naiveté still the holy grail of artists, given that the current art world is "the apparatus the artist is threaded through?"

The naiveté is what makes art about the process of discovery — the artist being naïve enough to try something he does not know the answer to or the result of. The apparatus is more about the product and not about the artists internal conversation with himself about his work, what he knows and more importantly, what he does not know.

What are your vices as a critic, writer and educator?

My biggest vice is contrarianism — nothing bothers me more than people blindly loving (or hating) something without having a good reason beyond the feelings of their peers. This makes me often default to an opposite view of work, even if I am no more informed than the people I am opposing, just in the opposite direction. My critique and general criticisms (when not being contrary) are often too nice, lenient, and generally not directly critical enough. I find it difficult to tell someone to their face they have made bad work. I tend to make too many "happy sandwiches" and not enough pointed critique.

What do you learn about an artwork you have not seen before in the first two seconds?

If I love it, hate it, lust after it, or am just indifferent. Later my feelings may change, but in those first two seconds I know if it works on a primal, visceral level.

What questions would you like to ask yourself?

Do you really have something to say that will change how you and others look at and react to design? Exactly what are you thinking about for your thesis work, anyway?

Can you think of occasions when your first response to an artwork has been, immediately and overwhelmingly, physical instead of intellectual?

The first time I saw Daniel Libeskind's theoretical works in the book *Countersign* — my heart skipped a beat and I remember a kind of buzzing in my ears — this was work that was so captivating and so interesting that I knew even then I would never, ever understand it. That was one of the very first things that got me interested in deconstructivist theory and poststructuralism.
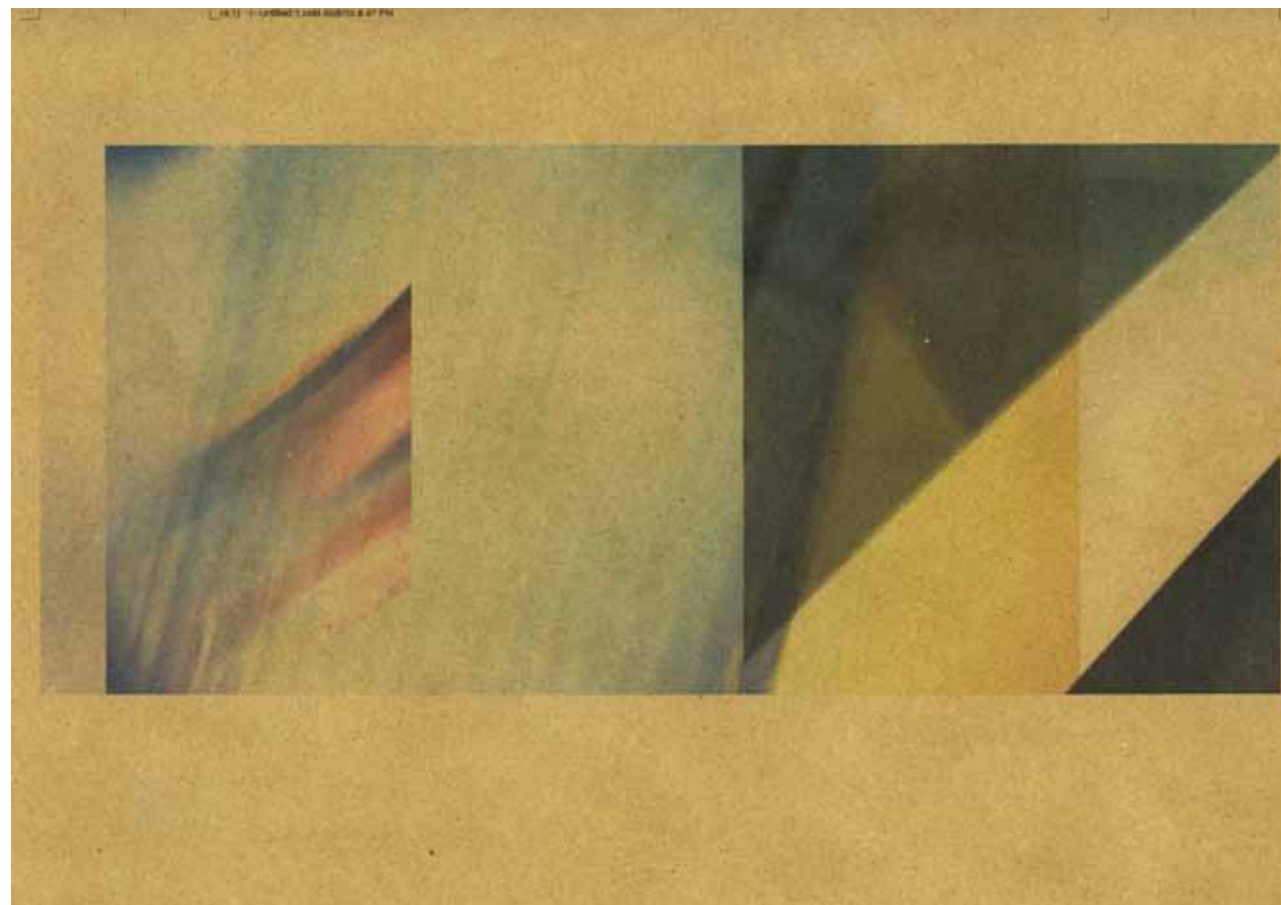
FILM LANDSCAPES

These compositions are a visual response, accompanying my written essay, "Hunting the Punctum," (page 70) to essays from *Camera Lucida*, by Roland Barthes; "In Plato's Cave," by Susan Sontag; "Uses of Photography," by John Berger; and "Remembering an Intellectual Heroine," by Christopher Hitchens. These visual sketches capture my thoughts about film as landscape and the inherent ambiguities and complexities in both. The images were created by juxtaposing digital video, then output on craft paper using an inkjet printer.

A QUESTION OF THRESHOLD

In starting on the road towards developing ideas for my MFA studies that will eventually lead towards a thesis, it is important to consider where to start from. One of my current advisors, Roy McKelvey, suggested that trying to start in an entirely new direction, ignoring what has been done in the past really makes no sense, especially if it resonates with me to this day. Therefore I am revisiting my Senior year at RISD, and my Degree Project — (the image to the left is an example). Below is the statement that was presented at my final review for that project. As mentioned at the end of the statement, this is something to look at in order to move forward, as opposed to dismissing entirely. While I no longer completely agree with what is say here, the overall ideas are still important.

INTENT

I have always been fascinated by certain kinds of art, design, and architecture. Daniel Libeskind, John Cage, Eric Owen Moss, Robert Rauschembeg, Peter Eisenmann, and Jaques Derrida have been my visual (and linguistic) companions ever since my days in architecture school in the early 1990's. My degree project was an attempt to gain a much deeper understanding of what it was about the work of these and other individuals that was so engaging and enigmatic to me. My DP would encompass a lengthy series of visual explorations in an effort to try and engage myself in a dialog with these masters.

PROCESS

After research and analysis of many works of the aforementioned artists and designers, the elements that are particularly interesting in their work include notions of chance, chaos, juxtaposition and complexity. Then began a lengthy and often frustrating struggle with the intent of my project. I allowed myself incredible freedom to work in whatever medium or methodology came to mind; so much like Jørgen Leth in the film *The Five Obstructions*, the hardest film to make is the one in which he is completely free to do whatever he wants. There were many false starts. Choosing to make my explorations devoid of meaning in an effort to be purely formal, critiques were difficult because the work was so personal and had no easy way for others to access what was being done. "It looks cool, but I don't get it," was a common statement throughout the semester by my classmates.

Like a deer in headlights, I was nearly frozen with too many options, and eventually chose to give myself more clearly defined restrictions in an effort to stop looking into the headlights. The use of words that were loaded with meaning and connotations as a basis for my explorations — such as *hungry* — were eliminated, and instead some firm restrictions were made by using random letters as content. Decisions were also clearly made on minimum numbers of iterations per each exploration series, maximum amounts of time spent per series, and so on. The numbers of iterations began to inform the final outcome of the DP itself: essentially a large body of work to be looked at as an entire process, instead of just a final object such as a book or film. In an effort to make the work of the semester accessible to others, a book (and possibly an accompanying motion piece) of the work done over the semester would be designed for the final review. After much deliberation with my studio critic the project was at the brink of becoming exactly that: a book of all my work, designed in a way that would try and use my ideas of chance, et al in the design of the book itself. However, just before I committed to the point of no return, something else happened.

ANALYSIS

Near the end of the semester, I (along with another studio critic) took a long hard look at all the work I had produced, and how it related to my original intent. What we eventually came to discover was that the work had amassed a kind of visual language and grammar; the same language and grammar that Eisenmann, Cage, Libeskind and Rauchemberg spoke. The work that was so frustrating and disappointing had become the beginnings of my very own Oxford Dictionary and Chicago Manual of Style. The language was clear to me after my initial research in the beginning of the semester: chance, chaos, juxtaposition and complexity. There was now a grammar to help guide the use of the language: distortion and the threshold of comprehension. The DP had in fact become ways of looking at how work that is on the threshold between meaning and meaningless, comprehension and confusion, and clarity and obscurity is work that is, to me, particularly interesting and engaging. What made the work of my favorite artists and designers so incredible was now more evident — it is a question of threshold. ~~As a way to begin to try and work with my new language, I created a book based on an interpretation of the Presidential Debate between then-Senator John F. Kennedy and then Vice President Richard M. Nixon in the Fall of 1960~~

CONCLUSION

My conclusion is in fact a question, or more accurately, many questions. A question of threshold is one that I can try to answer for the rest of my life, and this DP is in fact just a first step in a project that will last me past RISD and well into graduate school, where it will be further explored and continue informing my work for my entire career.

TRAFFIC DATA VISUALIZATION

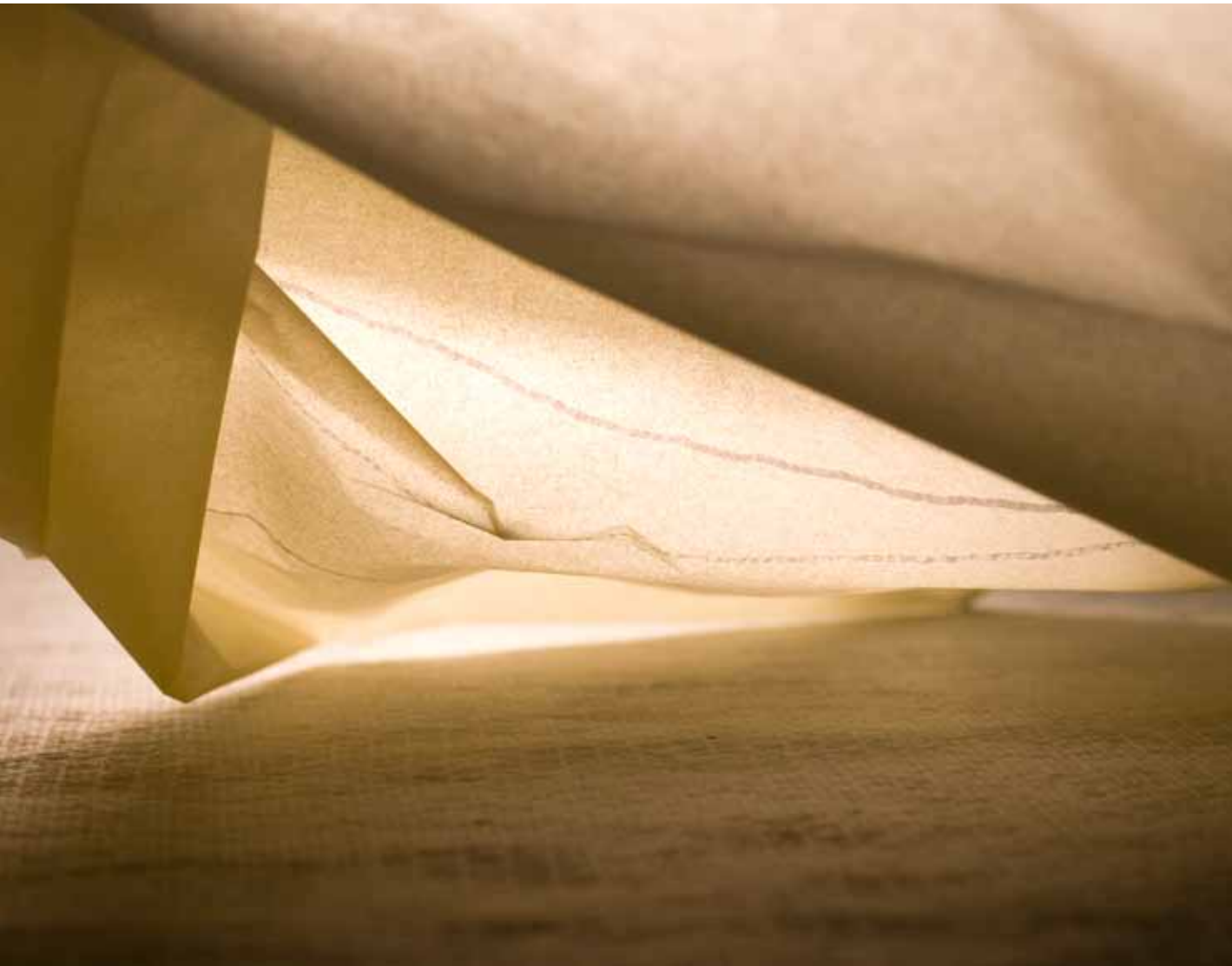Given the following set of data, we were asked to create an information visualization in a 16" square:

Broad Street is oriented east and west. Harrison Street is oriented north and south. 11:00 to 11:35 am: 2 vehicles traveling east on Broad Street turn left onto Harrison Street, 19 vehicles traveling south on Harrison Street continue through the intersection, 20 vehicles traveling west on Broad Street turn right onto Harrison Street, 28 vehicles traveling south on Harrison Street turn left onto Broad Street, 30 vehicles traveling south on Harrison Street turn right onto Broad Street, 36 vehicles traveling north on Harrison Street continue through the intersection, 45 vehicles traveling north on Harrison Street turn left onto Broad Street, 55 vehicles traveling east on Broad Street turn right onto Harrison Street, 65 vehicles traveling north on Harrison Street turn right onto Broad Street, 96 vehicles traveling west on Broad Street turn left onto Harrison Street, 101 vehicles traveling west on Broad Street continue through the intersection, 144 vehicles traveling east on Broad Street continue though the intersection.
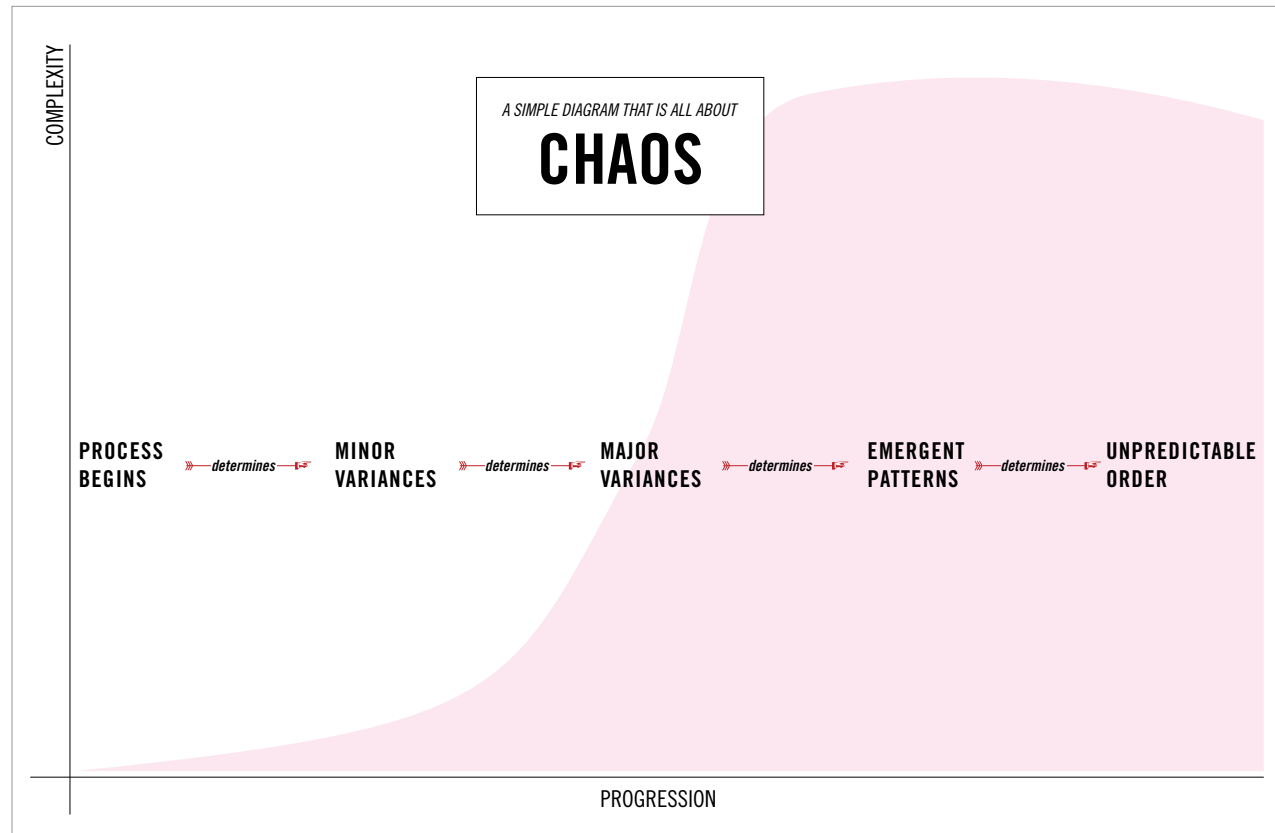
Since the events in this data set happen over a period of time (five minutes) I wanted to represent the data as not happening all at once; I instead separated each individual vehicle's path into a single sheet of paper with a specific form depending on what direction the car was moving. I grouped each of the four starting points into a different kind of paper and layered them together. By looking at the cutouts revealed by the path of each vehicle, one can see the movements of this intersection for those five minutes. Created using paper, basswood, corrugated plastic, cardboard.
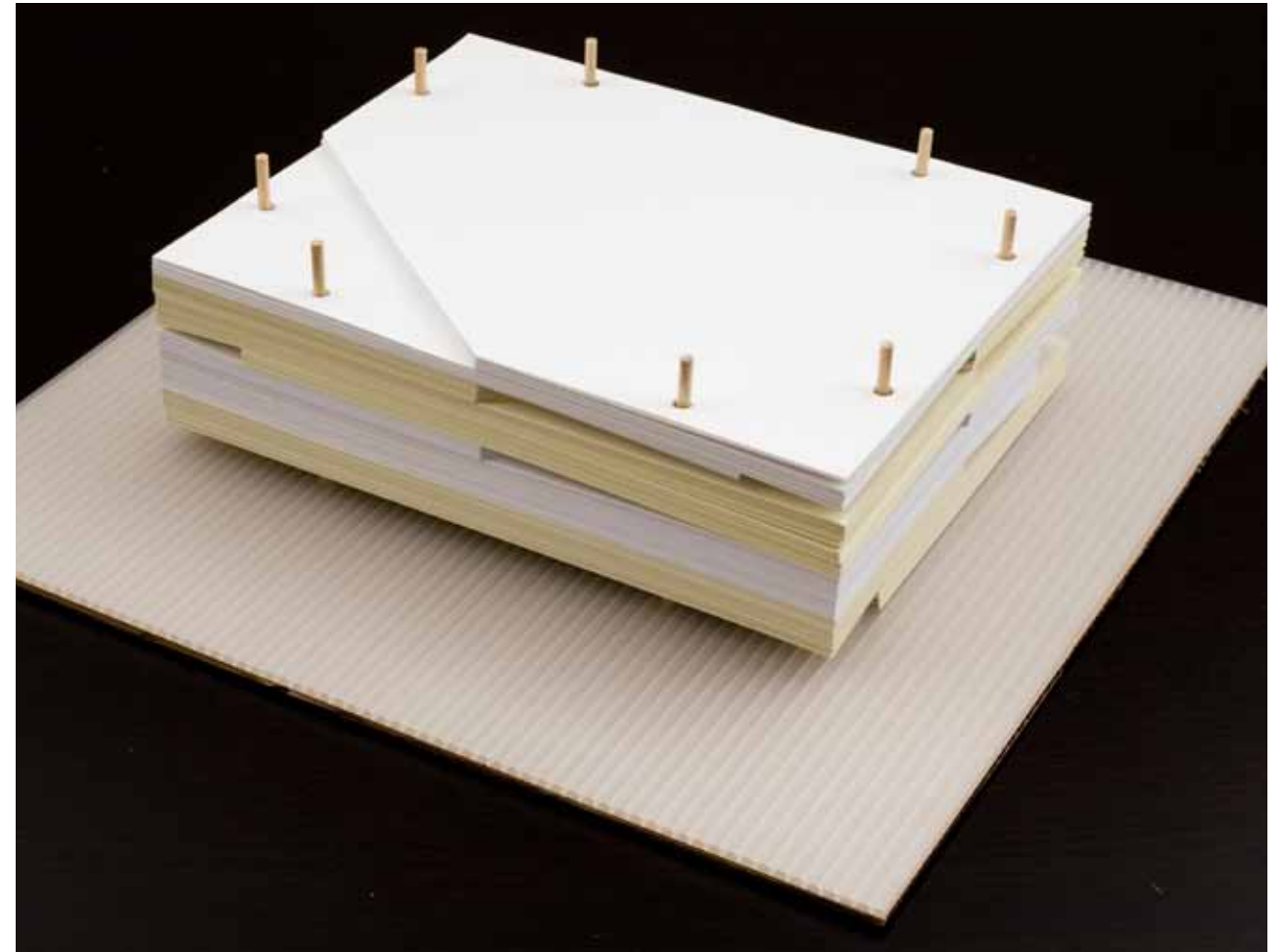
WRAPPING AND DRAPING

These are a series of volumetric sketches for a project about unused urban space in Richmond, Virginia. I am interested in seeing how a line, which regulates the site along a concrete retaining wall, can come off the wall into the third dimension. Created with tracing paper and Sharpie marker.

COMPLEXITY

A SIMPLE DIAGRAM THAT IS ALL ABOUT

CHAOS

PROCESS
BEGINS ⟩━*determines*━⟨ MINOR
VARIANCES ⟩━*determines*━⟨ MAJOR
VARIANCES ⟩━*determines*━⟨ EMERGENT
PATTERNS ⟩━*determines*━⟨ UNPREDICTABLE
ORDER

PROGRESSION

ENGAGEMENT

A SIMPLE DIAGRAM THAT IS ALL ABOUT

CHAOS AS DESIGN PROCESS

HANDHELD
PHOTOS
OF TYPE ⟩━*determines*━⟨ ORIENTATION
FOCUS, DEPTH,
LEGIBILITY ⟩━*determines*━⟨ DIGITAL
COMPOSITE
LAYER BLENDS ⟩━*determines*━⟨ HATCHING,
CONTRASTS
POS/NEG ⟩━*determines*━⟨ FRAMING
JUXTAPOSITION
ANALOG/DIGITAL

PROCESS

CHAOS DIAGRAMS

These two diagrams attempt to visualize, in a very simple way, what constitutes chaos. It is determined by unpredictability and emerging patterns of order, not randomness or disorder. The first diagram is a general overview of chaos as it relates to design. The second diagram demonstrates an application of this process to a Skolos + Wedell poster.
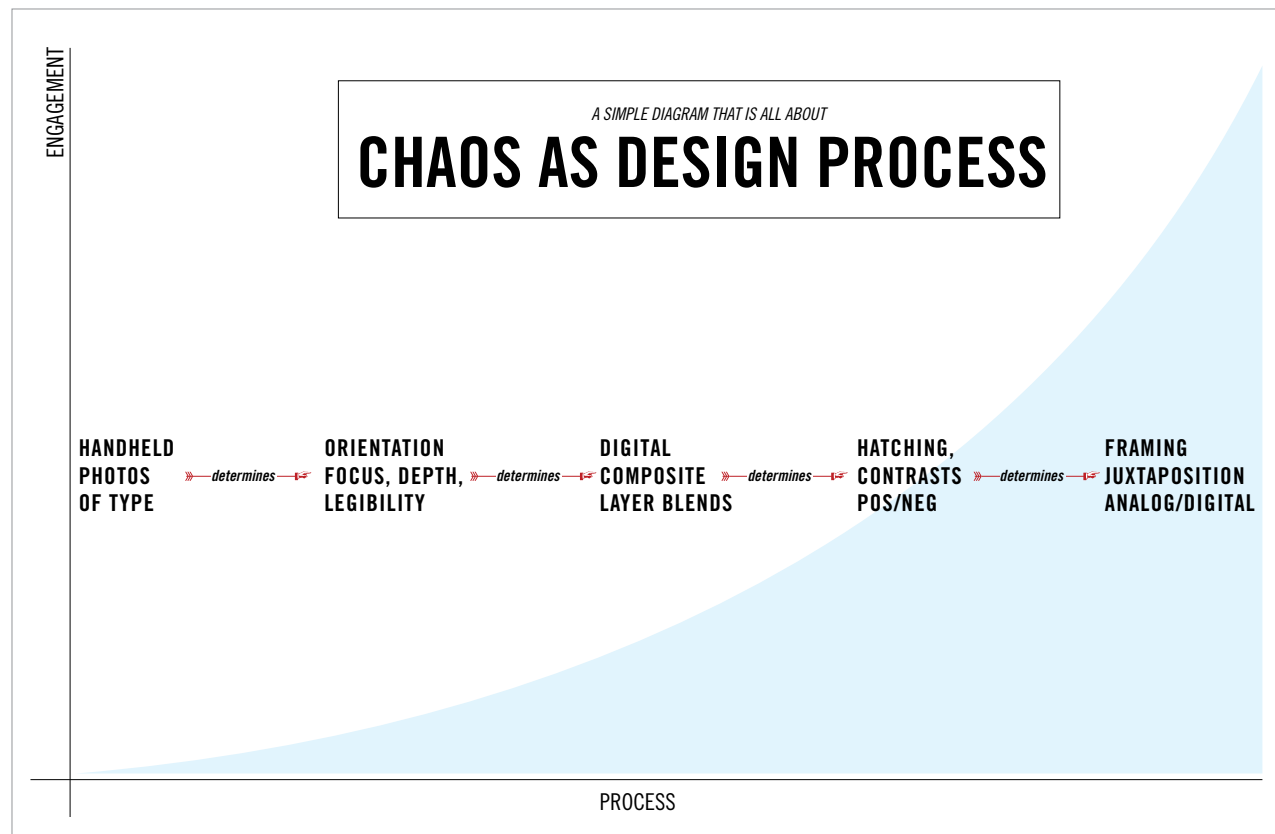
WORD LIST

This is an unordered, unedited "master list" of words, ideas,
names, concepts, and general mental overflow of stuff relating
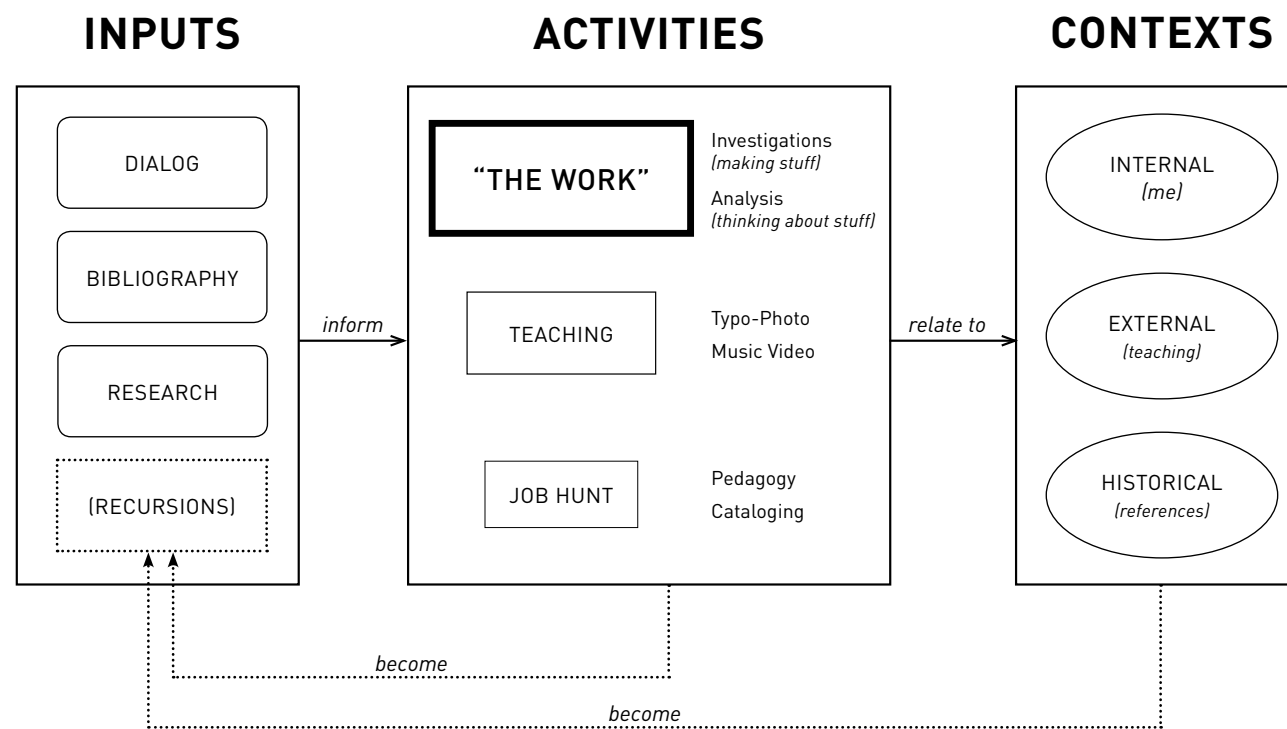to what I am thinking about for my thesis.

music video
rhetoric
paradox
seduction
dialectic
synthesis
chaos system
conversation between complexity and simplicity
~~wabi-sabi~~
typoplastics
affordances
visual grammar
~~Design as art — Bruno Munari~~
Ralph Schraivogel, complexity
Peter Saville vs Paul Rand
Wit vs good design
Jan Van Toorn
photoplastics
John Cage, chance operations
Philip Glass, complexity in simplicity
~~Dieter Roth, materiality~~
Lyonel Feininger, cubism
Franz Kline, abstract expressionism
type as things
staged photography
mise en scène
unexpected relationships
analog/digital recursions
~~additive vs. reductive working methods~~
expression
experiment
systems of chance
poster
book
authorship
authenticity
photography as authorship, not representation

edge of reason, predictability, communication
fleeting
derivé, situationistsfun
criticism as the control to react against
act of making design as criticism
complexity
juxtapositions
slipperiness
daniel libeskind
accident
serendipity
collage
generative systems
chance
chaos
~~complex simplicity / andrew blauvelt~~
using the hand in making
making while thinking
generative accidents
dissent
threshold
making the computer act analog
Chaos theory
Emergent theory
~~Deterministic systems~~
Daniel Libeskind, architectural drawings, theories and models
Franz Kline, paintings
Ralph Schraivogel, posters
John Chris Jones, "Essays in Design"
Robert Venturi, "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture"
Jan van Toorn, works
Skolos + Wedell, works
László Moholy-Nagy, works
Peter Saville, works
Tomato, works
Stan Brackhage, experimental films
Margaret Boden, "Creativity and Unpredictability"
Ishac Bertran, photography
Visual Editions, book design
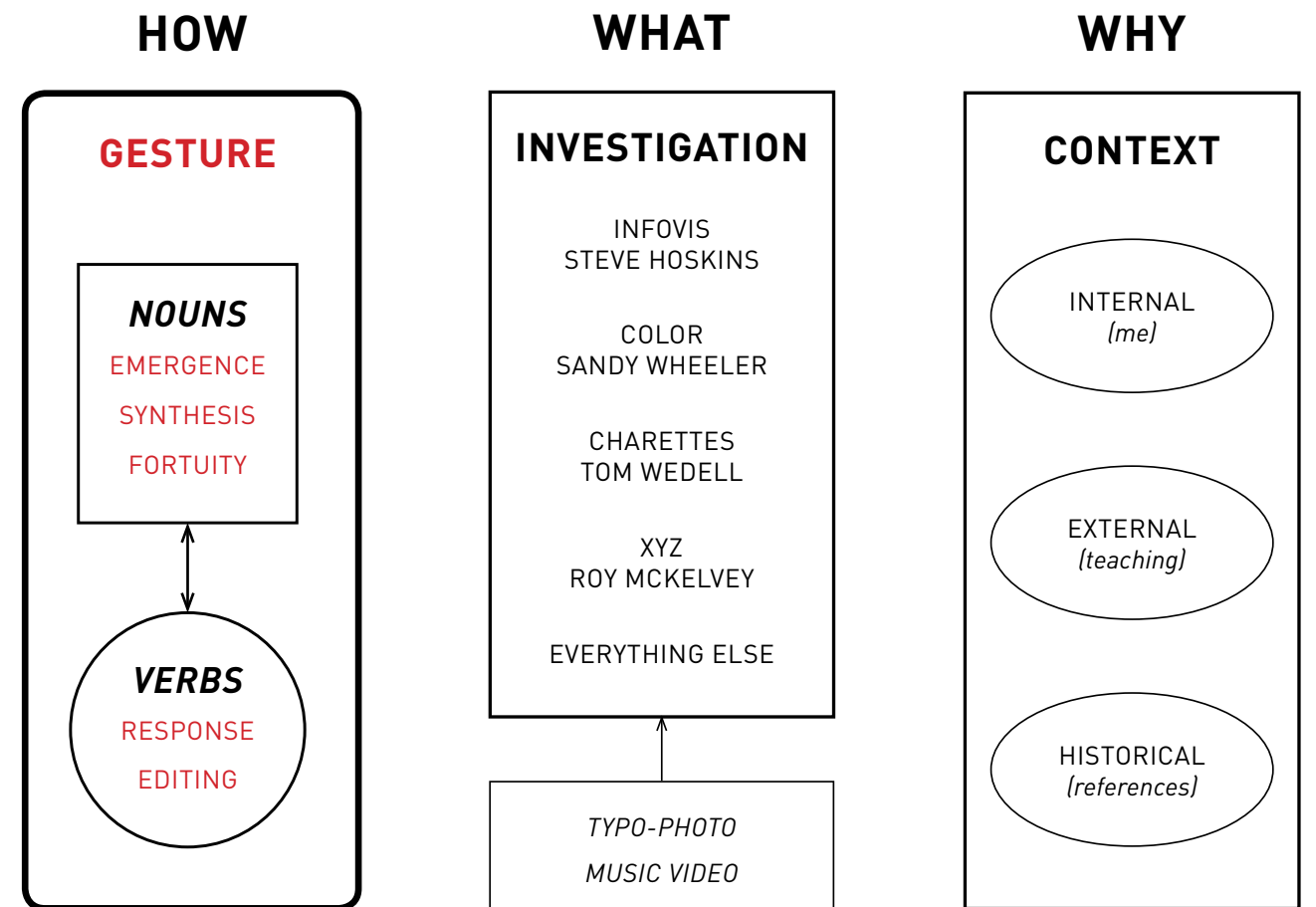Sergio Albiac, generative works
Schrödinger's cat

THESIS META DIAGRAMS

A "meta" or macro-level diagram of my thesis project to date. As I continue to simplify and refine my thesis topic, these diagrams are useful tools for distilling my ideas. ~~I am currently concentrating on the idea of "gesture" as the core of my thesis.~~

THESIS PROJECT

INPUTS

- DIALOG
- BIBLIOGRAPHY
- RESEARCH
- (RECURSIONS)

inform →

ACTIVITIES

"THE WORK"

Investigations *(making stuff)*

Analysis *(thinking about stuff)*

TEACHING

Typo-Photo
Music Video

JOB HUNT

Pedagogy
Cataloging

relate to →

CONTEXTS

- INTERNAL *(me)*
- EXTERNAL *(teaching)*
- HISTORICAL *(references)*

become

become

"THE WORK"

HOW

GESTURE

NOUNS

EMERGENCE

SYNTHESIS

FORTUITY

VERBS

RESPONSE

EDITING

WHAT

INVESTIGATION

INFOVIS
STEVE HOSKINS

COLOR
SANDY WHEELER

CHARETTES
TOM WEDELL

XYZ
ROY MCKELVEY

EVERYTHING ELSE

TYPO-PHOTO

MUSIC VIDEO

WHY

CONTEXT

- INTERNAL *(me)*
- EXTERNAL *(teaching)*
- HISTORICAL *(references)*

INVESTIGATION

As I work through a series of brief sub-projects, my thesis direction is becoming more evident and compelling. These motion studies are static typography shot off of an LCD monitor using an iPhone. I then composited them inside of After Effects by using layer blending modes. I am a strong advocate of not using filters, et al when working digitally, but when it comes to doing "multiple exposure" in digital video, this is about as close as I can get to the purity of a medium format camera and actual film.

What interests me about this work is the dialectic between complexity and simplicity, and the moment before something becomes illegible/not understandable/irrelevant. Sometimes these are totally readable, sometimes they cross way over the line of illegibility, and sometimes they hit that right moment and become really interesting. Even though I am still in the "making" (rather than analyzing) stage of my research, I do see how these could get extended into something more considered.
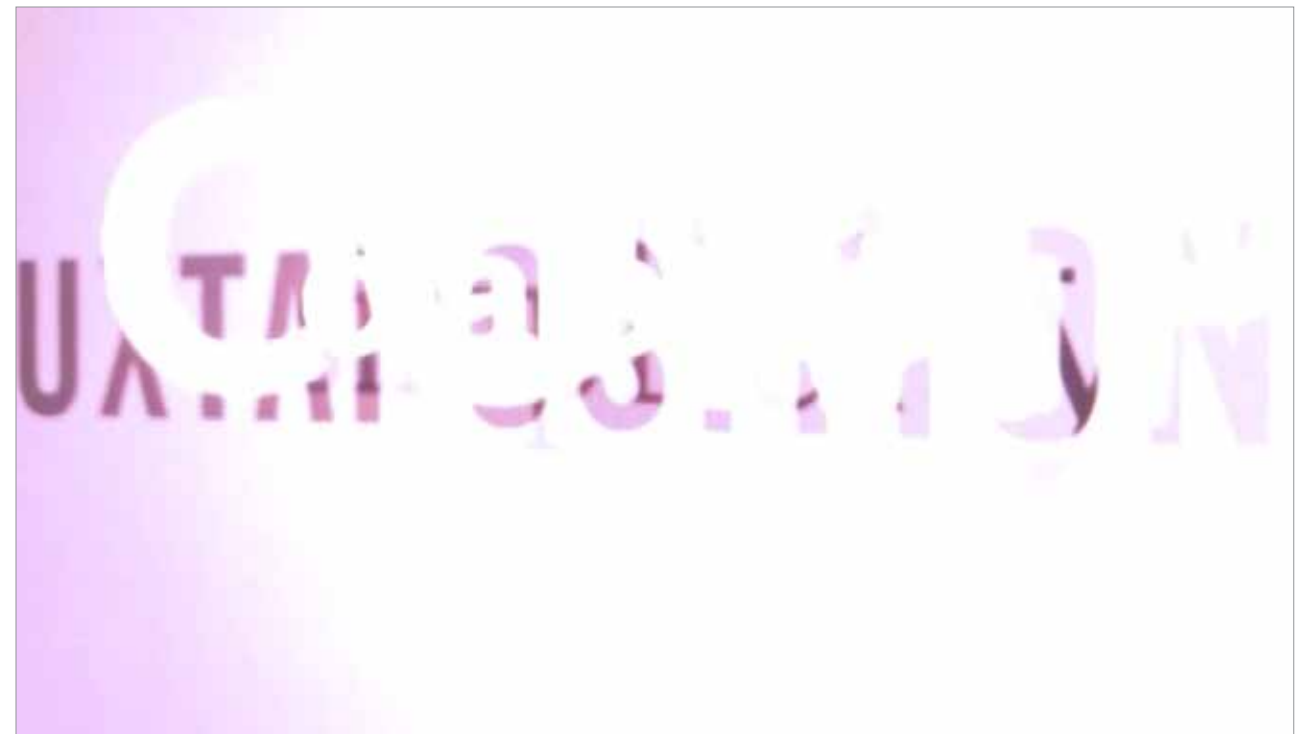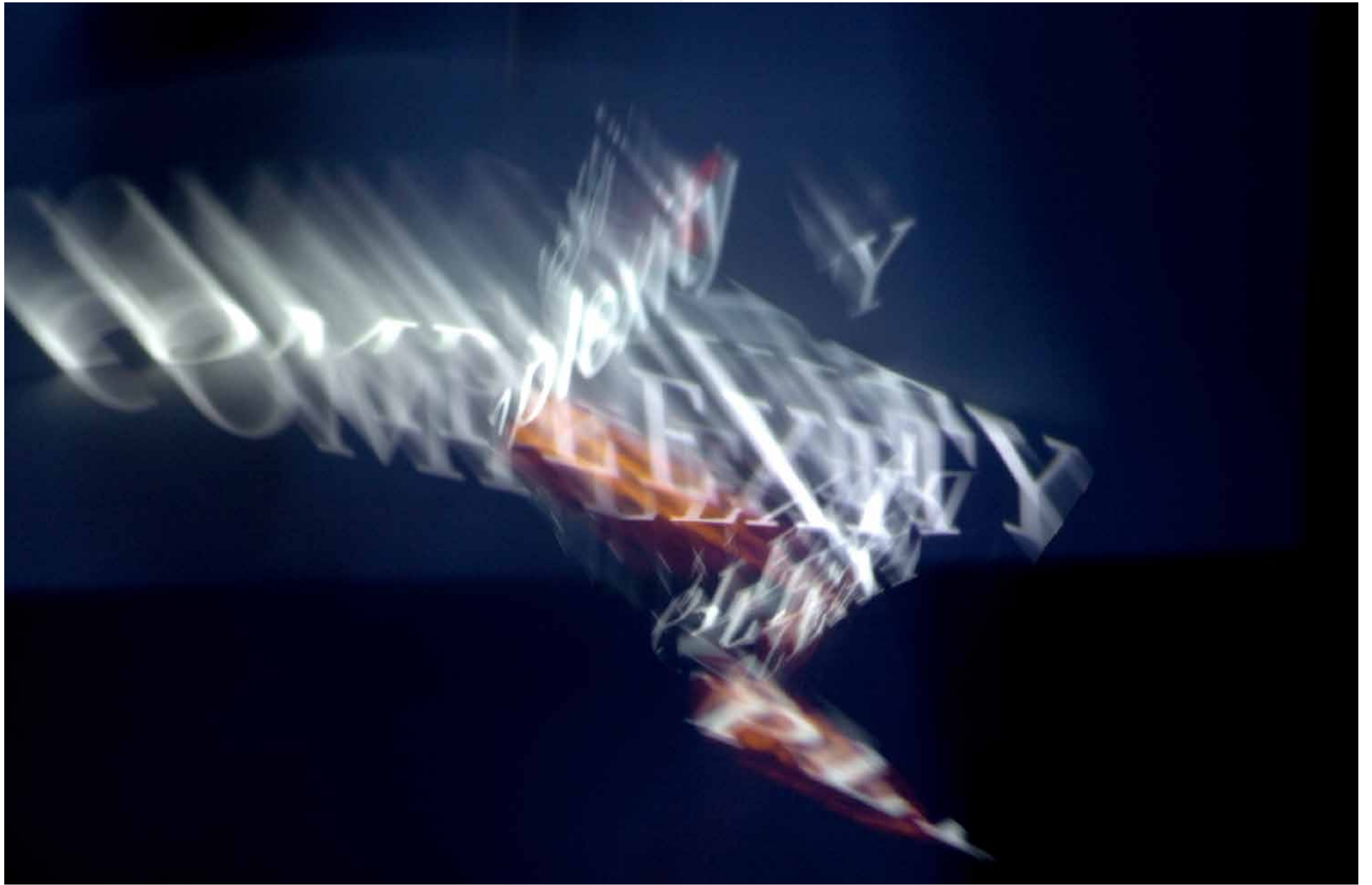
The words *juxtapose*, and *complexity* were digitally projected onto moving paper and captured using long-exposure photography.
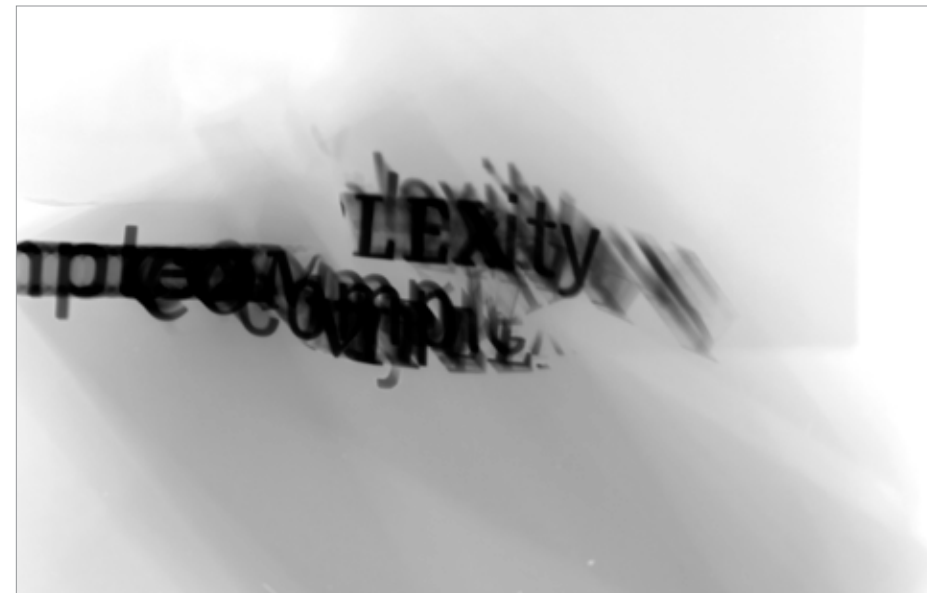
CHARRETTE

A semester long investigation of thesis related topics.

Emergence, noun: the process of coming into being, or of becoming important or prominent; the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.

Synthesis, noun: combination or composition, particularly the combination of ideas to form a theory or system; the final stage in the process of dialectical reasoning, in which a new idea resolves the conflict between thesis and antithesis.

Fortuity, noun: a chance occurrence, the state of being controlled by chance rather than design; luck.

Response, noun: a verbal or written answer, a reaction to something; how a mechanical or electrical device responds to a stimulus or range of stimuli; something offered in return.

METHOD

This independent study will consist of periods of making followed by periods of thinking.

Charrettes last for 24 days (about three and a half weeks) and will be where the activity of exploring my thesis happens. Starting with an initial investigation — the simple activity of looking at basic typographic form, it is expected that each investigation will lead to the next.

Reflections last for four days and take place immediately after a charrette. During each reflection I will write about the activities of the charrette. I will think about what I have made, what I have thought about, what questions I have asked and trued to answer and what new questions have arisen. These reflections will be posted under the "thesis" section of this site.

DELIVERABLES

There are no specific deliverables, however all work will be clearly and thoroughly documented photographically and in writing. Each investigation will be published on my MFA web site for discussion with Tom Wedell and my committee.

INVESTIGATION ONE

As a starting point, I attempted to find typographic form in non-typographic motion, in this case, film. These are macro-photography shots of the films Stop Making Sense and The Rules Of Attraction taken off of the screen of a laptop from an inch or two away.
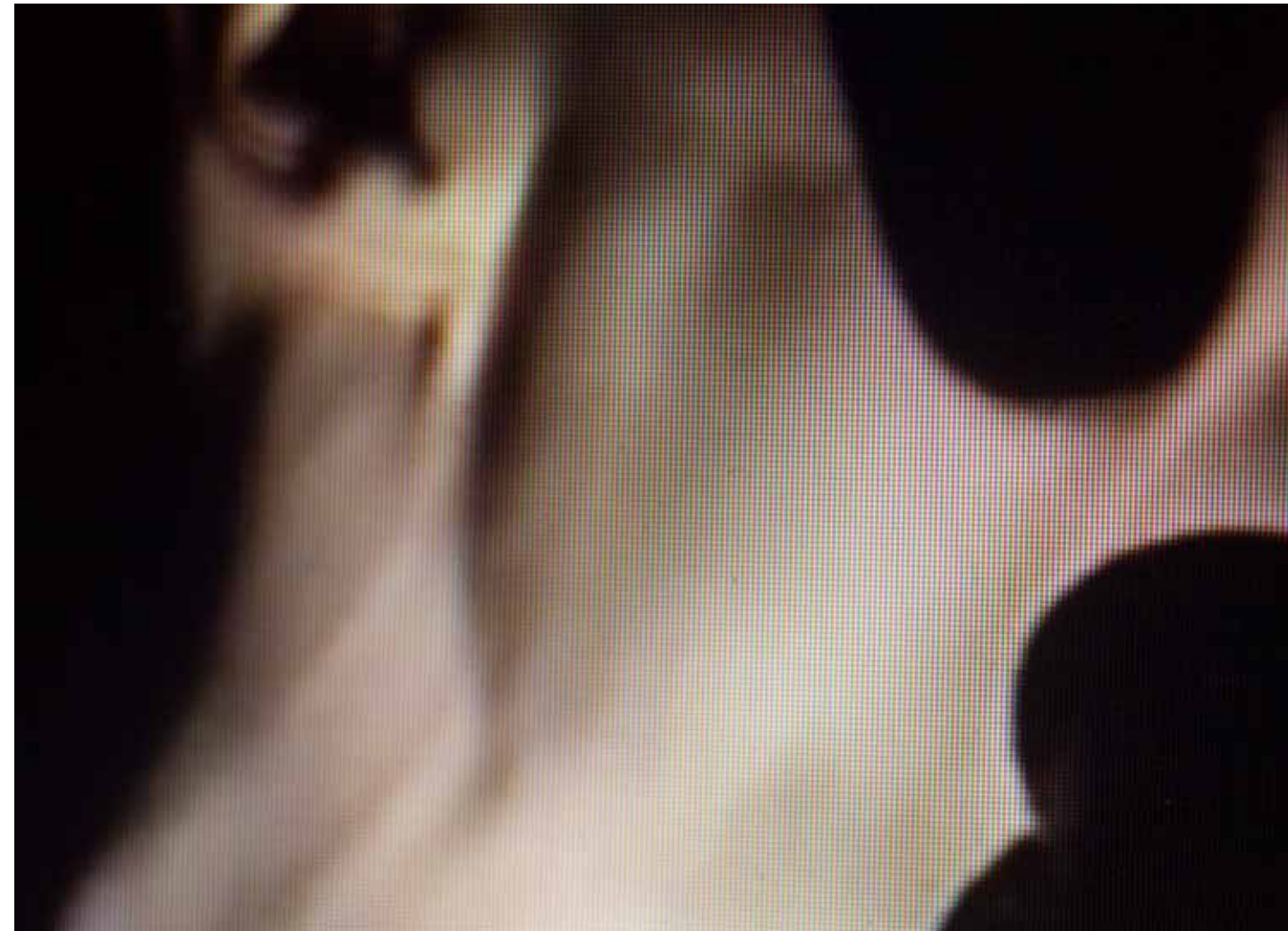
NEW URBANISM AND THE DÉRIVE

I live every day in urbanism, or, more specifically, New Urbanism. Even if you don't think you know what New Urbanism is, you do. New Urbanism is a way of planning communities that take the best parts of the "small town" and replicate it in new construction. Some of the tenants of New Urbanism are more walking, less driving. Small front lawns and narrow streets. No house is more than a five minute walk from the nearest public green space. Neighborhoods all have easy access to a central square with food and retail. The idea is to promote a community of people living together, not to isolate people behind fences and single-family homes with giant yards and private pools. Seaside, Florida is an archetypal example. Did you see the film *The Truman Show*? That was filmed in, and accurately represents, Seaside. My New Urbanism are the lofts at Tobacco Row. Redone, revitalized and renewed loft style apartments built on the backs of the cancer makers. We have beautiful courtyards with pools. Safe parking, scenic walks. 24/7 maintenance and climate controlled apartments. Ironically, the last thing it feels like is a community. Nobody talks to anyone else in the halls. We do not know any of our neighbors. But... it is quiet. Safe. Clean. Beautiful. I even feel hip living in the "bohemian" area of Richmond. Where all the cool people are. 14 foot ceilings! Exposed brick! Central air! Fresh cookies in the lobby! And nobody bothers you, to a fault.

I went to San Francisco a couple of years ago and visited a close friend (who is, coincidentally, an architect specializing in urban planning.) We spent a few days seeing what there was to see, and ended up in a neighborhood called the Marina in the northern part of the city. Beautiful shops, restaurants and stores. Nice streets, good looking, well dressed people. Mercedes and Lexus float up and down Chestnut Street. Cool coffee shops and knickknacks to buy, tucked between Gaps and Banana Republics. To sum it up: they even have an Apple Store there. But my friend and his wife hated it. "It's fake here" they said with that

arrogant air that ex-New Yorkers seem to have about anyplace that is not New York. "It's not real" he said, shaking his head in shame.

Debord says that "tourism is the chance to go and see what has been made trite" (thesis 168) — which is probably true, and yet, we flock as tourists to these places of triteness, including the Marina District and redone loft apartments. We know Disney World is not real, yet we go by the millions. We know that the T-shirt shops, overpriced restaurants, and audacious bars in Cancun, Mexico are merely constructs catering to tourists, yet we do not stay away. My lofts are aimed solely at the yuppies, and that is who lives there. We all know places like this, and are often snarky about how fake they are. Yet we want more of them, and enjoy being in them. The same way we enjoy a film, we enjoy the constructed realities. It is about living the fantasy, the dream. However, unlike a film, my cool, hip loft apartment is real. I sleep there every night. So the question has to be — if we think it's real, is it still fake? I love living in my fake, constructed tourist haven. Does that mean I am not really experiencing living? Would I more accurately experience life if I lived in a row house in the Fan?

Debord and The Situationists believe we do not really experience urbanism as it exists now. We need to have more fluid, playful and exploratory experiences in our lives where we live and work. We should live in places that provide a more experiential existence that stimulate creativity and emotion. I find this idea interesting, and wonder if I feel more liberated and creative in my Richmond yuppie loft construct than I did in a 2-family duplex on the East Side of Providence? What I realize is that I feel equally creative in both places. Upon reflection, I think the reason being is that in both places I have a relationship with a design school. RISD there, VCU here. As a designer, the unitary urbanism ideal seems to be academia. Not the buildings, or the institution, or the campus, but the mindset. The questioning and the collective dialog of designers and artists.

I can only assume Debord would roll over in his grave at this thought. Visual designers like us work in representation, and Debord postulates that "all that was once directly lived has become mere representation" (thesis 1). The much hated (at least by Debord) "spectacle" is our bread and butter. To me, we (designers) are living an incredibly unitary urbanist experience, because the academics of design, and especially of graduate school, is entirely based on the dérive: wandering about and allowing the topography of your interests and experiences guide you to new interests and experiences.
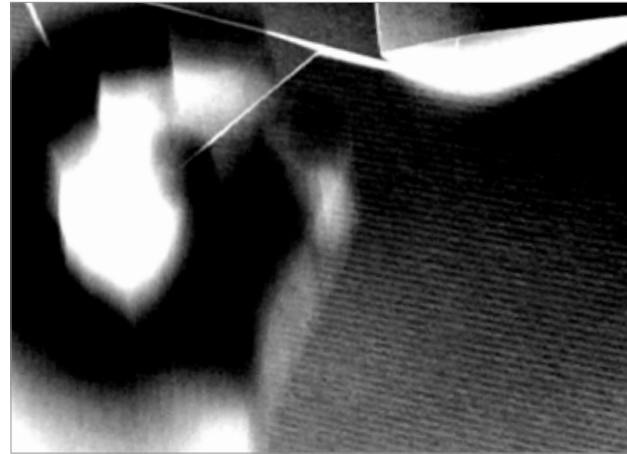
INVESTIGATION TWO

This investigation involves looking for typographic letterforms existing in video. I digitally shot a few minutes of my hands manipulating random pieces of paper and index cards. The video was shot without intentionally creating letterforms. After simple color correction, the fortuitous and typographic nature of video exposes itself.
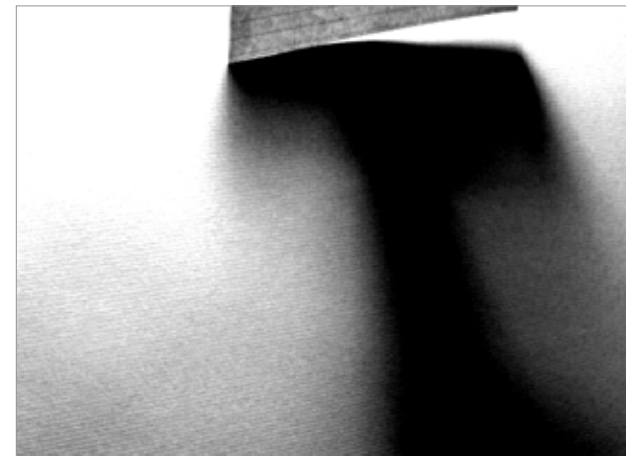
INVESTIGATION THREE

Using paper prints of the letterforms from Investigation Two, I am looking at how much control or constraint in a design is too much; when does too much design make something less engaging? I have collaged together the letters into words, using freeform ripped edges (less constraint), linear cuts that attempt to follow the letterforms (some constraint), and vertical straight cuts to each side of the letterforms (more constraint).
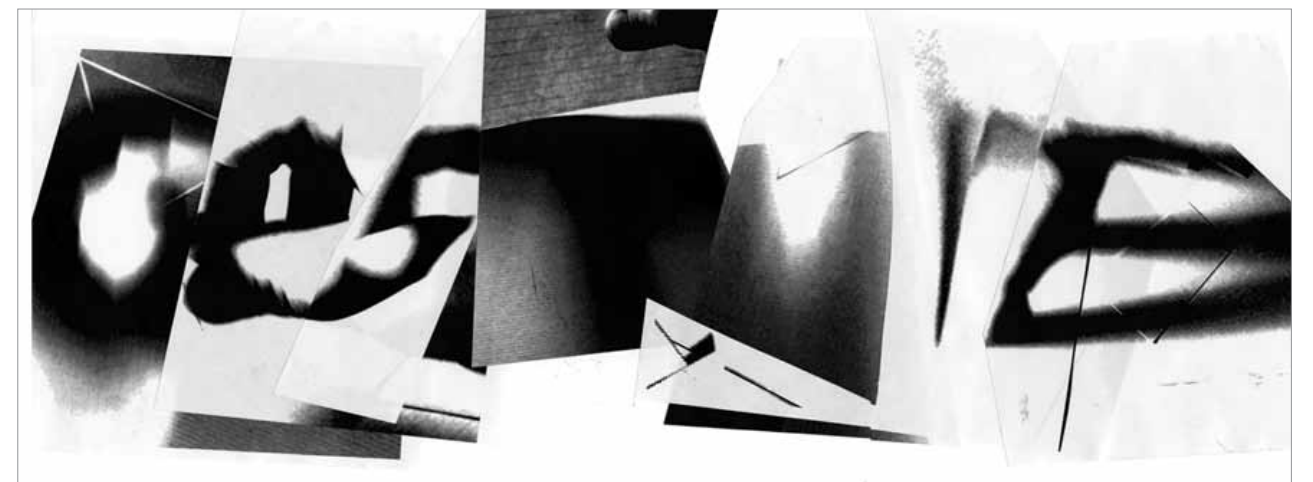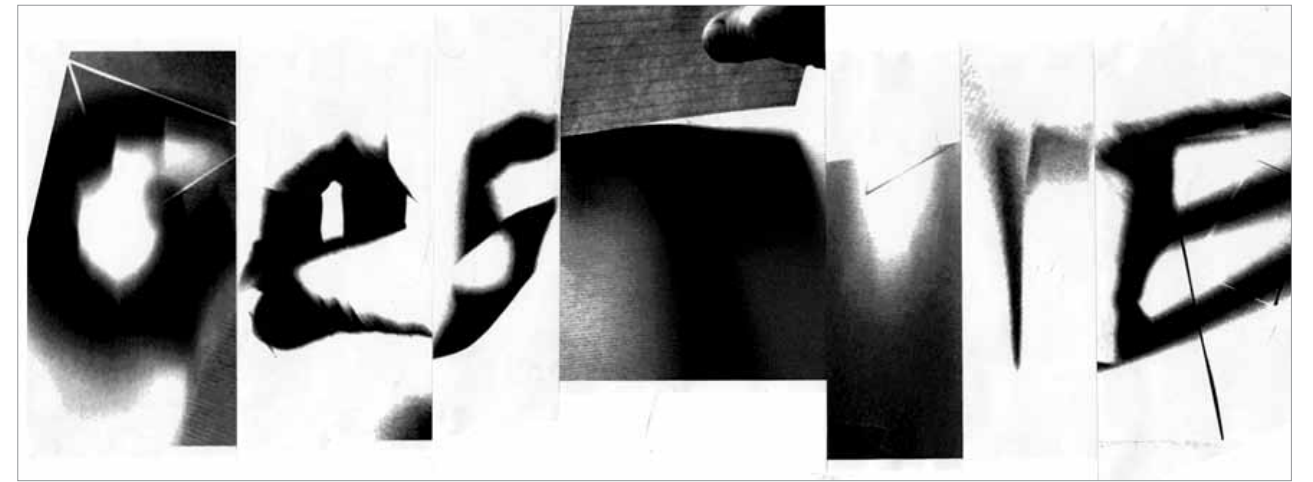
HERO WORSHIP

As designers, we are given too many definitive heroes. We are so often told who we should like, who we should admire, who we should deify. One of the more prevalent criticisms of architecture critic Herbert Muschamp is his adoration of some of the big name "starchitects." An adoration that blinds him to their shortcomings. This kind of hero worship is prevalent in all design disciplines, not just architecture, and I think it is a problem.

The best and worst part about design is that it is at once so abstract and so concrete, so intellectual and so visceral. The supposedly brilliant Paul Rand once said, "Design is so simple. That's why it is so complicated." This tremendous ambiguity allows nearly anyone to become the next totem of admiration for the design masses since there are no clearly defined metrics to good and bad. This is also part of what makes design so great, but I digress. In school you are taught whom to like and whom to appreciate. Moholy-Nagy, Lissitzky, Cassandre, Kalman, Glaser, Vignelli, Scher, Sagmeister, Lupton, Bierut, et al… these names and those like them are defined by your teachers as "the greats" and you as the student are expected to worship them. In many ways they are beyond criticism, they are only to be accepted as brilliant.

I have a problem with this for the same reasons I have problems with numbered lists of inspiration: there is no intimacy. You, the student or designer, are not required to know why these people are on a pedestal beyond what you are told. You do not have to date them. You do not have to see their dirty underwear and smell their bad breath in the morning. You only see the truncated, edited, spit shined pasteurized results of a portion of their work. To really understand and appreciate a designer you must know what is in their head; you must know the work they have done that is not in the books; you must know their worries and fears. You need to see the cracks in the armor to fully see how a designer gets to the great moments in their work.

I am far from immune to this disease of worship; I have many design heroes who were defined to me as such when I was a student, and my habit of limited criticism of their work has stuck. Like a smoker who knows they need to quit but lights up another, I know it is bad for me, but I do it anyway. However, I do try and be aware that there are no pedestals. There are no

sacred chambers of unflawed brilliance in design. Every designer has, if not bad, then at least much less good work that we are not seeing. Unfortunately, sometimes it is the much less good work that is being portrayed as genius.

Of course there is a catch to all of this: some work out there really is extraordinary. And sometimes the extraordinary work is being done by the starchitects and the starchidesigners. My concern is one of blind hero worship, especially to the highly impressionable undergraduate design students. I have always encouraged my own design students to get in touch with any living designers they admire — everyone has e-mail today, so why not? Find the person behind the print. It is important for design teachers today to be less evangelical and more measured in naming names and showing work. One of my favorite things about graduate school so far is a more neutral attitude towards precedent: Here is a name of a designer. You may like him. You may not. Go look him up and decide for yourself.

I fully respect that you may admire someone's work. I am not telling you not to. I am only asking you to know why you admire them, and "because my teacher said so" is not a good enough reason.
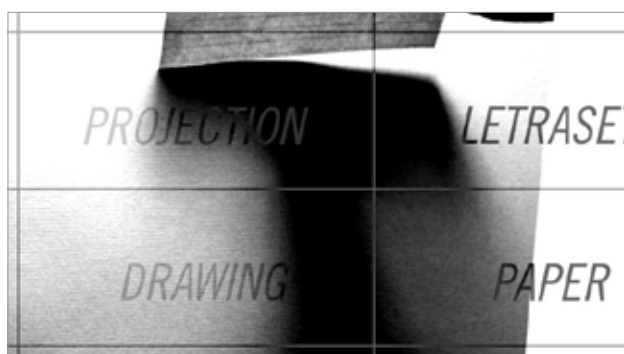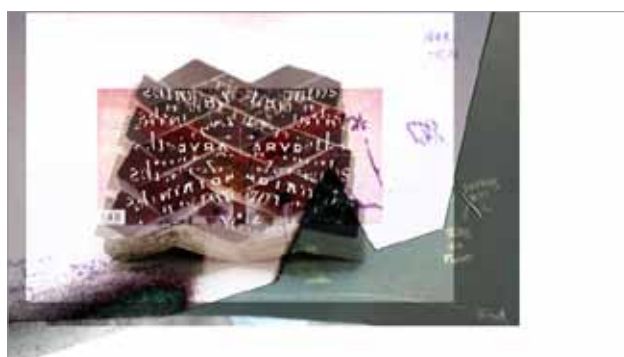
This investigation involved setting up a program (or algorithms) that would search for images on my computer with the following criteria: less than one year old, under 1MB in size, and start with a certain letter. Once those images have been found, I programmed a Photoshop action to composite the corresponding group of images with the appropriate letter from Investigation Two. Each image is made of three randomly chosen images from each letter group.
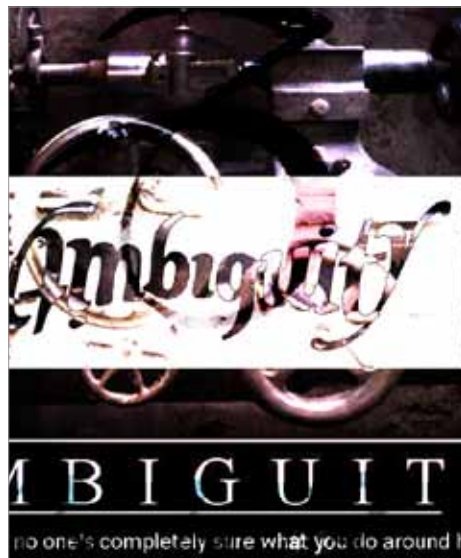
This investigation is an extension of the previous one, although it involves exploring the nature of portraiture and specifically "seeding" the programmatic process. Using the following search terms: *Michel Gondry*, *László Moholy-Nagy*, and *ambiguity*, images were gathered from the top ten results of each name (or word) on Google image search, and processed through a similar program as Investigation Four. I also ran a second set of some of the images that were all converted to black & white instead of leaving them as their native color.

What is particularly interesting and unexpected about this set of investigations is how different the images are that emerge from an identical set of constraints. Non-literal images tend to be the most interesting, which is why the compositions I am most delighted by are the Moholy-Nagy set. Instead of photos of the designer himself, they are almost all of his work. More straightforward, predictable images — like photographs of Gondry — are more awkward as we try and see a face or a smile that is distorted by the process. The already poorly realized cartoons and illustrations of the word *ambiguity* result in particularly awkward compositions.

INVESTIGATION SIX

Deliberate editing and control were employed in these compositions in order to evaluate or determine typography's role in altering visual expression. I used a random word generator to pick two words (*feast* and *tax*, *lift* and *mirror*) and used the words in Google image search. I selected images to use in a quick edit and then processed them through Photoshop, this time paying a bit of attention to size and placement. I also manually changed the layers to achieve the most engaging result.
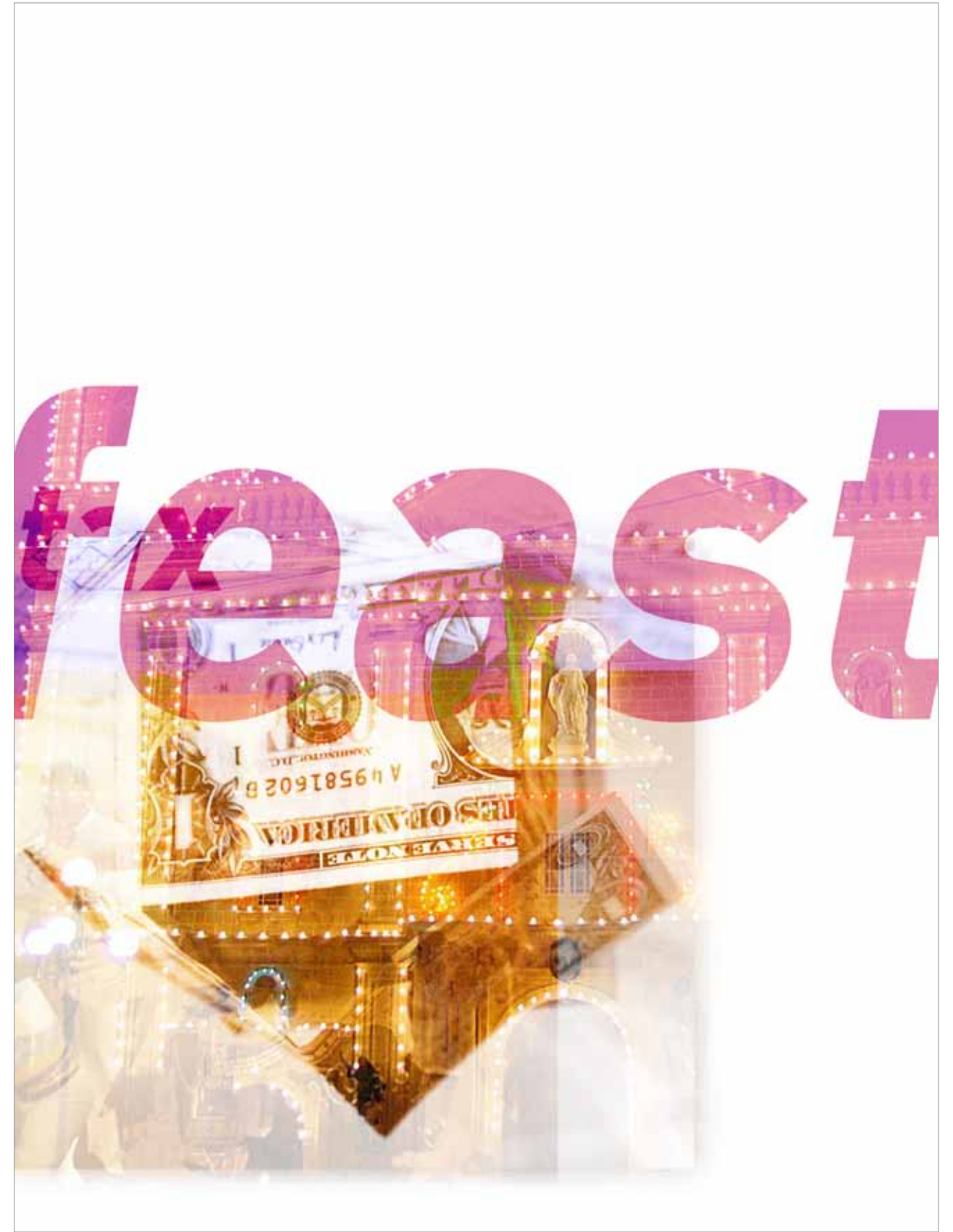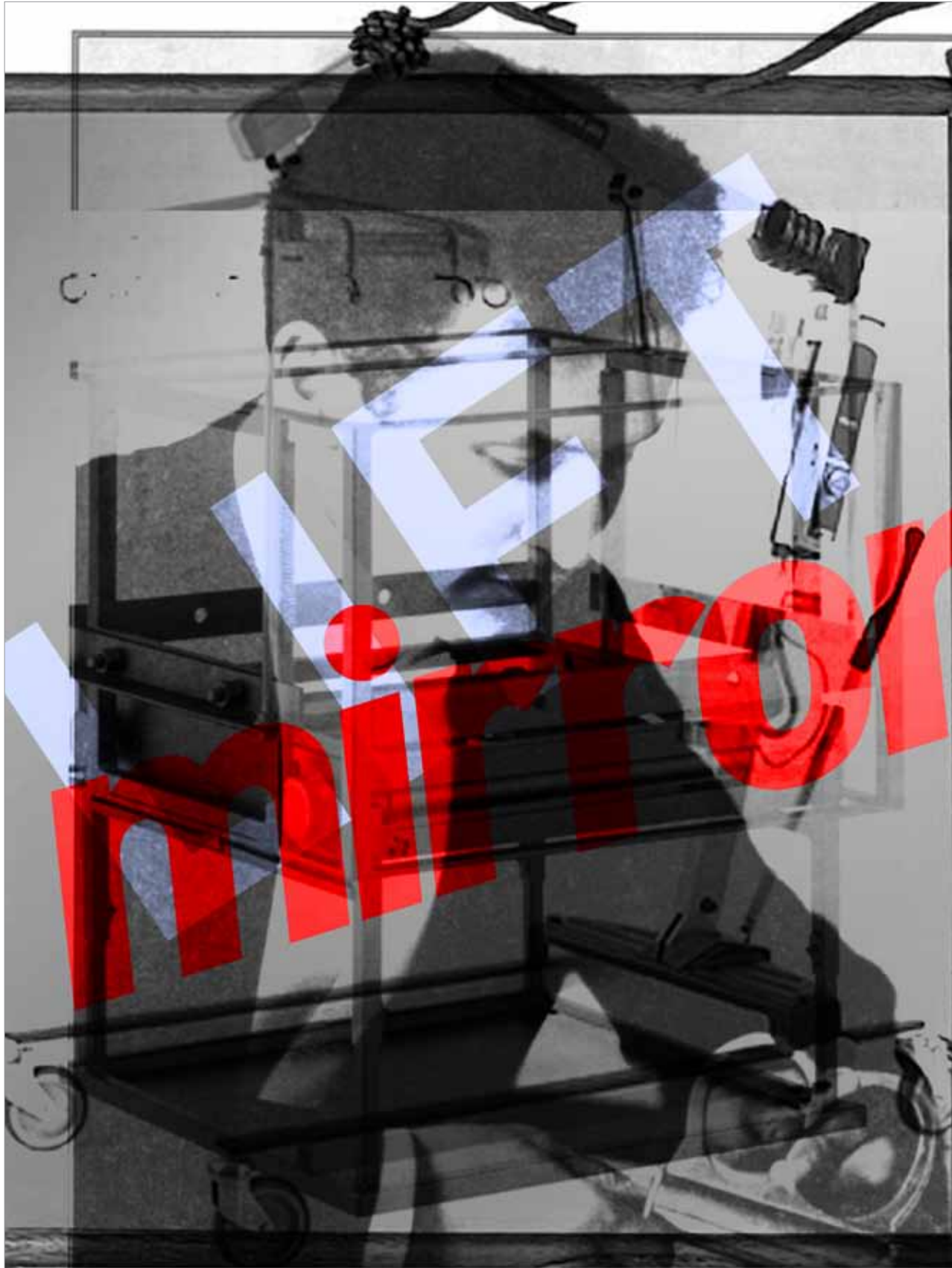
IN WHICH I WRITE A LETTER TO MYSELF IN THE FUTURE FROM MYSELF IN THE PAST

Dear Future Mitch,

This is Mitch (you) in graduate school. Right now, I am in our first year of the MFA in Visual Communications program at Virginia Commonwealth University, and I am writing this letter to remind you to think about your role as a designer, educator, and critic. I recently finished Sandra Wheeler's Survey of Design Criticism seminar, and she suggested I do this. Sandy says "hi," by the way.

It is time to consider a big question: how are you going to wear all three hats of designer, educator, and critic? In some ways they are nearly the same thing, and in other ways they are vastly different. You need to decide what it is to be a design critic who is also a practicing designer and a design educator. You read many things in that seminar class, written by many critics from the greats like Walter Benjamin and Herbert Muschamp, to the newer voices like Rob Giampetro and Alexandra Lange. It is time to ask ourself this: what are these critics doing? What are they contributing? This is what we wrestle with: the difference between talking big and doing big. By definition a critic is someone who expresses a judgement of value. A critic is someone who casts an opinion on someone else's work. It is in a critic's very nature not to create, but to judge. Is this valuable? Is this valuable to the same extent the creation of work is? Do you have to be a designer to be a good design critic?

It is easy to say that a critic is simply a person with an opinion and a medium to broadcast their judgement, but criticism is more than that. Good critics, valuable critics, critics who have something to say that is of significant interest, are far more than just people with egos and big mouths. A good critic has a depth of knowledge and an understanding of context that makes what they say not just a personal opinion, but more of a researched, scrutinized thesis about that which they critique. For example, look at something as common as movie reviews. There is a tremendous difference between your roommate who hated the latest Judd Apatow film, and a critic such as Roger Ebert, who has such an immense depth of knowledge about film and culture that his opinions are not just his, but the opinions of everyone who has ever come before him. Ebert is merely the current mouthpiece of a long history of film and cinema. Without Muybridge, Eisenstein, Capra, Hitchcock, Coppola, et al, Ebert would simply not exist. A critic like Ebert is a person with a tremendously informed opinion.

What about making? Ebert could not make a brilliant film any more than Muschamp could design a building, yet they are both important critics in their fields. I think of them as the control, the surface against which the makers bounce their ideas off of. Critics provide the accountability that is needed to make good work better and see bad work more clearly. The value of a critic of this caliber is not one of doing it better themselves but of helping those who do, do better. Through critiques by Michael Kimmelman and Daniel Mendelsohn, we can understand what is good and what is bad, what is working and what is not, what is engaging and what is vapid, what is yes and what is no. There was a time when I felt that only those who make have a right to judge that which is made, but I have changed this opinion. Some of the best critics you and I have had as a design student have not been excellent designers, but rather excellent critics of design.

You wear two more hats, Mitch: you are also a designer and teacher. How does integrating criticism into your professional work change the game for you? Think back to our seminar class, what were many of the discussions about? Complaining. Intelligent, interesting complaining based on thought and reflection, but complaining none the less. We are all aware of the shortcomings in our profession. You and I have written about it more than once — remember that whole @AngryPaulRand thing we did? Unlike a Steven Heller or a Rick Poynor, in that seminar class we simply did not have the breadth of knowledge or the research to be really, truly informed critics. Our criticism, good and interesting as some of it may be, came down to a personal opinion based on a small amount of anecdotal evidence. We did not have a thoroughly researched, deep vertical knowledge of the subject. And like everyone else, we like to complain more than we like to praise, and complain we did.

However, you and I have something the big-name critics do not: the talent and skill to make design. This puts us in a very interesting position because we can criticize though our making. We can approach design and the process of creating with a critical perspective. How we look at what we make, how we make design decisions and how we interact with other designers and clients can be a critique of the profession itself. What we are not doing in graduate school is the same thing we did before graduate school. We are looking to infuse our investigative and introspective attitude of thinking into the work we do. Being critical is a part of that. We manifest our opinions of design through our designs. How exactly do we do this? I am just starting to try to figure this out. ~~I do know that I approach design now in ways that are conscious and intentional. You and I have~~ ~~never just "let stuff happen" even if we like to think we did. No, we have always created the conditions to help make stuff happen.~~ We have written about best practices of good design and designers, and these ideas are always in the back of our head when we sit down to start making, affecting what we do.

And what about education? The students we teach are individuals, and we do not want to merely push and evangelize our own ideas onto them. Criticism is born of an opinion, and we ask students to have opinions of their own. We push students to take a critical stance on their work and their education. A large part of what we are developing during graduate school and beyond is a refinement of our own ideas and opinions. We become more informed, gain deeper knowledge, and provide our students the same. What is really important — the thing to keep in mind during and after graduate school — is to constantly develop and refine our opinions. We cannot be one-dimensional. Being a rule-breaker just for the sake of breaking the rules is one of our biggest fears, and a quality we do not want to pass on to our students. This is why in our role as an educator we relish the opportunity for research. Remember one of your favorite lessons from graduate school: you do not want to be critical just for the sake of criticism itself, so you need to intimately know what you are reacting against

Mitch, maybe our role as a designer, educator, and critic is to be a dissenter. We have found time and again that taking risks, going against the flow, asking the unasked questions has always paid off. Unfortunately, just being different is no longer good enough for us. Now we need to find out why being different is beneficial to us as a designer. Deep reflection on how and why we choose to disagree with design is one way we will act as a critic in our profession. Maybe this analysis of design will provide the very basis for our thesis research (you know what we did for our thesis, right now I do not). The catch is that I do not know how to do any of this yet. Maybe in your time you have it all down, but right now I am excited and more than a little frightened about where I am heading. Discomfort aside, I know that design is something we care about deeply, and much like John F. Kennedy's attitude towards heading to the moon, we are designers not because it is easy, but because it is hard.

Thanks for listening,
Graduate Student Mitch
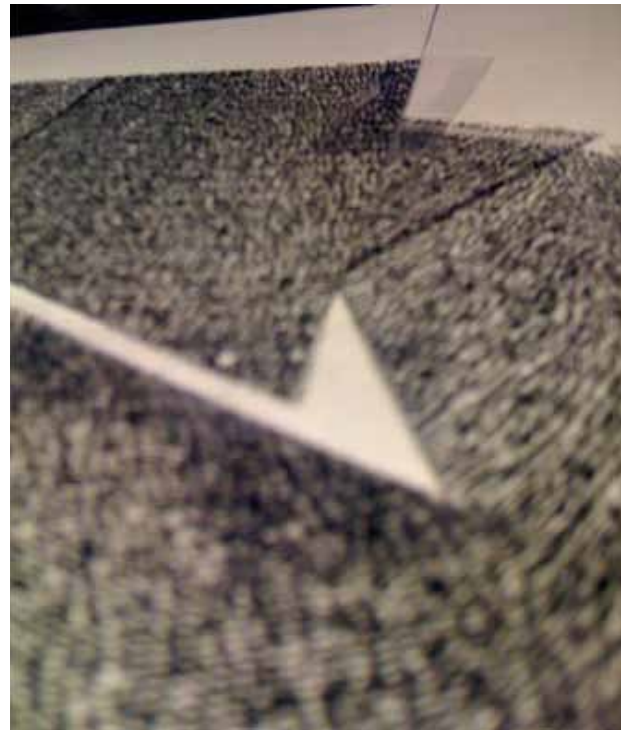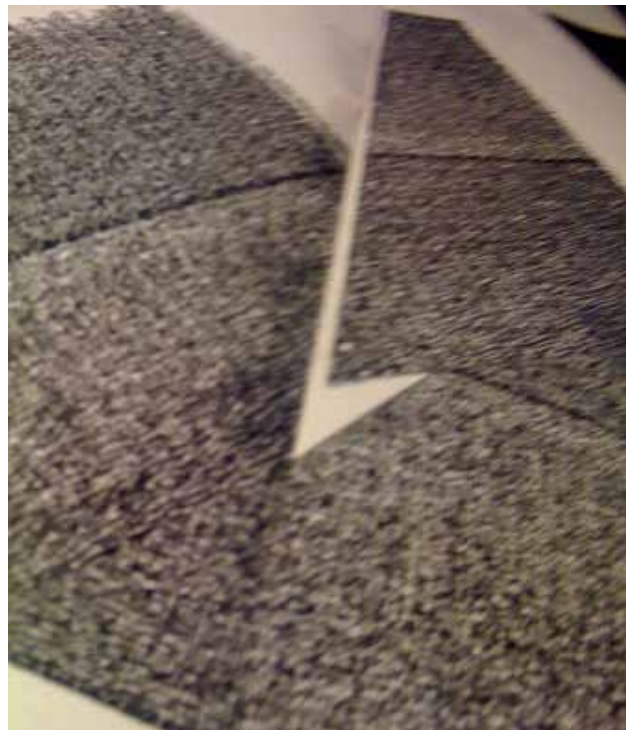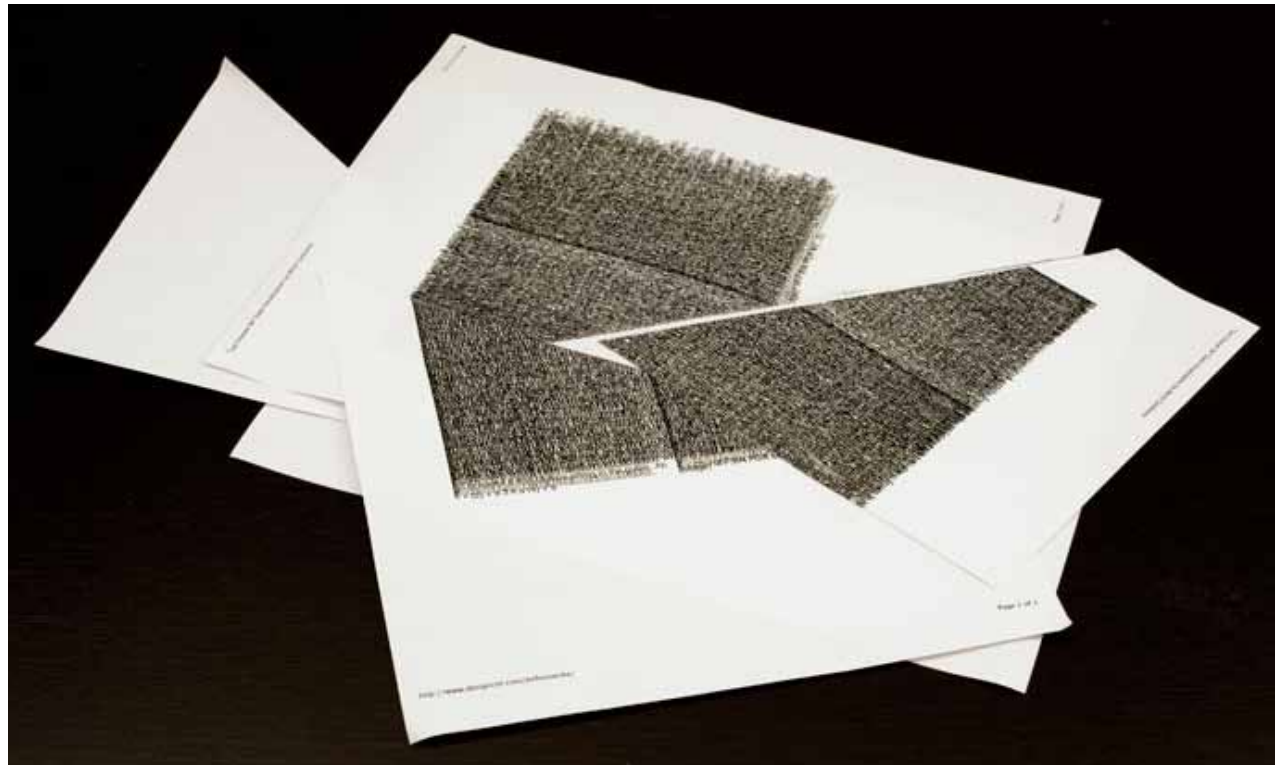
INVESTIGATION SEVEN

This investigation directly stems from my Typo-Photo class at vcu. Since that class is a fertile testing ground for my thesis ideas, I decided to engage myself in the same assignment as my students. My three randomly chosen limitations are 36 degree angles, I must change mediums 5 times, and make it useless. I decided to use my "Let Forever Be" information visualization from my workshop class as the source material for this investigation. My process was as follows:

1) I called up the website with my visualization on it.
2) I then printed that to letter size paper (medium change one).
3) I determined what a 36 degree angle was, and collaged the paper together into a composition.
4) I then photographed this collage (medium change two).
5) After bringing these photos into the computer, I composited them in Photoshop (medium change three).
6) I then printed them back out on my laser printer (medium change four).
7) I bound them into an accordion book (medium change five).
8) My final step was to then bind the book on both sides, rendering it unreadable, and therefore, useless.
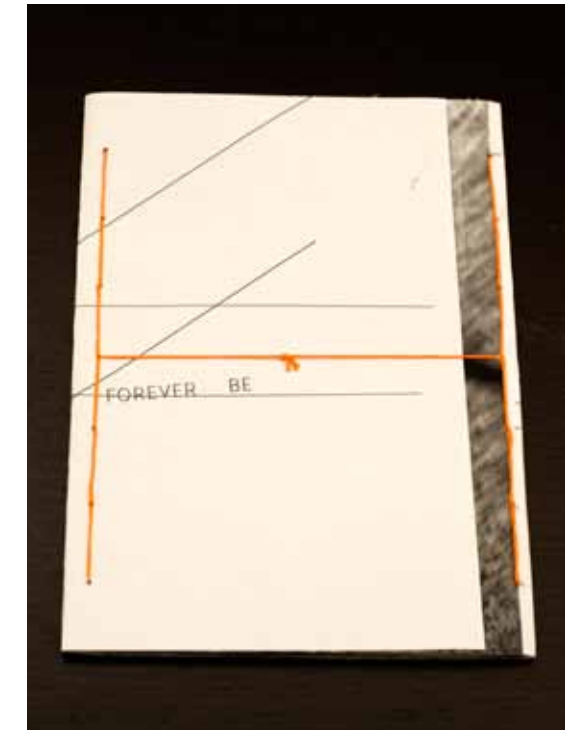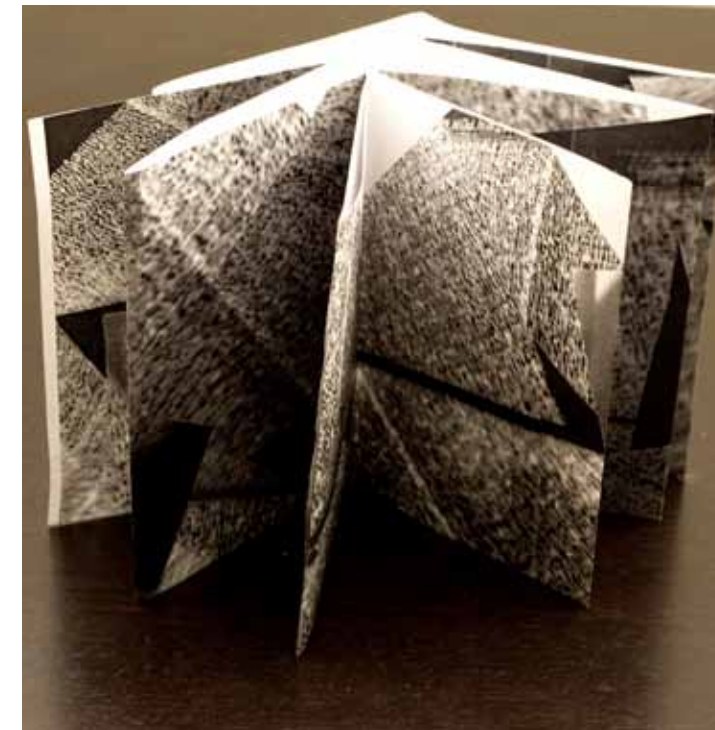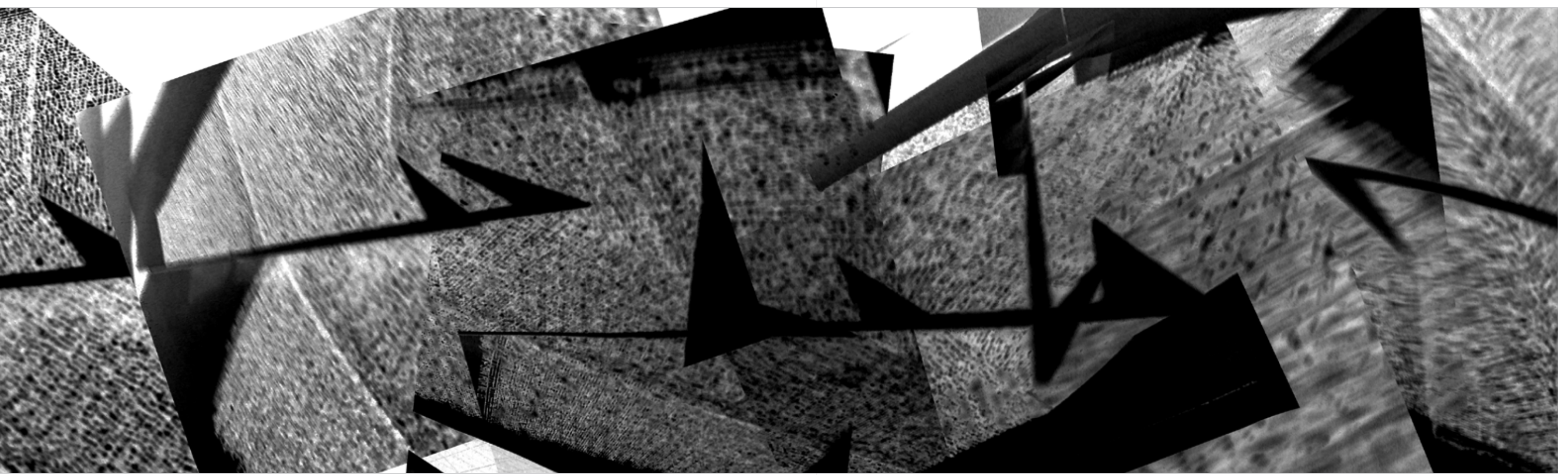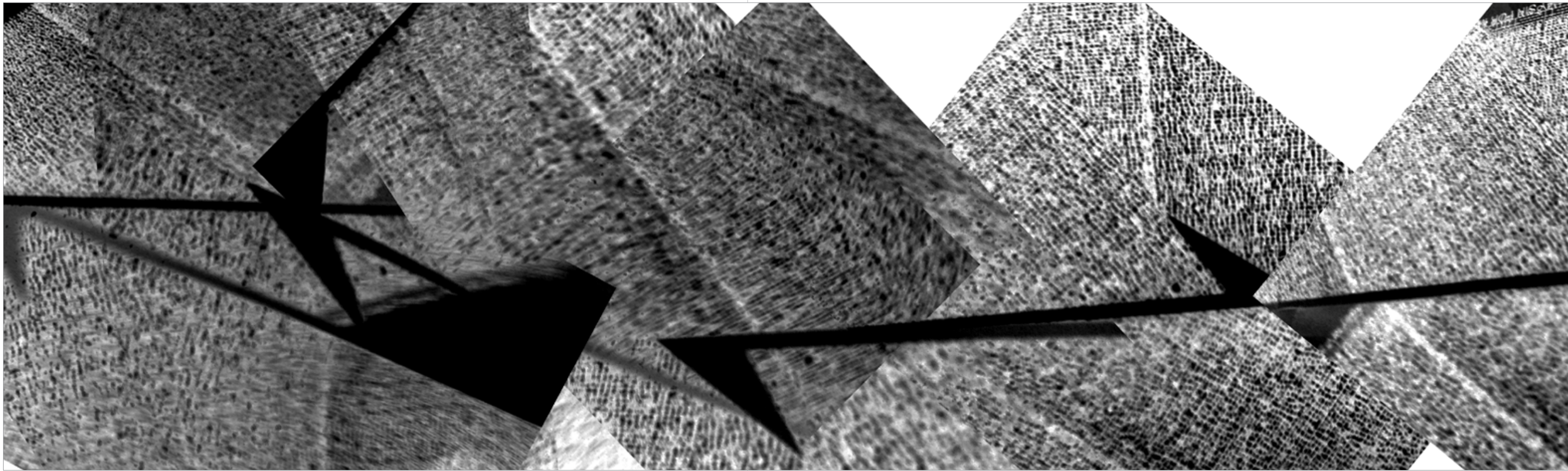
HUNTING THE PUNCTUM

As a practitioner, student, and teacher of design, I am always on the hunt for the next punctum. Numerous kinds of visual expression interest me, and I am constantly seeing new things that engage my attention. However, relatively few things I see really grab me — really puncture through my distant reaction of genial admiration to grab me and slap me across the face — this is the punctum. The punctum is what makes you get weak in the knees when you see a piece of work. The punctum makes you want to rip that piece of design off the wall and rub it all over yourself because it touches you so deeply.

In many ways the punctum is the x-factor in art and design: unknowable until it happens, unpredictable until it exists, unattainable by preconception. ~~Maybe as I grow as a designer, learn more things, raise my level of awareness, the punctum will be easier to find.~~ Right now the punctum is something I strive to find in every piece of work I make — often unsuccessfully.

Why? Because the punctum is the animal. It is the beast that does not always wish to be caught. It is the elusive fox to my hound. Sometimes I hunt for it for hours, days, even months and it does not show it's face. Its unpredictably is what makes it so alluring; and is partially why I use so much photography in my work. Finding the punctum is much easier with a camera than it is with InDesign. My punctui do not live in grids and the rule of thirds. The translation a camera makes of what you shoot with it — especially when using film — can see the punctum hiding in the tall grass.

As a way of making visual work I embrace the unpredictable nature of the camera. I differ from many photographers in this way — when I click the shutter, I am more interested in what I don't know will happen than what I think should happen. To me the perfect image is perfectly imperfect. And inside this imperfection is the lair of the punctum.

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY, *VIEW FROM PONT TRANSBORDEUR, MARSEILLE.* 1929
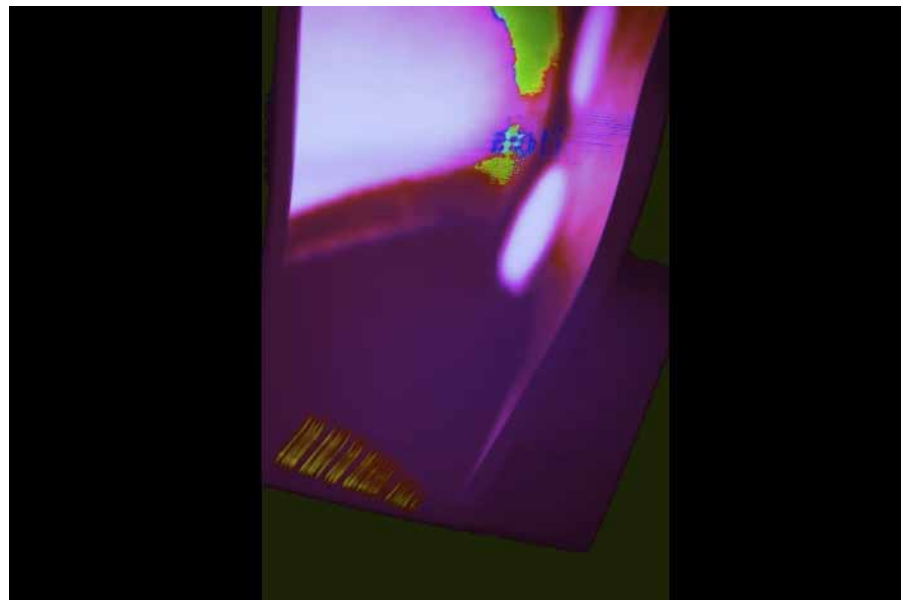
INVESTIGATION NINE

I took every single photograph I generated in making the poster for *The Art of Music Video* and created an animation with them in After Effects to convey the energy and action that happened during the design process. The first piece is untouched, exactly as they came out of my camera. The second piece has color correction applied that is meant to approximate the magenta color palette of the final poster. The third piece are #1 and #2 placed next to each other. The fourth piece is #1 and #2 juxtaposed, 10 frames out of sync and overlaid.

THE BEST CUP OF COFFEE IN THE WORLD

I hate flying. I remember a time when flying was something magical, on the level of being an astronaut, jetting your way to a new place. It was an adventure, but with comfort and even a touch of magic. Sure, flying coach has really never been what I would call *luxurious* by any means, but it was the kind of thing you did not do that often, and you enjoyed it when you did. Looking down on the earth from 30,000 feet is nearly akin to strapping on a Titan rocket and heading off to the moon. Security was no big deal, and you got better food when you took a long flight.

These days, flying is a special kind of hell. The TSA security measures, nearly Orwellian to start with, are now becoming Federally mandated molestation. Flights are later than ever, less comfortable than they were in the past, and everything from getting to the airport to something as simple as changing a flight is ever more a headache. Flying is no longer a thing of wonder, it is a thing of annoyance and discomfort.

Flying does have one thing going for it, however: the coffee. The best coffee in the world is to be found on an airplane in mid-flight. It is not the quality of the beans, (which is usually cheap and generic); it is not the brewing process in a high-altitude pressurized environment (if anything this makes the coffee more bitter and less flavorful); it is not what kind of conveyance the coffee is served in (I never fly first class so my coffee is in a paper cup at best.)

What makes the coffee so fantastically great in midair is the normalcy of it, the simple accessibility of the cup of hot yummy liquid. I have a wonderfully comfortable, wholly intimate conversation with that cup of coffee. It calms me. It makes me feel safe and secure as I sit in my too-narrow seat. I have a synesthetic reaction to that cup of coffee on my tray table as it brings me to a place of routine and control. It helps me to put a cozy bit of calm inside of the turbulence of flying.

That little piece of normalcy in an otherwise wholly abnormal set of circumstances is something I find fascinating about a lot of really interesting design as well. The disconnect between the flying and the coffee makes the coffee that much better by contrasting itself with the context of being in a metal tube traveling hundreds of miles per hour a few miles above the ground. A nugget of clear, comfortable visual or typographic comprehension inside of a complex, chaotic piece of design makes both the comfort and the complexity even more inter-esting; it elevates them both by their contrasts. In many ways, that cup of coffee is how I "get" a piece of design; it is how I start to relate to it. It allows me a point of entry inside of something I have a hard time understanding.

A PROCESS OF ART

It has been said many times that when it comes to art and design, half the fun is getting there; the process of creating is as rewarding as finishing the thing you have created. Process has always been the main focus of a design student's attention while in school, and I think process continues to hold a fetishistic attention by designers who are doing engaging work. An artist like Chuck Close makes monumental pieces of art, but what is particularly interesting is his process for getting to the final piece; his generative ideas of making form and his use of materials are much more rewarding than the final paintings themselves; I suspect especially for him. Artists and designers love process so much because for them, that is when the piece is tangible and allows for a relationship with it. When a piece is completed, their role in its existence stops, or at least changes dramatically. The creator cannot experience the work as a spectator because he is so immersed in its creation.

In a similar but opposite way, the viewer's relationship with the work starts when it is completed. The viewer's process is one of spectatorship instead of creation. Benjamin would say that only the original piece retains its authentic aura, whereas reproductions are bad falsehoods. I say that a reproduction is a reproduction, and the original is the original. A viewer will have one kind of experience looking at a reproduction that is just as valid, albeit potentially different, than seeing the original. The process is altered and you will see a piece differently depending on the context it lives in, but seeing a painting in a book is no more a "false" experience than seeing the original is, the process of spectating is still there. The reproduction can also enhance the original piece. Kimmelman notes how Smithson's work *Jetty* exists as three works: the jetty itself, the film about the jetty, and the writing about the jetty. All three are valid, and all three are engaging as the viewer sees them.

ROBERT SMITHSON, *SPIRAL JETTY.* 1970
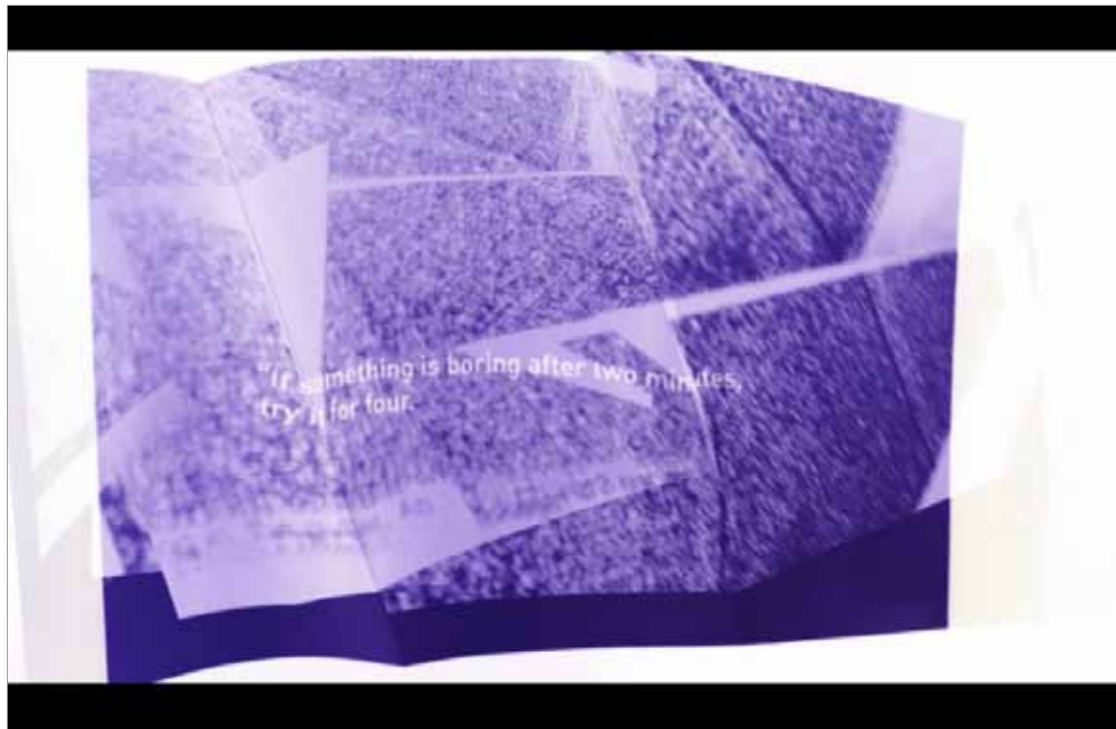
Here I played with the still frame animation technique from Investigation Nine. Using image #5 from Investigation Seven as a background, I projected this John Cage quote onto print-outs of the image:

"If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all." —John Cage.

I find these disappointing — the engaging aberrations of Investigation Nine are lost here — these compositions feel too dry and forced. I feel as though this investigation was too planned, too considered. ~~What makes Investigation Nine so interesting is that the images were never meant to be used that way. Here they were meant to be used only that way, and it results in something less exciting.~~

Composition 1 is a projection of black lettering with a white background, imported and animated as is. Composition 2 is a projection of black lettering with a yellow background, imported and animated as is. Composition 3 is the same footage as Composition 2, only inverted in After Effects.
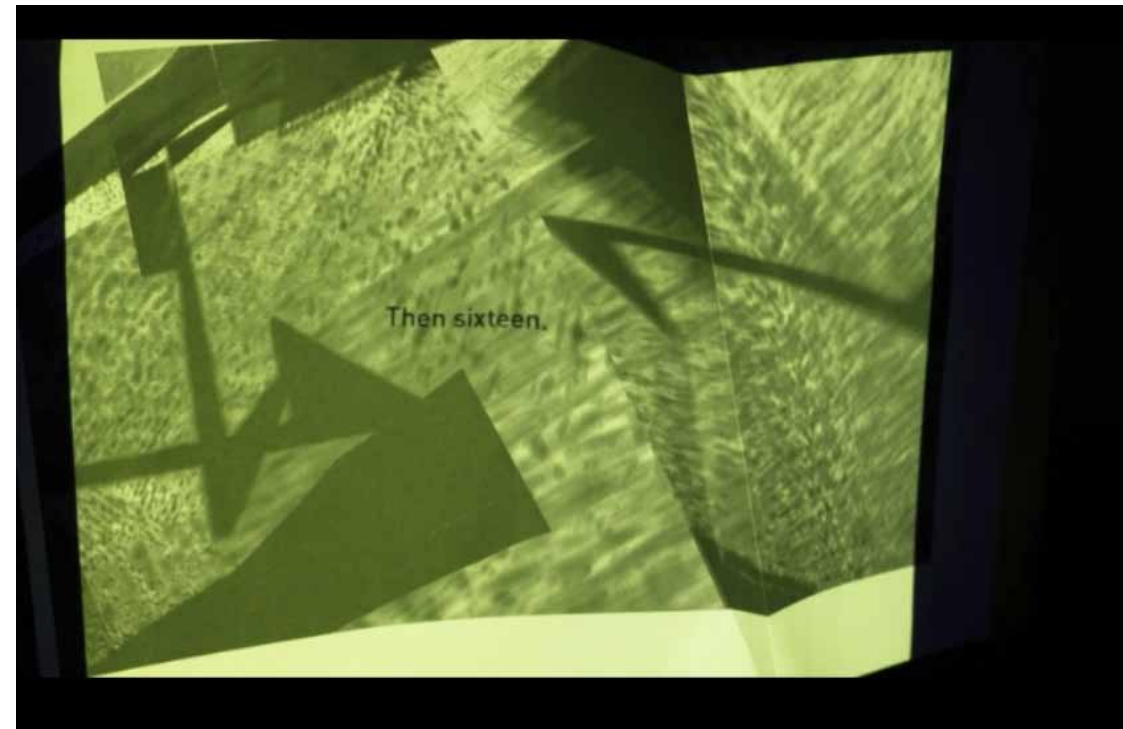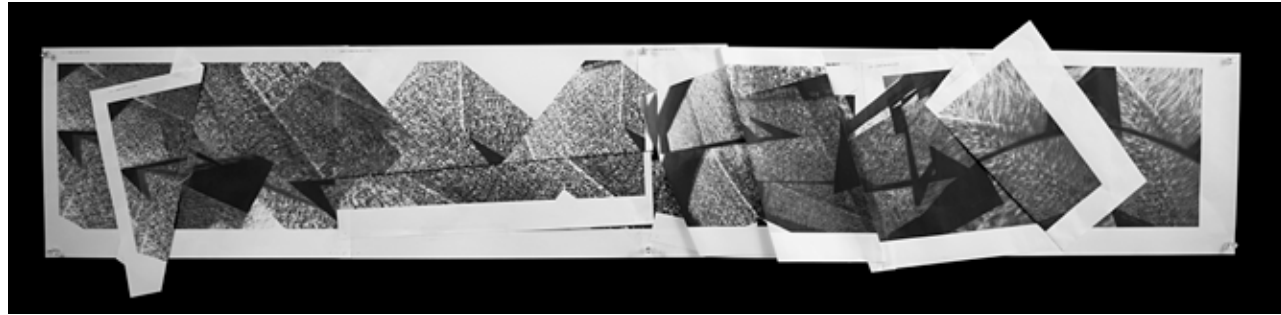
INVESTIGATION ELEVEN

A last set of "unfinished" investigations. I was curious about taking my previous processes off of the computer, and seeing what would happen with scissors and tape. Using some of the parts from Investigation Seven and the John Cage quote from Investigation Ten, a physical structure was created out of word and image that could not be achieved digitally.
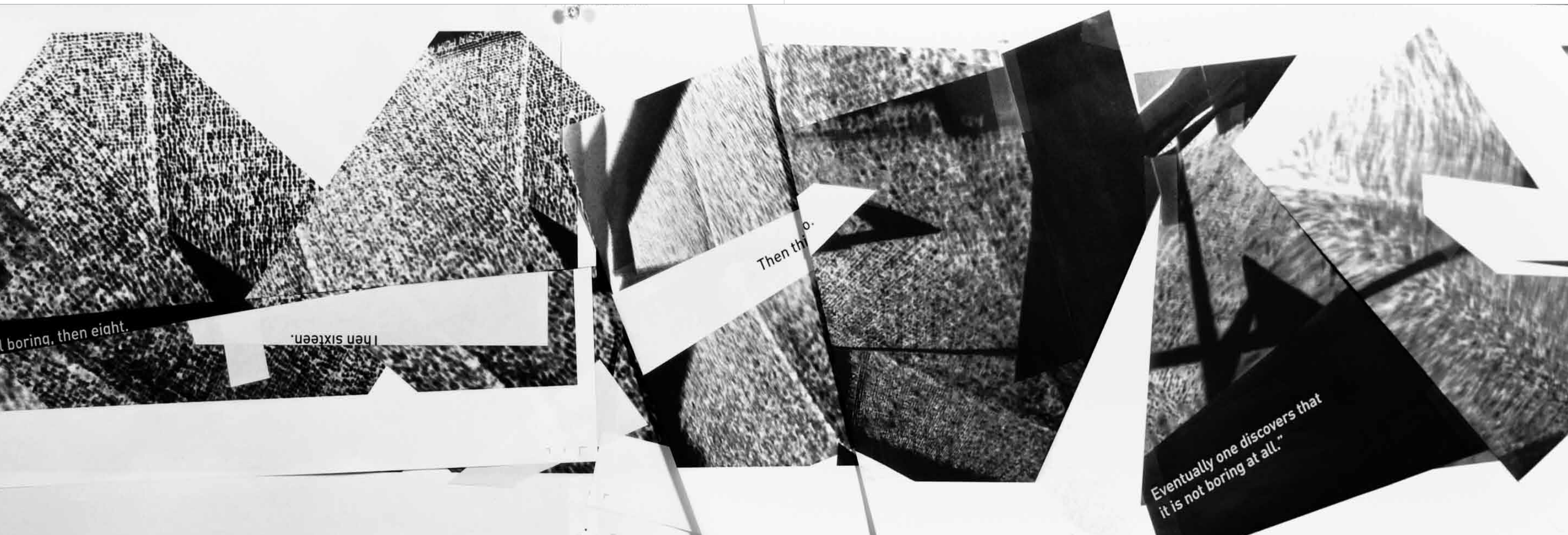
A MOMENT IN OUR STUDIO

BEAUTIFUL AND GONE

Mendelsohn's mention of the Tennessee Williams quote, "How beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken," naturally made me think about designer Martin Venezky's book, *It is Beautiful — Then Gone,* which is essentially the same phrase, only in Venezky's case he is referring to his practice in graphic design instead of about families and broken dreams. I think it is an accurate portrayal of design — or at least, of the kind of design I tend to be intrigued by. It is a game of proaction and reaction; we (visual makers) proactively make design decisions and begin to move forward in our process, but we also are constantly reacting to numerous ideas, constraints, feedback, etc. Working at the edge of reason, the edge of predictability, the edge of the communication, like Venezky does, means that sometimes, maybe often, design is fleeting. Sometimes you are just hoping to make something wonderful happen. You are not coloring inside the lines, you are not resetting the logotype in twenty different sans serif typefaces, you are not tweaking your baseline grid just so — you are wandering and chasing Nabokov's butterfly, and just for that moment when you catch one — it is beautiful. The next moment — it is gone. But not knowing when or where or how the beauty will reveal itself is part of what makes being a design so much damn fun. Every day, every moment is new. When it is not new, it is time to move on. Which is partially why I am sitting in this room reading you this essay in the first place.

SCANNED CINEMA

A visual investigation of cinematic imagery and how it can be represented as a still image. These are roughly 45-second long flatbed scans of the film, *The Social Network,* playing on an iPad. The manner in which you see a number of moments of the film in a single, unanticipated composition is an interesting play on the flexibility of time in cinema.

25 SEPTEMBER 2011

My investigations to date have been a search for my thesis argument. They are not about the deliverable or the value of the final output, they are about the process of discovery. ~~The hope is that they will illuminate and clarify my ideas into a cogent, understandable conversation about my thesis.~~ It turns out that this process is much more recursive that originally thought: investigations feed the questions, which in turn feed more investigations, which make more, new questions, ad infinitum. Unlike most quests for treasure, it is not known what to look for, where it is, what it looks like, or what value it has upon discovery. However, the search for it is proving to be exciting and increasingly more and more interesting.

The thesis project itself is a fortuitous process where each day can bring a new idea, a new word, a new methodology. This makes writing about my thesis quite difficult, ~~since I will not actually know what I am talking about until it is over and can be looked at as a body of work and a group of ideas.~~ With that in mind — and taking a cue from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Color* — my writing in these early stages will be non-linear thoughts on where I am to date. My hope is that these unordered but related ideas will help me and my committee see my thesis more clearly.

GESTURE

~~At the moment, the word gesture is the closet I have come to an encompassing term to describe my work.~~ Gesture includes a number of ideas that all hold significant value to me in describing my process. Gesture drawings from Freshman year's foundation classes come readily to mind as a clarification of the term. Gesture drawings are a way of re-seeing what is in front of you and reacting to it quickly and decisively. There is an intensity to a gesture drawing that comes partially from speed, and partially from the lack of forethought and pre-rationalization about what you are doing — you have to just do it, right now. There is an intent in a gesture drawing, there is a general direction of purpose, but there is little planning.

But, gesture is not random since there are many decisions that are made up front: the content (the nude model? a plant? a pile of bottles?), the medium (charcoal or pencil? sumi ink or graphite stick?), the support (craft paper? newsprint? sketchbook?), and the tools (hand? long stick? brush?). By allowing a level of constraint, you are free to let the rest of your process just happen without thinking too hard. You see and react to what is in front of you, and everyone reacts differently.

My design process is a gesture drawing, only in my case it may not be a drawing, but it carries the attitude of gesture with it. Working gesturally helps me with one of my biggest problems as a designer: starting. There is nothing more scary to me than the innocence of a blank page. Instead of harping on what is not there, and over-thinking and pre-rationalizing what typeface to start with, what my color palette should be, how thick those lines are, how big my document is, etc. I think quickly and act quickly. For me, this happens most often with a camera, but the attitude holds regardless of the tool.

CONSTRAINT & EDITING

Over-designing work is another problem. Questions have been raised previously about the threshold between interesting and uninteresting. In retrospect, maybe the threshold is really between under-designed and over-designed. Too much design, too much control can kill a piece of work just as surely as ignorance and un-refinement can. Overdoneness is just as bad as underdoneness. It is a constant effort to try and strike a balance between too much thinking, too much intention, too much constraint and the complete lack thereof. "Screwing around" is relatively easy as a designer; we know the tools, the techniques, we understand form; so just making things is not really a problem. The intent is to go beyond just screwing around, it is to intentionally screw around — to constrain myself just enough to screw around in ways that will result in interesting things. This is always a moving target and that is part of what makes design so interesting.

The catch with my gestural process is that it makes a lot of stuff, and a lot of that stuff is not useful or interesting. The editing process helps me look through the stuff to find the places that are worth paying attention to. Recently this editing process has been called into question; what is a critical part of creating work was often treated as almost a pragmatic afterthought: "time to sort through all this stuff and see what is here." How does my editing process relate to the rest of the design process — the work is made gesturally, can the work also be edited gesturally? Can the editing process become more gestural? Is editing where a significant part the constraint really happens?

EMERGENCE & FORTUITY

Emergence is the idea that out of a seemingly random, chaotic entity patterns will emerge. While not looking specifically for patterns, I am looking for *moments* — moments that somehow gel into something useful or engaging in the design. Making does not happen with a deliverable in mind, the outcome is not considered when the process starts: instead emergence is relied on because eventually interesting moments *will* happen. Such is the fortuitous nature of my methodology. In many ways it is not about making design, as it is about exploiting the process and just letting things happen.

At first glance my work reflects some of John Cage's ideas of chance operations, of setting up uncontrollable methodologies of making. In my work I am trying to do something more specific than chance operations. There is a level of constraint and editing to my process that moves away from Cage. A number of decisions are made that will affect the outcome; Cage does this as well; it is impossible for someone to create something without affecting it in some way. Cage is more interested in the places where the work becomes completely uncontrolled, where what happens is totally based on chance. It is more interesting to examine the places where my limited control affects what happens. Constraining the variables and editing the outcomes becomes important.

DICTATION & REACTION

There is value in the details of design and in directing where your work is going, and especially in design school a lot of the initial years of education are about learning the tools of design and how to go about using them effectively. However, as students mature and their work gets more sophisticated, how we teach must become less about designers dictating the ideas, and more about designers reacting to what is happening in their process. As a mature design student, I think this applies especially to my work.

THE EDUCATION OF A DESIGNER

While it appears as though most of these thoughts are completely internalized, much of it has bearing on how design is taught. It is fortunate to have what is essentially a laboratory for my thesis this year: the classes I teach (*Typo-Photo* in the Fall and *Poster in Motion: The Art of Music Video* in the Spring). Since so much of my interest in design relates to how design is taught and specifically my own pedagogy, it is inevitable that my classes will be a places to examine my ideas. I am most interested in how to relay my ideas of gesture to my students in a way that helps them move forward as a designers. For the most part, this is working quite well. My students are learning to act intuitively, with less pre-rationalization in their design. It is critically important that students do not merely imitate what their instructor does — they need to find their own voice as designers and my class hopefully provides a framework for this. Class discussions often center around how to create design by moving past obvious ideas into more connotative, evocative ways of using type and image.

I AM MY OWN BEST AND WORST STUDENT

My favorite part of teaching has always been what I learn while teaching, and even more so in a class I have designed myself. Having to explain these ideas to my students forces me to try and understand what I am talking about even more than the monumental task having to create a thesis project. In many ways my MFA experience is about teaching myself what it is I am doing, and learning to explain it to others. This makes me to come to terms with the fact that I am my own best and worst student. Critiquing others is far easier than critiquing myself. Pushing my students into unfamiliar places feels exciting, liberating! Pushing myself there feels contrived and difficult. Part of this process is an attempt to become two people: Mitch as MFA student, and Mitch as MFA teacher. Even though both Mitches are trying to move each other forward, it is a struggle.

REACTION

ABOUT THIS BOOK

My graduate thesis is complicated. It is difficult to see and understand, and it lacks clear and concise definition. It is a messy, awkward, and occasionally ugly collection of work, writing, ideas, and reflections on what I have made, my thinking about what I have made, and my thinking about my thinking.

Everything I have accomplished during graduate school represents an accumulation of experiences. Since one of the primary questions being asked is what I have discovered through process, everything is relevant since everything is part of my process, although, I consider some projects included here to be less important and uninteresting. The work represents virtually all of my activity over the past two years. I have examined, organized and curated this work into related categories, but overall the work is here as a collected corpus of ideas in its entirety.

What I have not done is spend endless time discovering the relationship between this writing and its relevance to a particular visual investigation. I have quickly and decisively edited my work into categories that best achieved my intentions at the time. Some work is investigation, some is application, some is for teaching and some is tangential — but related — writing on topics around design. My belief is that this thesis holds in its gestalt the basis for my arguments and understanding of what I have learned during my time at graduate school. Making this document has been a challenge, partially because I am not concerned with making sure everything I am doing makes perfect sense at all times. I am more interested in seeing how the work relates to

itself on a more innate and connotative level. Therefore I have attempted to alter and adjust what is presented as little as possible. Over the past two years some of my ideas have changed, a strikethrough identifies thoughts I no longer agree with.

My thesis document consists of five parts, the first four of which are a gathering of virtually all of my creative activity during my graduate studies. *Preface* contains work that does not lead directly towards my thesis, but was created for the sake of making and thinking. *Investigation* has work that leads towards ideas which began to clarify and examine my thesis. *Application* contains projects that resulted in applied pieces of design, like posters and videos. *Teaching* is a gathering of teaching activity during my time at VCU, including lectures, presentations, and writing about design education, as well as syllabi and assignments for the courses I have taught.

The fifth part, *Reaction*, includes writing and thinking that has been created after the events of the other parts of the book have taken place. It is where I think and write about what I have done, as well as provide an annotated bibliography for the past two years.

THROUGH PROCESS

Every designer has a design process they use to create every single thing they make, every visual entity they formulate and every idea that either becomes manifested into reality, or fades into nothingness. Design is about a lot of things, but between the layers of iterations, clients, communications, making, efficacy, thinking, deliverables, typography, imagery, grids, code, and so forth lies the process. Process is what makes design, design. Through process designers take abstract, unformed thoughts and snippets of ideas and create meaning. Through the design process we orchestrate ideas and meaning into communication others can engage with and understand. Robert Bringhurst has said that "typography is the solid form of language." I believe that process is the solid form of design.

For me, the design process is not simply a means to an end, the way to get from a nebulous thought to a paying deliverable. It is not a line from A to B with a few divergences here and there. I do not use my process to get to the end. I do not work with process to help me ideate visually. I work through process to discover what I am doing. The design process is design, and the relationship I have with this process is the core of my thesis: through process, how do we discover that which we make? Through process we define a grammar and an attitude towards that which we make and think. Through process we clarify what we care about and disregard what we do not.

My examination of process began during my undergraduate education at the Rhode Island School of Design. This experience

was an intellectual awakening, and despite my tremendous growth, at RISD I realized just how little I knew about design. Although being at RISD opened more doors than I could ever walk through, there were two important things that happened during my BFA studies that would forever change my relationship with design. First, I discovered new ways to use the camera as a part of the design process, and I was hooked immediately—design studio classes with Franz Werner, Thomas Wedell and Nancy Skolos made me rethink what a camera is and could do in the hands of a designer. I began using photography as a tool within my design process not to simply take pictures, but as a key component of how I was making design decisions—the camera became the catalyst for my process. This exposure to using the camera as a impetus of making—rather than just a tool of recording—irrevocably expanded my visual vocabulary and gave me a radically new perspective that opened up what I thought design could be, far beyond what I had always assumed it was.

Secondly, within a year of graduating with my BFA, I was invited to teach a senior level graphic design class. I had been a teaching assistant many times while I was a student, and I had taught a section of a *History of Graphic Design* workshop. This was the big time—my own course teaching senior undergraduate design students. The experience solidified how important teaching is to me, and since then I have been teaching graphic design for seven years as adjunct faculty at various institutions. Teaching design is in itself an act of designing, and it has become an important parallel to my own work. In many ways it is a place for me to apply and experiment with the things I am curious about —

a place where my ideas and questions about the designer/process relationship expand beyond myself.

In 2007 my spouse, Anne Jordan and I, opened a design studio, Hypothesis, Ltd. We chose the name Hypothesis because we believe that design is an experiment and each project a new starting point. From the beginning, we have tried to work on what we are interested in doing and allow that to lead to clients—a strategy that lets us work with people we like and respect, and on projects we find interesting and rewarding. We believe that everything counts, from exploratory projects without clients, to lectures, to other non-design related hobbies. Activities outside of the design studio are just as important as billable client work, because Anne and I share the belief that everything we do makes us better designers and thinkers.

The most significant discovery I made during my time at RISD and Hypothesis is that a designer can work from form to content. This is contrary to virtually everything we are taught in design education, where there is an expectation of a brief or assignment and a deliverable. From the beginning the size, budget and audience—perhaps even typeface and color—and certainly the due date and manner of evaluation have already been determined. Having learned from and worked with Nancy Skolos and Tom Wedell, I began to understand that it can go the other way—we can make simply to make because making is fun and interesting. Tom and Nancy tend to use collage as their muse for form, and from these collages—and there are thousands of them—they discover what content best associates with their form. Their design process is discovery, and that is something I hold tightly

to my chest like a protective parent—through process we can discover what we are designing.

Reoccurring again and again in my own process are methodologies that allow me to discover what I am doing. I work gesturally. This idea of gesture parallels foundation drawing classes, where gesture drawings are a common exercise — fast, reactive drawings of figures and still lifes. The gesture drawing was a way to not think, to not worry, but to just shut off the rational and judgmental part of your mind and just make. Gesture is about doing, not thinking; it is about the form happening because it just happened, not because you preplanned and had an outline and picked just the right pencil and got perfectly comfortable. Another way to think of gesture is by the modern acronym FILDI, which stands for "fuck it, let's do it." While the language may be worthy of a smirk, there is a very important idea here, which is basically *shut up and make something*. Working gesturally allows me the freedom to stop worrying and just *make*.

Gesture happens not just as the beginning of the process, but also in the middle and even at the end. I work iteratively and often with photography, and that means I tend to make lots of things. The editing process becomes an important gestural activity when I work. What I do not do is look carefully at every single image. I do not do exhaustive comparisons of ten images at a time to find just the right one. I do not examine the histograms and compare the RGB values to each other. I do a fast, intuitive edit into a select few that simply feel right. Instead of worrying and overthinking, I allow my innate sense of form and composition to tell me which images to pick. I work improvisationally with my

process, were I play off the results I get and then use them to move forward.

Improvisational theatre offers an interesting parallel to the design process. In the theatrical environment there is the golden rule of "yes, and…" This means that an idea, situation, element, or concept made by one actor is immediately accepted and added to by the other actors. In design, this means that I am co-creating with the process—instead of simply trying to get to the end of the project, I react to the process and then add to it over and over again. This improvisation is allowed to flourish because of the kinds of tools I tend to work with—specifically optical devices like cameras and scanners. These tools of optical visualization have a lot of characteristics that I exploit constantly as I work— photography and video tend to embrace chance and fortuity, allowing the camera to capture the unexpected and the unplanned in the frame. There is a level of translation that happens completely out of my control when I am taking a photo, or layering items on top of each other on the scanner.

Working through process to discovery is something I feel strongly about as a designer, and something I believe should play a more prominent role in the practice of design and especially design education. There is a real joy to discovery that can happen when the investigation is not tied down to expectations of outcomes or usefulness. Creating design is both a proactive and a reactive act of making and thinking, and educating new designers should happen the same way. How we teach and how we learn about design is intimately tied to how a student relates to their process. The practical realities of being a design professional are

something that must be a key part of any design education experience — students must know the tools and technologies of graphic design in the 21st century. They need to understand how to conceive, ideate, translate and create design from a design brief given by the teacher or client into visual communication that is effective and meaningful. However, they also need to understand the joy of discovery, and the delight that happens when their process goes awry.

Students need to understand that through process design can happen when they least expect it. There is a balance between the pragmatic and the expressive, between the useful and the ridiculous, and between the serious and the silly. When we only teach designers to be servants to clients we are not teaching them to be designers, we are teaching them to be employees.

My thesis examines everything above, but at its most reductive, asks this question: through process, is design the journey or the destination? To me, the fun part is the making, not the finishing. The activity of being a designer is being asked to make interesting things every day. The joy is in not knowing what that interesting things are going to be until after it is done.

The joy of design is that through process, design is discovery.

INQUIRY

When I examined my work from the last two years more closely, I come to this simple conclusion: I do not have a conclusion. What I have are many unanswered questions. I have spent time making design, thinking about design, writing about design and generally being immersed in an unbroken streak of design activity, and what I have clarified during this time is what I have *not* figured out. I think this is good—I neither want nor need my thesis to save the world, create a cool new product or be a new method of problem solving for others to emulate. What my thesis is ultimately about is my attitude towards design, expressed through process. Within that is also my attitude towards how others engage in the activity of making design, and how I teach design. This thesis is not an argument for how others should work; it is more about me arguing with myself. While this may appear selfish, since my design lives in the world outside of myself, this thesis also affects everyone else.

Instead of a neatly packaged analysis, what I have is something far more interesting and useful—I have more questions. These are questions that I will ask today and in the future, and foreseeably for as long as I am alive and capable of continuing to ask them. I think of this body of work not as the finish of something, but the start of it. These questions I ask here and now will invariably spawn new ideas which will in turn result in new questions in an endless cycle of activity and inquiry. This is as it should be—looking for the answers is much more satisfying than finding them.

I have written about the tools I use to make design, specifically tools of optical visualization, that include the DSLR camera, video, scanners, and analog film cameras. I now understand that these tools are not about how much I like to use a camera, or that I enjoy film, or that video is an interesting medium. These are about the affordances each tool offers — using photography, video and scanning allows me to play with variation and unpredictability. This passage from the Eames Office website discusses how designer Charles Eames approached how he used the camera in a similar way:

"For the Eameses, and particularly for Charles, photography was not merely a way to record things, it was a part of the process of design, part of the process of understanding the furniture. It wasn't a matter of taking these pictures and examining them later for flaws — no, it was the act of moving around the object, viewing it through the lens, making a series of decisions about taking a picture, and perhaps isolating and assessing the object without distraction or delusion. That process was the critical experience for Charles. But photography was not simply a matter of understanding furniture. It was a critical part of the Eames ethic. Charles often said that photography was a way of having your cake and eating it too."
— www.eamesoffice.com/photography

What else could I be using and working with in my process?
I want to find other tools and methodologies that have similar affordances to what I work with now. Skolos & Wedell tend to

work with collage—I think this is a medium that offers comparable tendencies to that of the camera. I jumped from primarily using a camera to a scanner for my James Victore Poster (page 127). This was a leap that proved fruitful. There are certainly other natural media that I have not yet discovered that are ripe with potential: paints, inks, and other mark-making tools. Also using the computer and programmatic tools like Processing or electro-mechanical devices like the Arduino could provide me with places to embrace my gestural and improvisational way of working.

Having taught a class on music video this past semester, I find that it is not just something I like because it is an interesting medium. I postulate the music video is a nearly identical medium to graphic design, specifically the poster—they use similar languages and concepts in how they are constructed and communicate. I wonder if the relationship between graphic design and music video is even closer than that. **Is music video really a different medium than graphic design? Or, it is just one divergent aspect of a larger group of ideas about how we create?** Music video is a playground for a graphic designer to explore and experiment with sound and image, narrative and concept, motion and kinetics. I think design and video have a closer relationship than I have had a chance to examine.

I frequently work with only the barest idea of a final deliverable —often with no deliverable in mind at all. Simply discovering through process is enough to get me going. Working from form to content in this way frees me from going down predictable paths that result in predictable work. **Does working with form first and content second make for better and more meaningful**

content, or just more aesthetically interesting form? I would not have gotten to any of my investigations had I known where I was going with them; however, is form to content the best way to work when working with more applied intentions of design? **Can I work in the reverse from content to form within a similarly exploratory design process?** I know that I do not tend to work the way most designers do. I am curious if my design process is a hindrance or a liberation.

    What are ways that I can push the innate abstraction and ambiguity in my work to enhance the meaning of design? I am constantly wondering about the line between clarity and abstraction in what I make. My work tends to be complex and abstract, and often needs to include literal or obvious moments to make the design more accessible, usually in the form of secondary typography. This feels like cheating — the design should be meaningful and effective without having type that feels out of place to make it more understandable.

    I believe that there is a tendency among designers working today towards a minimalistic, reductive sense of graphic design that incorporates a lot of subtext and explanation to really understand. My work goes the other way—towards a more complex and layered aesthetic with less pre- and post-rationalization. I tend to suspend thinking when I begin working on a project, and allowing my intuitive, gestural attitude to discover the work through process. I think that too much planning and rationalization can kill the design. **Exactly when does pre-rationalization cause this? What is the point where it goes from being planned to being dead before it leaves the gate?** The other side of this

equation begs examination too. **When is post rationalization simply bullshit? When does it justify something that does not need justification?**

    The future holds my pursuit of the answers to these questions, and the raising of many more. I excitedly look forward to what comes next.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, Steve. *Process: A Tomato Project*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996. This is a collection of words and visuals from the design collective Tomato, who are involved in various media including print, music and video. The nonlinear and ambiguous nature of the work presented here clarifies that the process, not the product, is what the reader is asked to consider in this book.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. France: Hill and Wang, 1981. Barthes speaks about the idea of the "punctum" as the thing in a photograph that is wholly consuming and magical. The punctum is an important element that I strive to find in my work with optical visualization.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken, 2007. Benjamin's seminal 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" speaks about nascent mediums of art and design such as film and photography, and speculates on the affordances of these new technologies and how the aura of the work changes.

***The Fearless Freaks*. Directed by Bradley Beesley. USA: Short Factory, 2005. DVD.** This documentary about the band The Flaming Lips is relevant to the argument of experimentation for the sake of experimentation. Band leader Wayne Coyne often

uses the framework of the band's performances as an opportunity to stage experimental processes that result in unexpected and unplanned outcomes.

The Five Obstructions. Directed by Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth. Denmark: Zentropa Real ApS and Koch-Lorber Films, 2003. DVD. Director Lars von Trier challenges his mentor Jørgen Leth to remake one of Leth's short films five different times with various — and often ridiculous — restrictions. A fascinating examination of the design process and how arbitrary limitations can beget unanticipated and delightful results.

Goldstein, Mitchell. *A Question of Threshold.* Rhode Island School of Design Degree Project, 2006. This statement of intent that accompanied my senior degree project from my BFA in Graphic Design at RISD acts as an intitial starting point for my MFA studies at VCU.

Libeskind, Daniel. *Countersign.* New York: Rizzoli, 1992. A study of complexity and ambiguity in the early, as yet unbuilt work of architect Daniel Libeskind. His work as a paper architect is intriguing and reveals a deep, highly conceptual design process I admire.

Moholy-Nagy, László. *Vision in Motion.* Chicago: Paul Theobald & Co, 1947. This book is presented as an examination of nascent art and design, from styles like Cubism to mediums like motion and photography and how the artist relates to the rest of the word. Moholy-Nagy's exploration of how this book itself is laid out — with images accompanying the text, not just collected together — is an early example of the integration of type and image.

Poynor, Rick. *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. An examination of postmodern design and designers, specifically their attitudes towards the previously established rules of what graphic design is. A section on Deconstruction is of particular interest to me in how these designers tear down typical modes of communication to make something previously unconsidered.

Robinson, Julia. *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art.* Barcelona: Actar, 2009. A collection of Cage's musical work, noting his use of chance operations and unusual materials in his compositions, and how unexpected occurrences manifest themselves in performances of Cage's work.

Skolos, Nancy and Wedell, Thomas. *Type, Image, Message.* Gloucester: Rockport, 2006. Skolos + Wedell's process of working from form to content via collage has been tremendously influential on how I approach design; as well as their extensive use of the camera as a tool for form making.

Stop Making Sense. Directed by Jonathan Demme. USA: Palm Pictures, 1984. DVD. This concert film about the Talking Heads uses a stage that is literally constructed during the performance

itself. An interesting example of using "mise en scène" and constructed narrative that is influential in how I set up my own processes.

Venezky, Martin. *It Is Beautiful — Then Gone***. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.** Venezky calls the space between obvious and more removed relationships the "poetic gap", and is a prominent feature in his work, which results in projects that are poetic and unexpected.

Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture***. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977.** This book is a celebration of ambiguity and contradiction in architecture, and can be applied to other mediums of design.

ADDITIONAL READINGS AND REFERENCES

Amis, Martin. *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews, 1971-2000*. New York: Hyperion, 2001.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Berger, John. *About Looking.* New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Cheever, John. "The Swimmer." In *The Short Story, a Contemporary Looking-glass.* ed. Smith, Elliott L., and Andrew W. Hart. New York: Random House, 1981.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone, 1994.

Frayling, Christopher. *Research in Art and Design*. London: Royal College of Art, 1993.

Gray, Carole, and Julian Malins. *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004.

Hara, Kenya. *Designing Design.* Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2007.

Heskett, John. *Design: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

Hitchens, Christopher. "Remembering an Intellectual Heroine," *Slate*, 29 December 2004. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/obit/2004/12/susan_sontag.html

Hollis, Richard. *Swiss Graphic Design*. New York: Yale University Press, 2006.

Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961.

Kimmelman, Michael. *The Accidental Masterpiece: On the Art of Life, and Vice Versa.* New York: Penguin, 2005.

Lange, Alexandria. "Why Nicolai Ouroussoff Is Not Good Enough," *Design Observer*, 20 April. 2011. http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=12708

Margolin, Victor, and Richard Buchanan. *The Idea of Design*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1995.

McDonough, Tom. *The Situationists and the City*. London: Verso, 2009.

McSweeney's Publishing. "McSweeney's Internet Tendency." http://www.mcsweeneys.net/tendency

Mendelsohn, Daniel Adam. *How Beautiful It Is and How Easily It Can Be Broken: Essays*. New York: Harper, 2008.

Muschamp, Herbert. *Hearts of the City: The Selected Writings of Herbert Muschamp*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich. *Nabokov's Butterflies: Unpublished and Uncollected Writings*. New York: Beacon Press, 2000.

Riley, Charles A. *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology*. Hanover: University of New England, 1995.

"Robert Rauschenberg on Artnet." Fine Art, Decorative Art, and Design — The Art World Online: *Artnet*. 15 Dec. 2011. http://www.artnet.com/artists/robert-rauschenberg/.

Schjeldahl, Peter. *Let's See: Writings on Art from the New Yorker*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008.

Sonnoli, Leonardo. "Leonardo Sonnoli." 15 Dec. 2011. http://www.sonnoli.com/

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Allen Lane, 1978.

Sottsass, Ettore. *Man Transforms: An International Exhibition on Aspects of Design for the Opening of the Smithsonian Institution's, National Museum of Design Cooper-Hewitt Museum.* New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 1976.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, and G. E. M. Anscombe. *Remarks on Colour.* Berkeley: University of California, 1977.
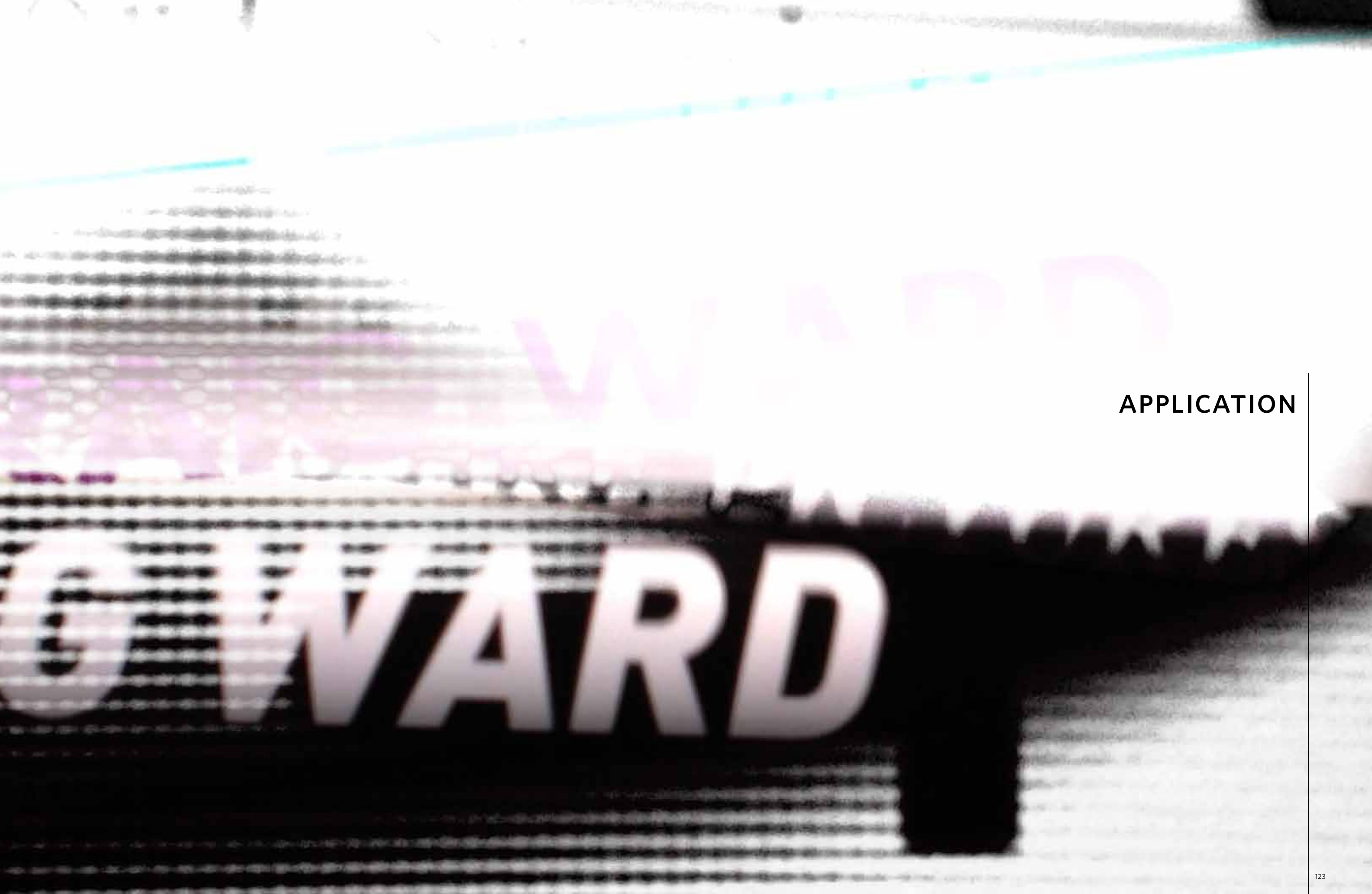
APPLICATION

THE DANCE

As someone who used to paint, I know that as the brush gets loaded with paint, as the canvas gets wet with pigment, colors begin to mix together in ways that are outside of my complete control. I find painting most interesting when it embraces this fortuity; it is at its best when dancing instead of marching in a straight and predictable line. We know from our color wheels that red and yellow will mix together into orange, but we cannot predict accurately how colors will mix when you start to add more tones that are randomly picked up by the brush, that sit on the support, that change opacity and translucency. There are painters who are very specific in their use of color, and do everything to control it precisely. It is when the painter reacts not to what is in his head, but to what is in front of him that painting becomes not an act of translation, or an act of documentation, but an act of response. It becomes the dance.

I wonder to myself if this is why I am constantly trying to avoid creating design inside the computer. I do not mean making design without the computer, but creating the design inside it: making design by pushing pixels around. Using the programmed and binary world of software to generate form and meaning. It is hard to dance inside the computer; it is much easier to march. This is why the computer is an incredibly useful tool, it does some things much better than a person does. The problem is all the things it does worse. I see design students picking up the computer as their first activity when embarking upon a new project; this worries me tremendously. The reality of graphic design today is that almost all of it will end in the computer, but it certainly does not need to start there.

The computer excels at constraint, but falls short at freedom. It acts as a safety blanket to students: they know they cannot really screw up too badly inside of InDesign once they know the rules. Unfortunately, screwing up badly, really *fucking something up*, is so often where it gets really interesting. Students are taught to be afraid of screwing up, of failing, of not succeeding in a design. This is one reason why I refuse to think of design as solving problems — because it presupposes that there are correct solutions. I do not think that failure is good, that failure is a goal to strive for; but I think accepting the possibility of failure makes the process more fun and begets more interesting results. In the same way accepting the inevitability of dying frees you to live your life; accepting the inevitability of ruining your design frees you to make more design.

JAMES VICTORE POSTER

This is a poster for James Victore's lecture at VCU in April, 2011. Knowing Victore's work and his general attitude towards design, I was very conscious of trying to reference what he does but not imitate or exhibit his work for the poster. Ideas for the poster were inspired by Victore's aggressive stance on design, and how he corrupts existing culture and visual constructs in his work. I chose to use low-quality images culled from cellphone photos, which I randomly received from some of my Twitter followers. In keeping with my thesis ideas of unpredictability and Typo-Photo, I used the flatbed scanner as a way to composite these photos and some simple typography together. I tricked the scanner into imaging these solid, printed pages as Kodachrome transparencies, which made for some interesting and unexpected results. After some experimentation, I took the final image — which is just one single scan — and did some very minor color correction and typeset the credits.

This process works for this poster because it does what Victore himself does: subverts the established. Rather than using the scanner for good, I prefer to use it for evil — allowing it to scan incorrectly makes for much more interesting and chaotic results, but still allows for some order to arise from the outcome.

SKOLOS+WEDELL POSTER

This promotional poster announces Nancy Skolos and Tom Wedell's 2011 lecture, workshop, and exhibition at Virginia Commonwealth University. Tom and Nancy teach at RISD and run a design studio near Boston. Over the years, they have become both our mentors and good friends, and when I found out they were coming to VCU, we jumped at the chance to design a poster in their honor.

Their poster work (www.skolos-wedell.com) involves a lot of layering and collage. Having taken their workshop previous to my time at VCU, I am very familiar with how they work and the kind of ideas that go into one of their posters. The poster is intended to be a reflection of their design process, not just an imitation of the kind of work they have done. After deciding on all the correct copy, each segment of text was typeset in a number of different typefaces. Using nothing more complex than a desk lamp, a camera on a tripod and my hands, each typeset sheet was photographed. The photographic process provides a nice level of unpredictability and abstraction that you cannot get working just on the computer. This also is a reference to the nature of collage and how Tom and Nancy work.

Each photo was then color corrected and composited together with two or three others to create the basis for the poster. These were then brought together into the finished piece. Since the nature of collage is to work intuitively, the images where not given very much adjustment, which allowed this poster to remain a bit raw.

The poster represents both the hand and the digital, as well as the complexity in the final letterforms. Below are a few detail shots so you can see how interesting these get.

FORMALLY CONCERNED

Lately I have seen something I find worrisome: form. Or more accurately, the conversation we are having with form.

I see a lot of superficial form — form that has a limited conversation about itself. Form that is ornamental without a deeper meaning. Take Tumblr for example. This web publishing platform is often used by many people as a kind of visual scrapbook, and is frequently populated by reblogging of other people's postings of images, videos and other digital ephemera. I would hesitate to call this curation, as I think it tends to be more of a gut-level reaction on the part of the blogger as to what he or she likes and therefore reposts on their Tumblr blog. I think it often comes down to "hey, that looks cool/funny/witty/ amusing/unusual/aesthetically similar to the kind of stuff I think I should be posting!"

The result of this are blogs full of nothing but other people's stuff. Pages and pages of other peoples photographs, designs, videos, etc. This is not inherently bad, but what I get curious about is how this affects how people go about making their own work — is there room to think about something new if your mind is filled with everything else? Probably, but I would not discount the distraction of seeing an endless stream of externalized, decontextualized imagery. I imagine the natural reaction to my opinion of this is that these Tumblr blogs act as inspiration, as a scrapbook of ideas. I question this as well, since I think true inspiration comes from the questions you ask yourself, not from constantly looking at how other people answered their own questions. I hope that the reblogging and reposting of other peoples' work — and reblogging other peoples' rebloggings, ad infinitum — does not take the place of actual creativity. I mean, finding cool stuff and posting it sort of feels like you are making something, right? Tumblr can provide an illusion of creation — I wonder what people would make if they were not busy making this illusion?

There is also a tendency towards making form that is not interesting, or enticing to look at or experience. There is a lot of work out there — especially in many graduate programs in design — that appears much more interested in a conceptual explanation of itself than it is about the form of the thing made to explain the concept. It seems as if this kind of work is in denial of the importance of form, as if making something look beautiful and exciting undermines its relevance or intelligence. What I am interested in seeing (and making) is a synthesis of concept and form, of meaning and realization, of the syntactic and the semantic. I want to see work where the meaning is reinforced by the form, and the form is reinforced by the meaning.

I am worried that designers as a group are starting to have the wrong conversations with form. Instead of deep processes of discovery, we make minimalistic versions of movie posters. Instead of comprehensively researching a method of creating something, we Google for tutorials. Rather than thinking as much about how something looks as we do what it means, we make it starkly designed, with an oversize flush-left sans-serif typeface on top of a stark image or line drawing. Why does this seem to happen more and more? I naturally wonder how we are teaching design to students. Is design hyper-intellectualized because of academia? Is it superficial for the same reason?

This writing is much less about what everyone else is doing (and of course, not everyone is doing what I mention above — but many are), it is more about how I talk to form, and my conversation with what I am making. As a maker and a teacher, these are questions I think I need to try and answer for myself and my students.

TOOLS

Humans tend to spend a lot of time describing the world we live in. Designers spend a lot of time describing the world of design. This inquiry is arguably a part of what makes us human — wanting to understand not just the how and the what, but the why. Animals worry about how to get to the food, how to protect their young, what that other, bigger animal may do to hurt them or take their food. Humans want to know the meaning behind the how and the what — why does that animal want to hurt us? Why do I hate that other person? Why does blue mean sad and red mean angry?

These descriptions — even when only talking about the relatively simple what — can be our downfall. A color described as a Pantone number or CMYK mix is theoretically going to be identical no matter where you get it printed, no matter what company you use to do your offset printing. But that is not really true. The paper has to be identical, and even that is largely impossible — the same exact kind of paper from the same paper producer can vary batch to batch. And suppose you get the same batch of paper from the same company, then the lighting you look at the printed paper under will affect what color the eye sees. CMYK and Pantone, which are supposed to make something that is inexact into something exact instead does something far worse: it makes something inexact into something that is falsely exact. It fools us all into thinking color is finite and easy to contain.

Unlike CMYK, RGB is inherently understood to be a relative measurement. RGB describes color on a screen in an additive process of representation. Since we know that RGB only exists on screen, and we also know that all screens are different, the RGB description of color becomes a relative approximation of color. RGB accepts its inexactness. Where this all becomes a concern for me is that designers tend to think of color in these numerically described systems. It is habit to match a Pantone chip to a color we may like. We impress ourselves by remembering the CMYK mixes of colors we see. We look at books of colors, neatly contained in a finite number of pages, with a finite number of chips on each page to decide what color something should be. We understand the inexactness of an RGB color as a technical issue unable to be resolved, a divergent anomaly we have no choice but to accept.

The problem is that design is analog, but a lot of design tools are binary. I am constantly wondering how this affects how we make design, and how I can overcome — or maybe embrace, or even exploit — these conflicting existences.
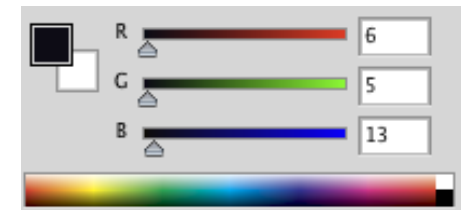
THE RGB COLOR PALETTE IN PHOTOSHOP.
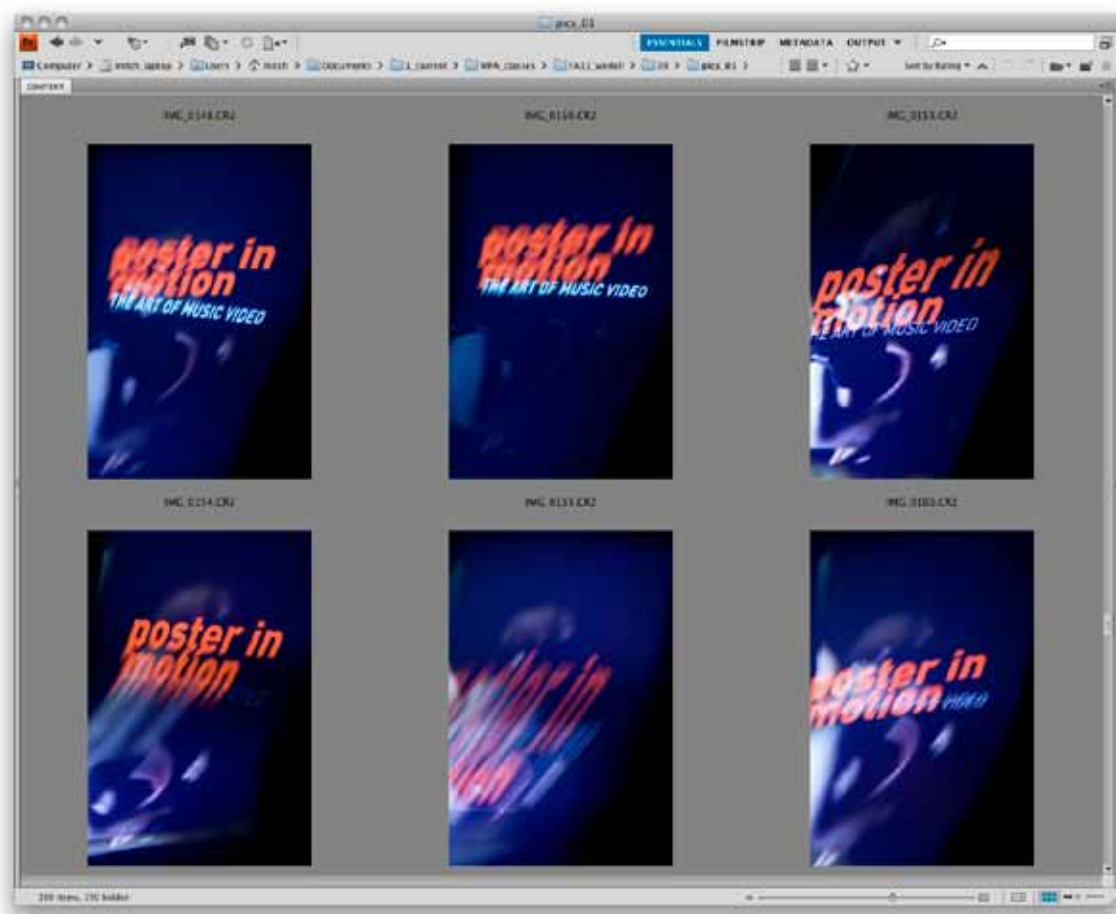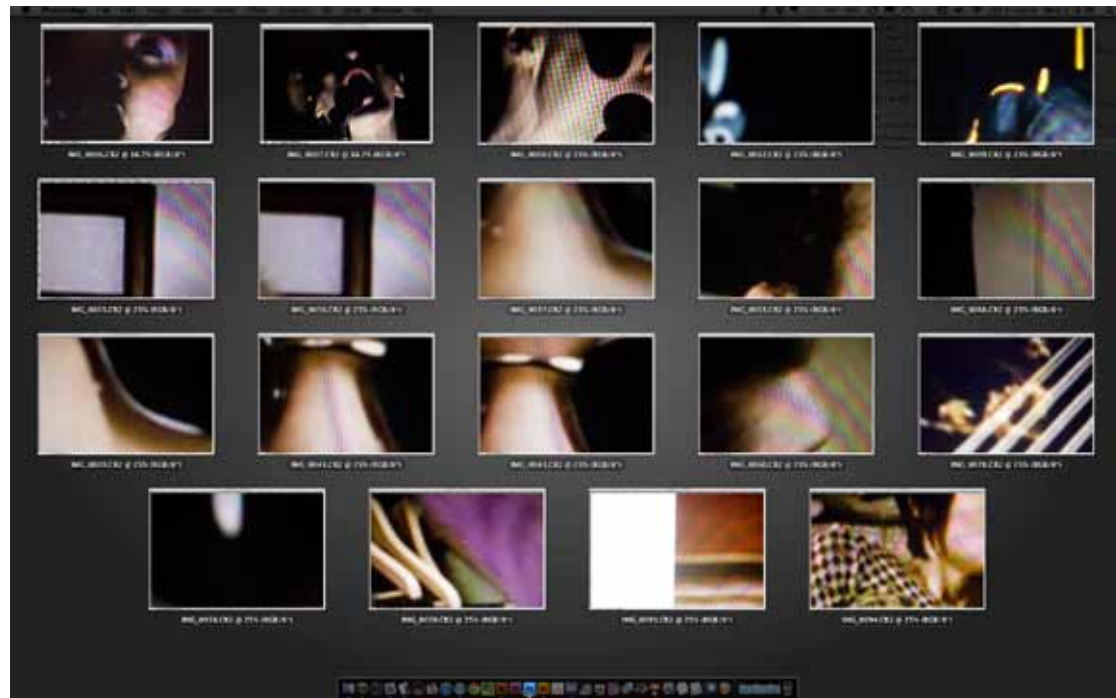
INVESTIGATION EIGHT

Starting with this investigation, I am trying to move way from the literal programmatic nature of Photoshop actions and more into attempting to make the synthesis of elements happen off of the computer. This investigation also adds in the requirement of a specific deliverable; in this case, a poster used to promote my Spring class Poster In Motion: The Art Of Music Video. I am also attempting to use more of my own source content rather than Google.

Unexpectedly, I found some of what I needed to talk about music video from Investigation One, which were macro photographs of music videos taken off of my laptop screen. While I felt at the time that this investigation was not strictly "successful" in terms of what it generated, I am finding now that it was quite useful in providing me with visual content to remix and reuse. I am reminded of a lesson I learned from Skolos + Wedell: always keep what you make because you can find a use for it later.

I looked at all the images as a group and settled on a few that I felt were the most "music videoish" in that they had some sense of form and expression, as well as had the pixelization from the screen represented in the photograph. I especially liked the images of Talking Heads lead singer David Byrne singing into the camera (top row, second from the left).

I then brought the images into After Effects and created a short movie which flashed a couple of images for half a second each, and then typography with the main information of the poster. I set this all up rotated 90 degrees as I knew I wanted the poster to be in vertical orientation when it was completed. I had to make a number of movies to find the right combination of image and type.

Using a digital projector, I projected the movie onto a large white piece of paper in a dark room, and shot the paper using a 5-second exposure on my camera. Even though some digital cameras will allow for a kind of multiple exposure, it does not react the same way multiple exposure in film does, therefore

using this long exposure combined with the movie allows me to synthesize the words and images together. It also allows for a variable: the motion of the paper, which moves in ways that are unpredictable.

After taking hundreds photos I felt that I had gotten at least a few shots that would work. I then began to edit them down looking at what was appropriately legible, and what looked good. This is an example of what I am currently calling a "gestural edit"—not thinking too hard, not looking too closely, but more doing a fast run through my images and seeing what feels the most right.

I narrowed it down to a couple of images that I think worked well. After saving it out with virtually no editing other than adjusting contrast, I then brought my favorite image into InDesign to lay out the proportions and supplemental typography.

After looking at the near-final piece with my partner Anne, we felt it was a bit too literal, especially in the choice of colors. We adjusted the image by changing the colors in the blues and neutrals, giving the poster a more vibrant hot magenta color palette. I felt this was abstracted enough for the poster to work well.

The poster was then printed and hung in the vcu graphic design department. Since I wanted to keep the poster simpler than the kind of things the last few investigations had generated, I chose to keep only the minimum information on the poster itself. Therefore, I also created some quick tear-sheets that have the url of the microsite I set up for the class to provide a detailed description.
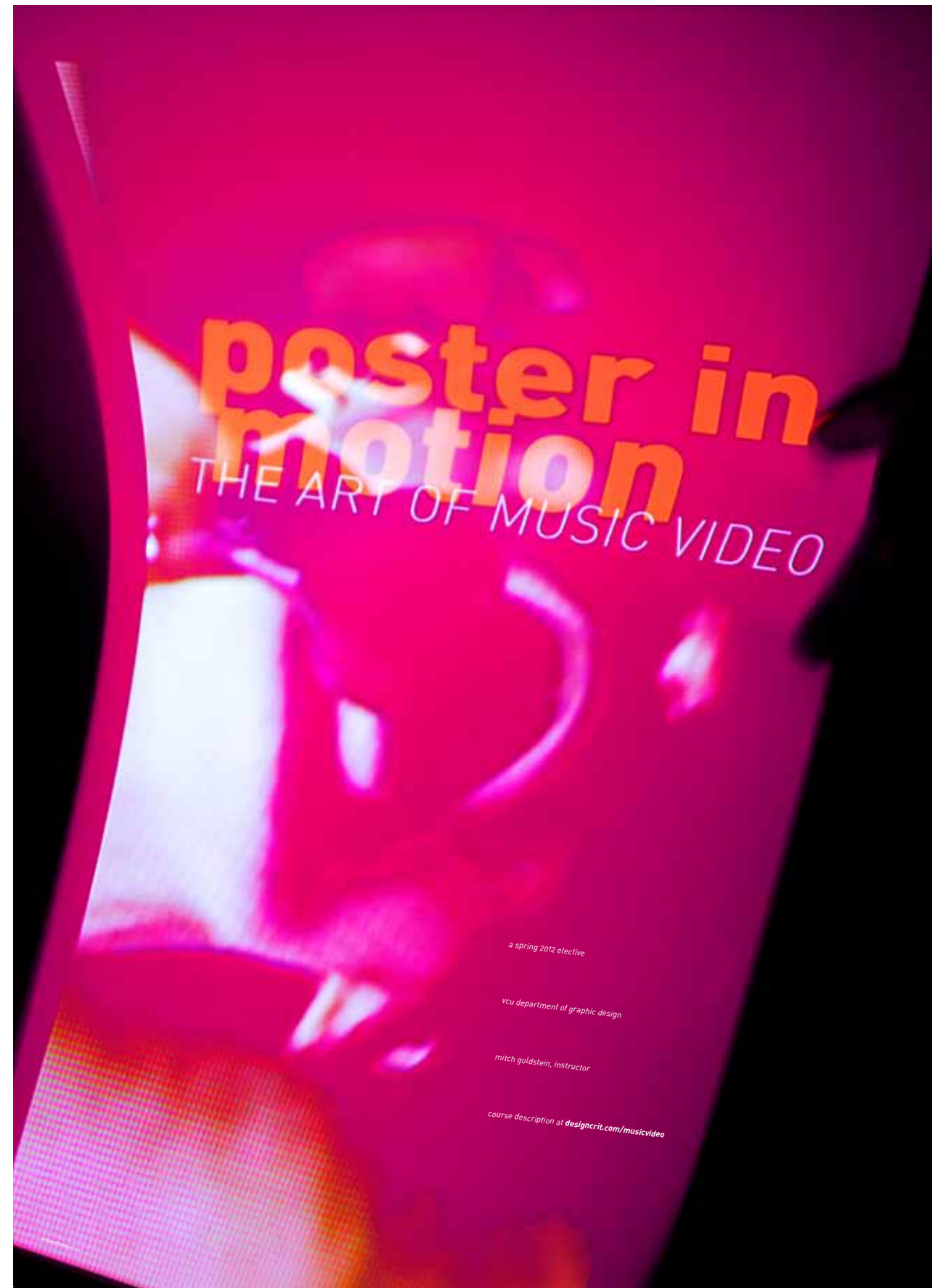
AN AURA OF AGGRESSION

Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, *The Work of Art In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* speaks of the aura of work being lost when it is mechanically reproduced — the thingness of the thing is gone when it is not an original thing. Perhaps what the age of mechanical reproduction has removed more than aura is aggression. I use this word not to mean anger, or violence, or confrontation. Aggression in art and design suggests that makers exhibit an outward confidence with bold gestures within our work and the practice of making our work, of being assertive in what we do and how we do it.

I think designers fear aggression. There is a tendency to withdraw, hold back or otherwise tread lightly with our clients, with ourselves, with our process. Many designers are uncomfortable telling their client what their hourly rate is. Design students are timid about presenting something new and unusual they did to the class. Even design teachers tend to be shy and anxious about giving truly critical critique and appropriately bad grades when warranted. Say what you will about the work of Stephan Sagmeister, I have to applaud his aggression: he makes no apologies or qualifications about his work. Yes, he makes words from styrofoam cups, and bananas, and urine. No, he is not sorry he did it. You not liking it is your problem, not his. He works aggressively, and it results in things that I sense makes himself happy first, and his clients happy second.

The point here is to question how designers work and make, especially knowing that we work primarily in reproducible media like print or photography or on the web, and not to suggest more designers make sentimental typographic aphorisms from fruit. I wonder if the sense of aggression when pasting up a composition or carving letters out of a hunk of stone is lost when clicking a mouse or kerning type. There is too much celebrated graphic design work out there that can best be described as flaccid. The preoccupation with dead, boring, blasé aesthetics is something I do not understand — I think it is time to consider bringing the aggression back to design.

STEPHAN SAGMEISTER SPEAKING TO US VIA A WALL OF BANANAS.

YOUR OWN PERSONAL CUBISM

Marshall McLuhan notes in *Understanding Media,* that cubism seizes total awareness of everything at once, and "...drops the illusion of perspective in favor of instant sensory awareness of the whole." (page 13) Cubism acts as an early precursor to the media landscape that McLuhan sees today: a world of hyper-linked existence where everything relates to everything, and everything is available nearly instantaneously. As makers of media, designers have no choice but to work within this post-cubist existence. We teach that design does not happen alone, inside
a locked cabin in the woods. We talk about how design becomes design when it solves someone else's problem, when it helps others understand content, when it becomes not about the designer but about the message everyone else is seeing.

What happens when a designer chooses to ignore this immense landscape — if they can? If McLuhan's cubism is everything, all at once then what is the other side of the discussion — a few things, one at a time? The question I am not asking is "what happens when the designer locks themselves in a cabin in the woods and starts making?" Too often this kind of self-reflective, internalized making is cast aside as "just art" — and done so with a dismissive wave of the hand. The argument about art versus design is one I no longer take part in — whatever answers are found quite simply do not matter. You may as well debate if red is a better color than blue, or if *Star Wars* is more entertaining than *Star Trek*.

What I am wondering is simply what happens when designers make work that happens inside of their own, personal cubism? When we ideate within a small, internalized landscape of interconnectedness that relies on ourselves to provide the context? Designers love to categorize what they make as "personal work" or "client work." I think this is — at best — a fallacious idea, and at worst a destructive and harmful classifi-cation. Designers are quick to dismiss work that is done just for the sake of the making as a masturbatory exercise in selfishness. I believe that the really interesting, really deep conversations with design can come from inside the process, not only from outside the deliverable. Making work that worries about itself, instead of worries about how everyone else reacts to it, can be as valuable as any other design activity.

I do not classify what I am thinking about in this writing as "personal work" — all design is personal to those who make it, and to those who experience the result of the making. Design forces the brain to make connections and relationships based on social, cultural, and personal contexts of the designer and the viewer, therefore how can design not be personal? I have heard this kind of work called many things, like process driven or experimental or un-programmed, but none of these terms really seem to say what we are trying to say. It is worth consideration that there is tremendous value in the making for the sake of making — climbing Mt. Everest is not about standing on the peak, it is about getting up and back down alive.
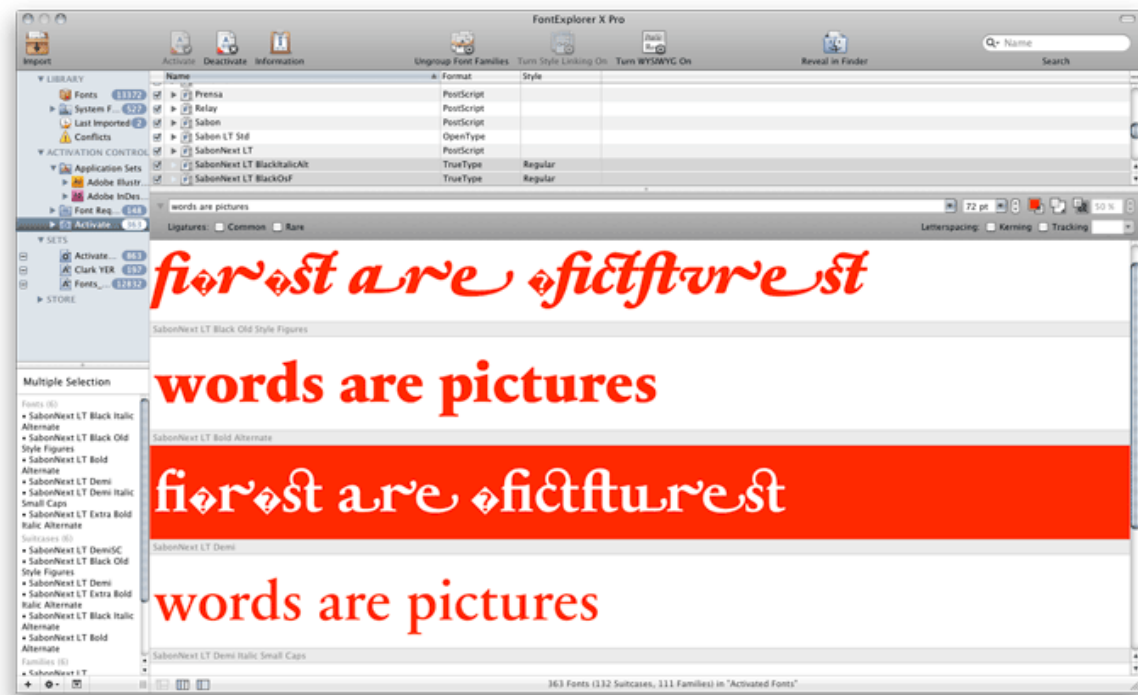
CRAIG WARD POSTER

In the poster for my class *Poster In Motion: The Art of Music Video*, I created a literal "poster in motion" by stitching together all of the photographic images created during that posters design process into a series of short animations. For this poster for a lecture by designer Craig Ward, I wanted to try to reverse that process—create a still poster by using frames from a piece of motion work.

I continue to examine and evolve my ideas of working with gesture and improvisation in my design process as well as trying to exploit optical visualization processes. In this case, I worked with iPhone video, my computer and cut pieces of paper. I knew that I did not want to imitate the kind of work Craig does, but I did want to keep the feel of creating something a bit messy and unpredictable. I started by making some unplanned, gestural cutouts in sheets of paper with an X-acto knife. My only intention was to fenestrate the paper so I could use it as a frame to shoot video through.

I then set the key information of the poster in FontExplorer on my computer—the program used to manage and preview fonts. Rather than trying to typeset in InDesign or otherwise control the typography, I allowed FontExplorer to do this for me. I selected some general typeface families I thought would work visually, and I also adjusted the colors to something other than black using a simple RGB color picker built into the program.

I darkened the room and held the cut paper a few inches away from my computer and shot video with my iPhone. I tried a few things: moving the paper, moving the iPhone, moving both, moving neither. I shot a number of short clips with the words CRAIG WARD and WORDS ARE PICTURES.

I brought the clips into AfterEffects and layered one clip of each set of words on top of each other. Using simple layer blending and color correction I made a series of animations, which I then went through frame-by-frame to "find" the poster inside of the movie. Each 20-second long movie has about 600 frames—or in this case, 600 different posters. This is a process that could be endless since moving one clip elsewhere on the stage, or choosing a different clip of the same words would result in hundreds of new compositions to choose from. Rather than spending an eternity on this part of the process I examined only a few cuts of the animation until I found a frame I liked and chose to use that, rather than to keep looking for a better poster in the animations. I exported the frame at high resolution and added supplementary information in InDesign.

REFLECTION

I continue to learn that an important part of my design process is the edit—I have referred to itelsewhere as the "gesture edit" but I think it can be more accurately thought of as the "fast edit," or perhaps more poetically as the "shoot first and ask questions later" edit. I had literally thousands of possible posters to examine from this process, but I only spent an hour getting to the final image from the animations. We are taught to be meticulous and detail-oriented as designers, but this is a place where grabbing what feels right when I feel it serves the process best.

As I move towards my final thesis document I am trying to coagulate how I work into something both I and others can understand. There are a lot of moving parts to how I work but most of what I make has these things in common: *Improvisation* (co-creating with the process rather than directing it towards a specific place). *Optical visualization* (camera, video, scanner, etcetera). *Gesture* (unplanned actions and innate, emotive decisions). *Fast edit* (quickly choosing the "right" compositions).

COLOR IN PHILOSOPHY

*"I saw in a photograph a boy with slick-backed blonde hair and
a dirty light-colored jacket, and a man with dark hair, standing
in front of a machine which was made in part of castings
painted black, and in part finished, smooth axels, gears, etc.,
and next to it a grating made of light galvanized wire. The
finished iron parts were iron colored, the boy's hair was blonde,
the castings black, the grating zinc-colored, despite the fact
that everything was depicted simply in lighter and darker
shades of the photographic paper." —Remarks on Color, III-117*

"Color deceives continuously." —Josef Albers (from Color Codes)

Color does not merely act deceptive, but it is itself a deception.
Scientists say that color only exists in the brain of the person
who is seeing it, and does not have any actual reality of its
own. If a tree with green leaves and a brown trunk falls in the
woods, and nobody is there to see it, is the tree still green and
brown? Even within the context of the mind, color is slippery,
elusive. Johannes Itten has shown us extensively how a color
shifts based on what other color it is sitting next to.

Extending this to the discipline of graphic design is
interesting: if color is a deception, and color is a building block
of design, then is design a deception as well? As designers,
we constantly change and adjust form, typography and color.
We tweak spatial relationships, minutely adjust kerning, and
pick laboriously through Pantone chips as we work. "Design"
is arguably the act of manipulation, and in our manipulation,
we deceive the viewer of the work into seeing what we want
them to see.

I fully embrace (and tremendously enjoy) this deception.
I try to have a "gestural" relationship with design: working
intensely and quickly, and without much forethought or pre-
rationalization. Since I am often using the camera to work this
way, deception is a critical component of my methodology. I use
my camera not to make literal representations of form, but to
make deceptive images that are the base of much of my designs.
The design I make only really works when you see it not for what
it is, but for what I am trying to deceive you into seeing.

THE RECTANGLE IS WHITE. OR MAYBE IT ISN'T.
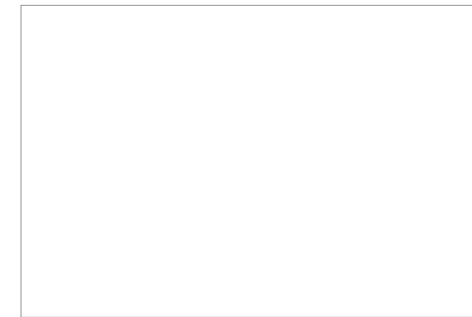
ARCHITECT MIES VAN DER ROHE.

THE NEW DETAILS

"One must always be prepared to learn something totally new."
— Remarks on Color, III-45

"God is in the details." — Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Does the "totally new" exist? The saying "everything has been done" has been making its way around art and design circles forever, but is it true? Many think the advent of the computer has created many totally new kinds of art and design, from information visualization to rendered 3D animations and video games, but I am not sure I agree. Computers have made many new tools of both the hardware and software, and computers have also made for new processes we use in the creation of artifacts. But are the things we create with these or other tools really new, or are they just derivative of the old in shiny new packaging?

This is something worth considering. We know that all art and design exists within of a context of history, culture, theory, and ideas. Art and design made by humans (or by a human-designed tool like the computer) comes from the context of all the work those humans have seen before. We cannot un-see that which we have seen, and we cannot un-experience that which we have experienced. How can anything be totally new when it all comes from what came before it?

For something to be totally, really, truly new it would be devoid of all context, of all memory. Given this apparent impossibility, nothing can be totally new. Instead everything is an evolution, a derivation. However, I do think there is a place for the new — and that is in the details. When we create art and design, what is often totally original and totally new is the details: how we have arranged form and color, shape and placement, organization and structure. From a macro view it is derivative, but from the micro view it is completely original.

God is in the details, and so is *the new.*

THESE 11 THINGS ARE ALL WE NEED TO BE AWARE OF.

WALK THIS WAY

One thing I have found as a designer is that there is no shortage of people giving me advice. There is nothing designers love to do more than to try and help other designers be better at what they do. This is noble and good, and as a community of people we certainly know how to try and take care of our own by offering sage musings on our experiences in the profession. We have all seen and read many pieces from all the big design stars we all know: Victore, Draplin, Sagmeister, Monteiro, etc… offering their nuggets of wisdom for those less famous than themselves. Hell, I am as guilty of this myself—I wrote the *Design Education Manifesto* after all.

I am starting to wonder—how useful is this? How useful is Aaron Draplin listing off 50 bullet points of advice? How useful is Mike Monteiro writing a book about how to be a designer? How useful are people we know only by reputation telling us what to do and how to act as a designer? I can tell you from a personal view that I absolutely believe every single word I wrote in my Design Education Manifesto. I also believe that it will help those who read it get a better design education regardless of where they are in their schooling (or even after school). I believe that giving back to the community that helped me get where I am is a required part of being a designer and educator—maybe the main part.

However, I also think that my Design Education Manifesto is most useful for one person: me. I think it is probably much less useful for everyone else. I do not think it is useless—I really do think there is good stuff there. I will be the first person to admit that it was written primarily for me, even though it appears to be written for everyone else. I cannot speak from any specific knowledge, but I suspect that many of the other tomes of advice and wisdom from others are also written mostly for their authors.

What should we—as designers, thinkers, makers, critics, and educators—be writing and talking to each other about? This is a really good question that should be asked and answered by as many people as possible as often as possible. I do not know, but I do think that more lists of advice are not the best way to help the community of designers progress. I think we should be making designers think instead of imitate or have a checklist of ways to act. We need to be proposing ideas and arguments that we talk about together. I am curious about Frank Chimero's book *The Shape of Design,* because it appears to be a thesis on what he thinks design really is, as opposed to how he thinks we should act as designers. I am excited about Ze Frank's new *A Show* because his is a conversation about creativity and acts of making, not bullet points of how to be more creative.

I applaud anyone who spends the time and effort to write and lecture about how we think we can become better designers. I thank James Victore, Aaron Draplin, Stefan Sagmeister and Mike Monteiro for their efforts at giving a little back. I simply wonder—should our conversations be less about "this is how I did it" and more about "how could you do it?"
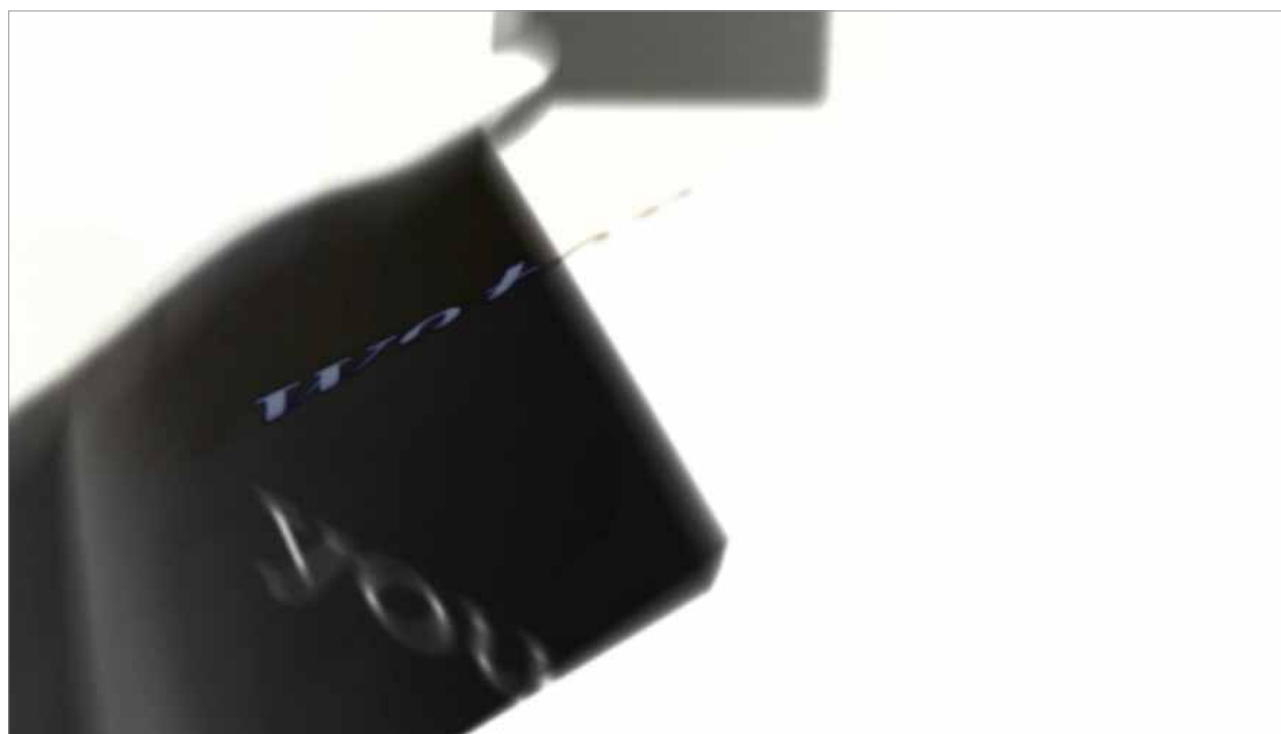
DIPSACUS FULLONUM

This is an experimental music video for the song "Dipsacus Fullonum," by the band The Low Branches, from Richmond, Virginia. I filmed digitally projected words from the song lyrics onto paper that I kept in motion with my hands. Numerous clips were composited together inside of After Effects using simple layer blends.

WE'RE OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD

Designers spend a lot of time endlessly discussing and questioning technology. The question this brings up is why are we talking about this so much? Does it really matter that we use Instagram instead of a Polaroid camera? Is letterpress really better than an inkjet print? Do we really care about the authenticity of Photoshop manipulation versus working with film? Does it matter that we visualize data in Processing, Excel or C++? What we are really talking about when we question technology is uncertainty — designers get very uncomfortable not understanding how things work and what they will do.

Many designers identify themselves as control freaks — concerned with steering their work in specific directions, obsessing over esoteric details, and generally playing god to everything they oversee and create. We are enamored and empowered with the idea that we control the destiny of our creativity. When designers come up against a new technology — be it lead type or software — we get uncomfortable because of the uncertainty inherent in not understanding exactly how this technology works, and exactly what it can and cannot do, and what it will mean to our profession. Especially with recent digital technology, there is a notable sense of *The Wizard of Oz* syndrome — designers feel like someone that we do not know, that we cannot see, is behind the curtain pulling the levers and hitting the buttons and making the magic happen.

It is important to understand that we are not worried about unpredictability, which some designers enjoy. In fact, designers today often go back to old technologies because we like the

unpredictability they provide in comparison to today's digital tools. Letterpress, photographic film, and similar tools are often used in contemporary design because of their unpredictable, analog nature.

Technology is a constantly evolving entity that is always in a state of flux, and its fluctuating nature is always uncertain. The irony is that technology in design is often used to reduce uncertainty, and to provide more predictable methodologies and processes to creating design artifacts. Even the analog technologies designers like to use in current work were originally introduced to dramatically reduce the unpredictability and ambiguity in the technologies they replaced. Before lead type, letters were drawn by hand, with each letterform being different. Analog photographic film reduced the wild variations in hand-painted portraiture. Even though designers do not understand exactly how a Photoshop filter actually works, the software engineers who programmed the algorithms do — it is a repeatable, predictable mechanism that works the same way under identical circumstances

When designers debate Pinterest versus Tumblr, or Twitter versus Facebook, what we are really asking is simply this: *what happens next?*

And, *will I get to be a part of it?*
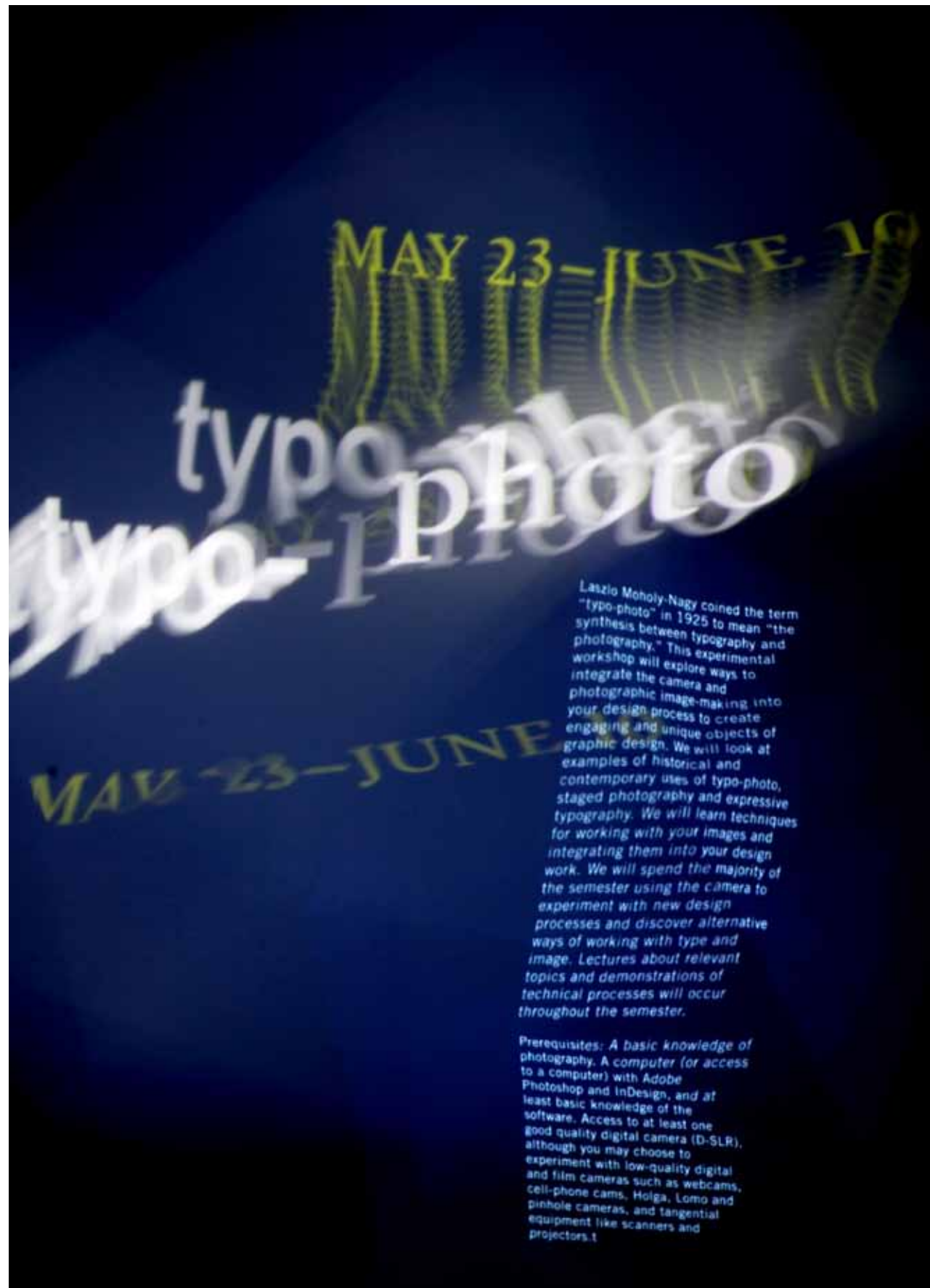
TYPO-PHOTO POSTERS & BANNERS

These are a few posters and web banners I created for my summer elective *Typo-Photo*. The posters are created using a digital projector, some folded paper, and a 10-second exposure on a DSLR. The banners are macro photography from a computer monitor that are composited together digitally.

MAY 23–JUNE 10

typo-photo

MAY 23–JUNE 10

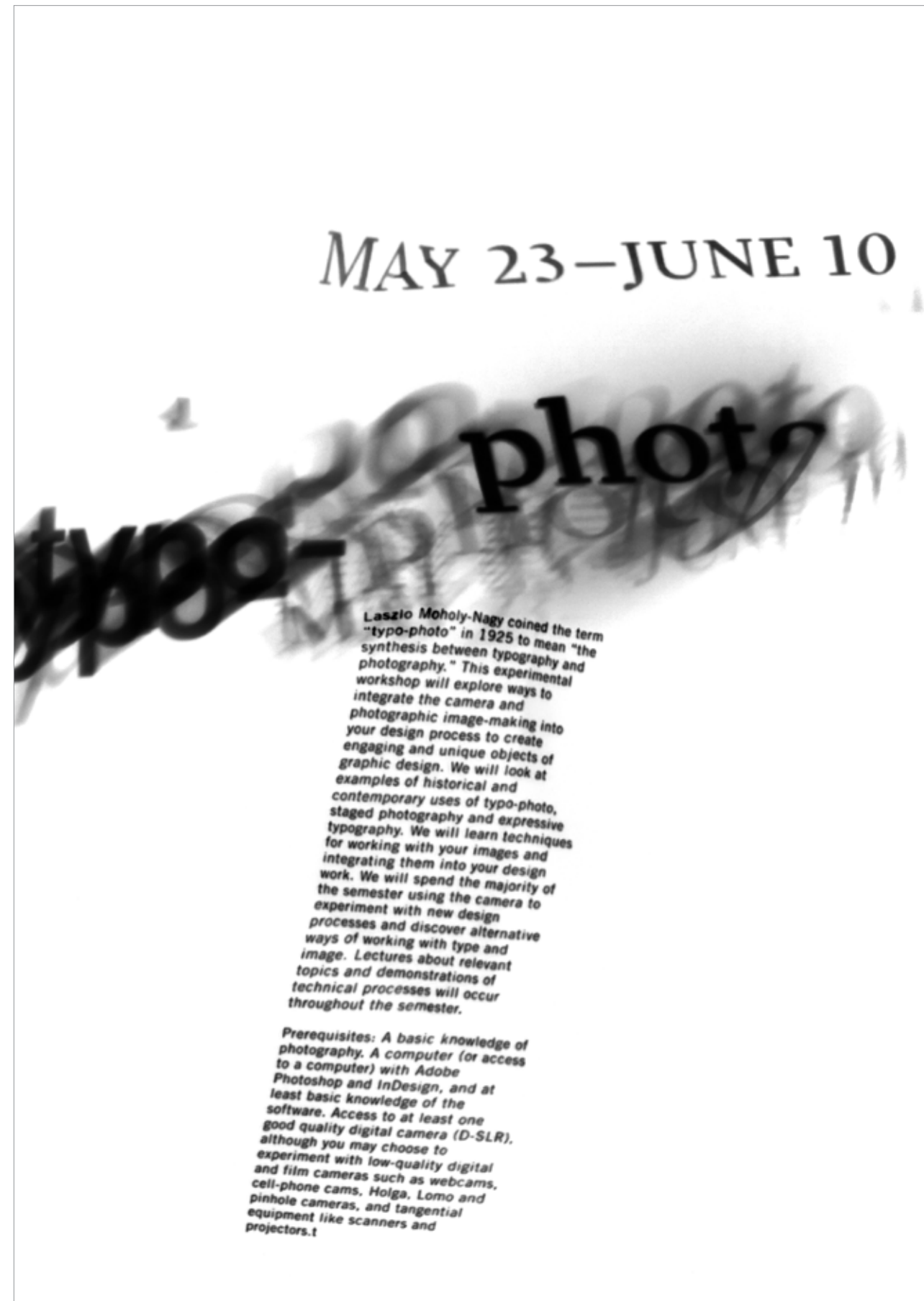Laszlo Moholy-Nagy coined the term "typo-photo" in 1925 to mean "the synthesis between typography and photography." This experimental workshop will explore ways to integrate the camera and photographic image-making into your design process to create engaging and unique objects of graphic design. We will look at examples of historical and contemporary uses of typo-photo, staged photography and expressive typography. We will learn techniques for working with your images and integrating them into your design work. We will spend the majority of the semester using the camera to experiment with new design processes and discover alternative ways of working with type and image. Lectures about relevant topics and demonstrations of technical processes will occur throughout the semester.

Prerequisites: A basic knowledge of photography. A computer (or access to a computer) with Adobe Photoshop and InDesign, and at least basic knowledge of the software. Access to at least one good quality digital camera (D-SLR), although you may choose to experiment with low-quality digital and film cameras such as webcams, cell-phone cams, Holga, Lomo and pinhole cameras, and tangential equipment like scanners and projectors.t

THE COLOR OF LAZINESS

I was reading this article about bad trends in current movies and was stuck by one thing in particular. The author is talking about how modern movies are digitally color-corrected by genre — horror movies are blue, unreality is green, and so on. He concludes with this passage:

> ... directors have realized these colors are a no-cost way to create atmosphere without, you know, having to write a good script or hire competent actors. These colors are a visual shorthand for various emotions and ideas (yellows seem hotter, blue makes a scene seem lit by spooky moonlight, washed-out grays are depressing). In other words: It's just laziness.

This is an interesting idea, that color can be the tool of laziness. We have thought a lot about the psychology of color and how greens mean nature, and red means love, and white means pure. But what about the ramifications of thinking this way? What about the dumbing down of how we communicate by using colors as simple shorthand for more complex ideas? Films are enormously complex systems of meaning and story synthesized within aesthetics and visual narrative. What if the filmmaker is not skilled at juggling these various signs and signifiers as they tell the story? Not to worry! We can — especially now — very easily adjust the color of the film. Knowing how to effectively tell a story that resonates with an audience becomes less important than knowing how to manipulate the medium to provide a false effect.

Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg created a movement in the 1990's called *Dogme 95*. The idea was to make pure films without special effects or overbearing post-production. This was a reaction against increasingly prominent technological tricks used in filmmaking. Some rules include things like filming only on location, only using actual sound recorded during filming, and a host of other limitations. This idea of "back to basics" is directly in opposition to the effects-laden opuses of modern Hollywood directors who churn out mindless detritus.

I wonder how we can apply *Dogme 95* to graphic design? I think for design it is less about "no computers" or "no effects" and more about being authentic. On more than one occasion I have been asked by a student how to make a simple physical effect digitally. "How can I make a coffee cup ring stain on a piece of paper with Photoshop?" My answer? "Get a cup of coffee, a piece of paper and a scanner." I think that the tools we have available to us in 2011 are nothing short of magnificent, but it comes with a caveat: when it is so easy to make anything, it is too easy to make nothing good. The authenticity of how we make, how we create meaning and engagement becomes more and more important as the skills to do so get more and more muddied inside of the tools.

MARTIN VENEZKY POSTER

This poster is to promote a lecture at vcu by designer Martin Venezky. Having been a longtime fan of Venezky's work, I wanted to create a poster that was a reference to his process, but not an imitation of it. I decided to refer to the handmade nature of his work by doing a photographic setup using paper and an Alvin cutting mat — tools and materials Martin uses in his design process.

For the main type I used lasercut letters made from clear acrylic. I experimented with a few variations of the words set individually, intending to composite them together later.

Trying to combine these together digitally was not working. After some thought, I wanted to try and capture this poster with a sense of mise en scène — having everything that needs to be in the poster present on stage in a single photographic image that tells the story of its making. I printed out the secondary information on paper and placed them in the setup as the base on which the acrylic letters stood.

I also tried another version with a bunch of scrap paper I gently threw onto the setup in an effort to convey a greater sense of collage in the poster, but instead of interesting it looked messy and overly complex. The overlap of the transparent letters were giving the poster enough complexity and the additional material was just making it confusing.

After some simple color correction I chose to make the poster a one-color cyan print, as a reference to the CMYK printing process
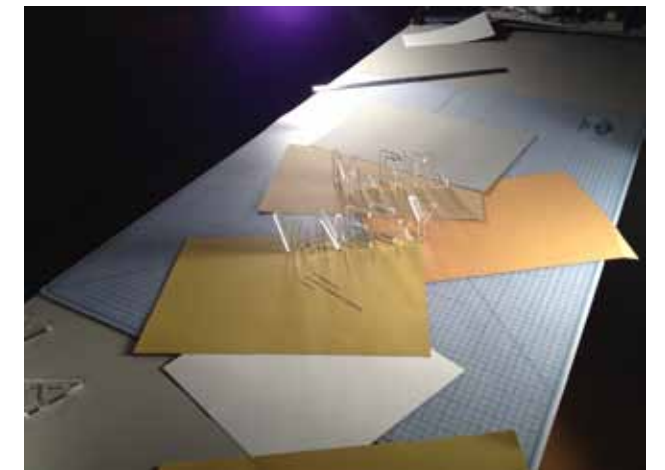
WHITHER BEIGE?

I remember a time when most consumer electronics, and virtually all computers were beige. The story goes that manufacturers needed to have an obtrusive, less noticeable color for these new magic boxes, and beige was it. Not white, not tan, not black, not brown — but beige. The un-color color. You would think white would fill that role, but white is actually quite noticeable in how crisp and clean it is; whereas beige just fades away. It can fit in to any decor, it can get dusty without looking noticeably grimy. Black was reserved for entertainment devices, like TVs and VCRs. Beige was the color of computers, of business, of "getting shit done."

In all of my years as a design student and a design teacher, I can honestly not remember once when beige has come up — as a color, as something to try to get, as a palette. Off-white? Yes. Light yellow? Sure. Dingy gray? Occasionally. But I have never heard "you need some more beige in that" or "have you tried making that type beige" or "you know what would make this really pop? Beige." Beige has moved from the color of make stuff happen to the color of nothing happening. Beige is now negatively generic. It is the color of nothing. It is visual Muzak. It is a can of government issued beans with a white label and all-cap sans serif black lettering that says BEANS — only today that bold black lettering on white would be considered pretty hip design.

We like to say that "_ is the new black" to refer to whatever is now, whatever is hot. But what is the new beige? Will we look on all of today's brushed aluminum electronics 20 years from now as we surf a history of electronics website on our magenta/tartan/clear/paisley/holographic-colored tablet computer and ask ourselves what the hell were they thinking? That brushed aluminum looks so… beige. And what about graphic design? Sure there are trends and popular movements and predictable elements, just look at Trend List for a sample of current fads in graphic design. But beige is more than just about a fad, it is about a larger shift in aesthetics, in what we want and need not just in a small way, but in a larger context.

I look at the brushed aluminum on my iPhone and I have to wonder: are things already — if I may coin a phrase — beigeing before our eyes?

THIS IS WHAT COMPUTERS USED TO LOOK LIKE.

DESIGN PROCESS VISUALIZATION

This is a visualization of my design process used in making
The Art Of Music Video poster. I am mapping every file I created,
all of my thoughts during my making, and a record of the time
I spent on each segment of making. I have also tracked the spe-
cific files that went into the creation of the final piece.

itely

GESTURE EDIT

s good
d con-

looking at all the images i star what i think can work
i look at what you can read which eliminates a majority of the
pictures

also like
erstand
e as is

what works as a gestalt what i think looks cool from a glance
and gets starred

some that are conservative and very legible get a star

i end with 33 photos that i then open up into photoshop
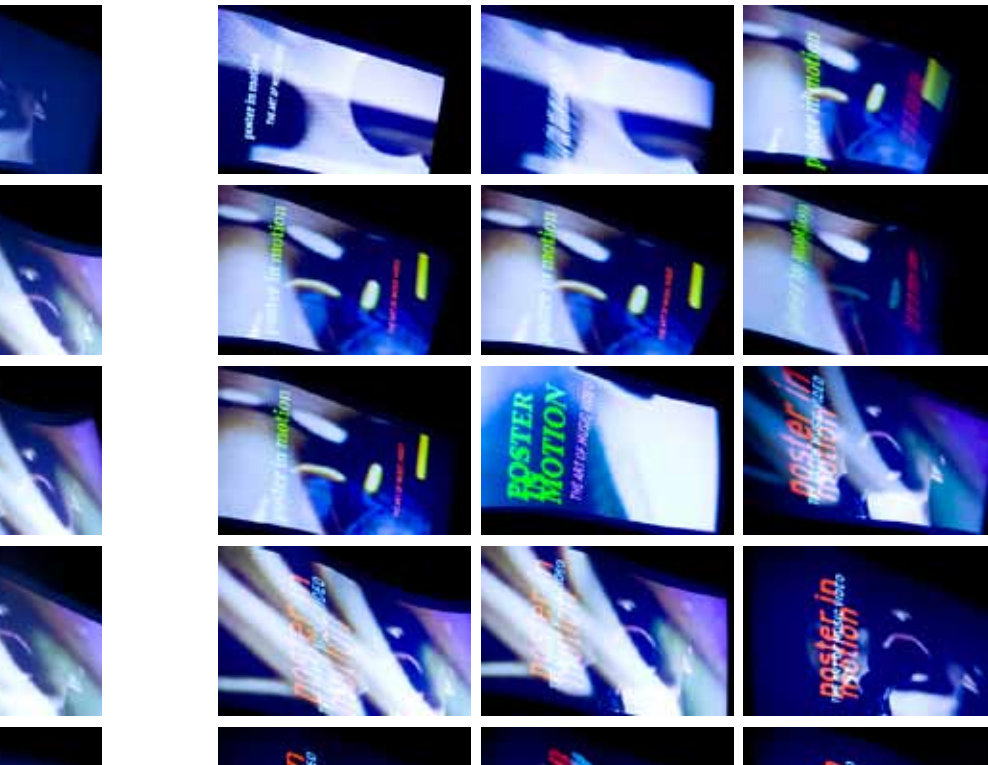
another 25 or so images that are simila
something not working

sometimes the blur is ugly or the color
bad or they just do not feel correct whic

i end with 8 images that i like a lot but
more than the other

this is the image i will use

nputer

this is the poster here in one shot

i save them out as psd files just quicklyer to
so they are more intense
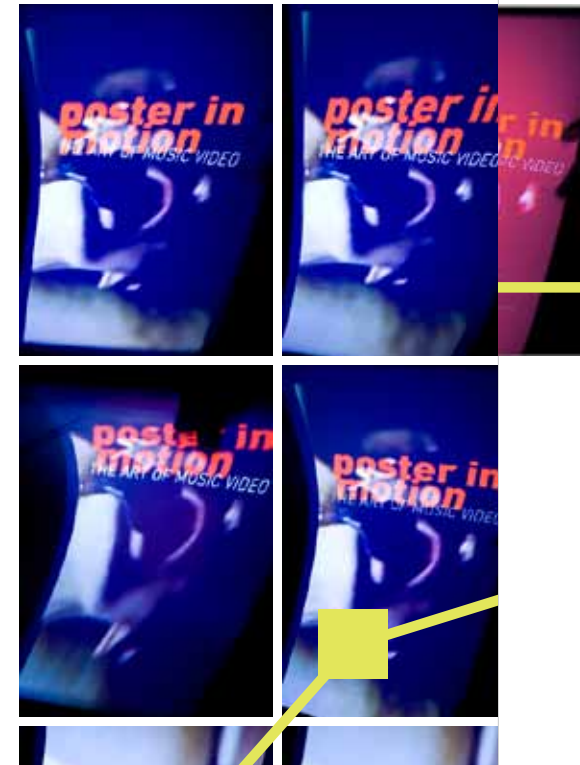
FINAL LAYOUT

i bring the final psd files into indesign and nail everything
down including the design credit

TWEET FILE

i run a spellcheck to make sure it work and i check the fuel
resolution to make sure i am ok

time to start the pimping so i tweet out

i give it all a look over but at this point it is basically done and
there is not much else to do

a few of the vcu twitter people like it

PROCESS AS PRODUCT

If you are old enough, you know the band The Flaming Lips from their rather bizarre 1993 college alt-rock single "She Don't Use Jelly." This is where I first heard them while attending Syracuse University. You likely know them now from the song "Do You Realize?" which has gotten massive airplay over the past few years and has helped to thrust the band into must-see status at the top of many critic's lists. You have no doubt seen lead singer Wayne Coyne walking along the arms of a crowd in a giant inflatable bubble. You have also heard of Trent Reznor, who, performing as *Nine Inch Nails*, also became big in the early 1990's and has stayed that way with his heavy industrial electronic based music. More recently, you know him because of the soundtrack he and Atticus Ross scored for the film *The Social Network.* You also know Chuck Close, the portrai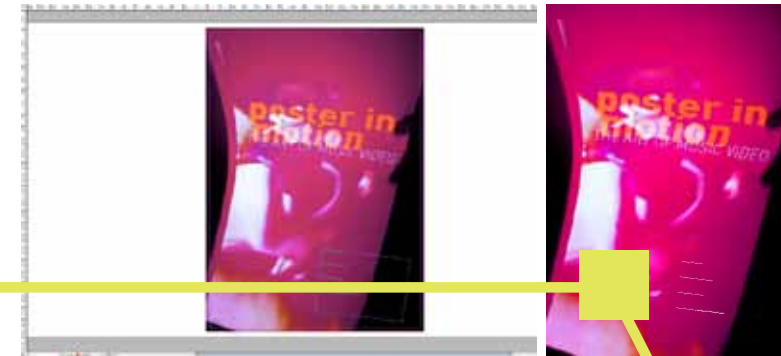t painter. He has been an internationally recognized artist since the early 1970's, and is most well known for giant oversize paintings of people, often using some kind of a modular grid or other segmented structure.

I often think of these three people together — Coyne, Reznor, and Close — because I have an interesting relationship with their work. I would say I'm somewhat ambivalent about most of what they do, although I do quite like a few of their creations. However, what I do love is their process. I love their making, their creativity, their realization of form — be it music, video, performance, drawing or painting. I look at their output as merely a byproduct of their process. I know that logically any output is a byproduct of process, but to me what they are really doing, what they are striving for, is the process. The albums and paintings and performances are just the things they happen to end their process with.

This is something I really more suspect than can actually prove as I do not know them personally. I have heard interviews with all three people and there is something else going on beyond "I wanted to make an interesting painting" or "I had

a nice sounding chord progression in my head." To me it sounds more like they have ideas of creating, of making, and wanted to see what happens when they act on it. Coyne spends time filming a kindly described "art film" called *Christmas on Mars* about Santa Claus in outer space. Reznor has broken from his record label and has released entire albums of experimental music for free online. Close sets up intricate systems of abstraction to create portraits that only make sense from far away, often working with a team of assistants as he is confined to a wheelchair.

There is something going on with these three men beyond the obvious trapping of their respective fields. Something I admire tremendously, but struggle to understand. There is something about them and their work that reminds me of color: defined yet completely undefined all at the same time. Also like color, I have a strange relationship with their work — I know it is there, but I often find enjoying it to be tedious. Yet, like color, there is a deep relationship beneath the surface I have a hard time quantifying.

I do not know exactly what I am trying to say here, but I do know this: I have plenty of Nine Inch Nails music on my computer, but I rarely listen to it. However, I feel better knowing it is there. I do not own any Chuck Close paintings, or reproductions, but I have seen him speak and I often reference him in design critiques. I have not listened to The Flaming Lips in many years but I did watch *The Fearless Freaks*, a documentary about them recently. Despite my lack of consumption, I selfishly feel more creative when I think about them. Even with my distant relationship with their work, they seem to influence me regularly.
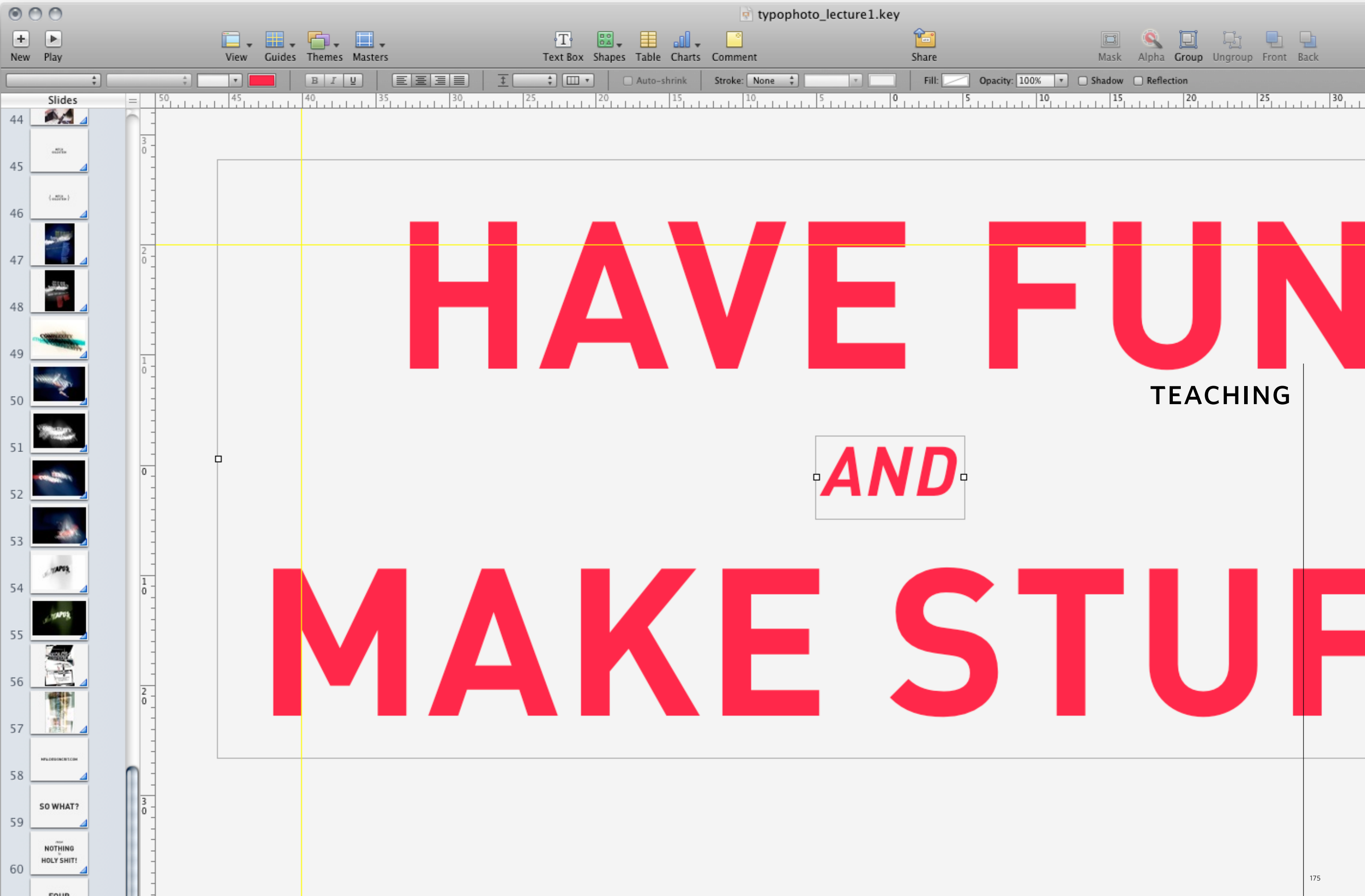
THE POETICS OF CHANCE OR THE FERRET-JELLO HYPOTHESIS

Graphic designers tend to work with intent. We often start a project with the idea of the thing — the deliverable. We know we will be designing a book, a poster, a logo. Design is often thought of as "visual problem solving" so naturally, knowing we will end up with a "solution" to our given "problem" in the form of a "thing" is nice and comforting to us — it is a safety blanket inside the complex world of design. However, there is another way to think about making design, and that is not with intent, but with exploration — designing while not necessarily knowing about
the deliverable, or what supposed problem you think you may be resolving, or making sure that what you are creating fits exactly into the right parameters as outlined by the design brief. You can create design by simply gathering some ideas, setting up some processes, laying out a framework of making and simply seeing what happens — allowing the making itself to clarify its outcome.

Working this way involves a lot of things many designers are uncomfortable with: things like unpredictability, failure, and working with chance. There is a possibility what you are making will fail. You may get something that will not fit into a prescribed idea of a deliverable. The question is where our interests lay: what can we get when we do not know what we are trying to get to? I think of this as the poetics of chance — the notion that chance begets things you simply cannot plan for, outcomes you cannot expect. Chance brings you to places that you could not predict, and lets you make things you could not foresee. The poetics of chance are often at play in my own work, as I am usually unsure of where I am heading with a project until after I have gotten there.

A BRIEF HISTORY

There are numerous examples of chance in art and design. One of the most admired practitioners of chance was composer John Cage. Cage worked in many forms outside of the standard ideas of writing and performing music, but his most interesting ideas were when he used chance as a tool of composition. Using the *I Ching* — an ancient philosophical Chinese document from about the 2nd millennium BC — Cage created chance systems for composing music. The *I Ching* uses a systems of symbols to divine order in historical events, and Cage translated this into a tool to create music. He would essentially ask the book to provide him the notes and the arrangements of his music. In some ways he was playing the book as he would play a piano or guitar. Cage used the *I Ching* as a tool for creating music for the bulk of his career.

Starting in the 1940s, Cage also worked with and popularized the notion of the prepared piano — a standard piano altered with screws and other foreign objects placed between and around the strings. This allowed the piano to make unpredictable sounds based on how the objects and strings reacted when being played. Cage did not literally throw a handful of screws into the belly of a piano, but instead used the basic harmonic structure of music to place the objects within a somewhat logical structure. The idea was not about being random, where there would be zero control of the instrument, but about chance, where Cage allowed for the unexpected as he did not know what the screws would do to the sound until the piano was played. To me this idea of chance instead of randomness is what makes Cage's work so interesting — he is not looking at purely random tools and methods. To put it simply, there is a method to his madness. Randomness would involve a complete lack of control and zero intent in how the tools are used. Something is random when each iteration or action has no relevance to the other iterations around it, like flipping a coin. One instance of the coin landing heads or tails has zero bearing on what it does the next time. Chance — at least in the way Cage uses it — is more about exploiting the unexpected and unpredictable. Cage works with systems of making, and methodological frameworks; from the *I Ching* to prescribing notes based on the folds in a crumpled piece of paper.


A PREPARED PIANO.

In the 1920s, László Moholy-Nagy started working with chance in his photography, but in a more subtle, innate way. Using the technique of the photogram—placing objects directly onto light-sensitive photo paper and exposing them to a light source—Moholy-Nagy created unpredictable, chance-based compositions. The resulting composition could only be evaluated after the paper was exposed and developed—there was no way to predict what each physical arrangement of objects would result in when turned into a flat, developed image. Moholy-Nagy was continually experimenting with materials and techniques, including using oil between sheets of glass and flashlights to refine and exploit the photogram process. What is exciting about working experimentally the way Moholy-Nagy did, is that there is an inherent amount of failure to the process, as many compositions will not work, both technically and aesthetically, but within the failures were extraordinary successes.

Another example of how Moholy-Nagy worked with chance is his 1930 kinetic sculpture, *Light-Space Modulator*. This object—made of metals, plastics, cellophane, lightbulbs and other materials—worked as a tool for creating compositions, rather than only acting as a composition unto itself. Moholy-Nagy was interested primarily in the shapes and shadows the object cast onto nearby walls as it moved. In many ways the light-space modulator was a photogram in motion. In a photogram, the objects on the paper are less important than what they result in through the process of making. *Light Space Modulator* works the same way—as an object it looks interesting, but running the process allows it to generate things even more interesting than itself.
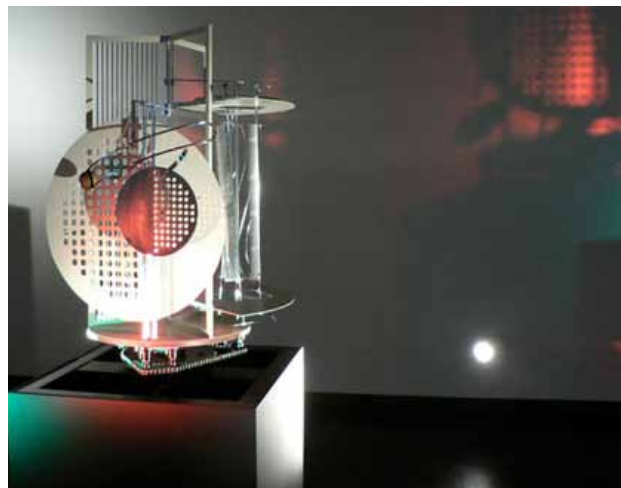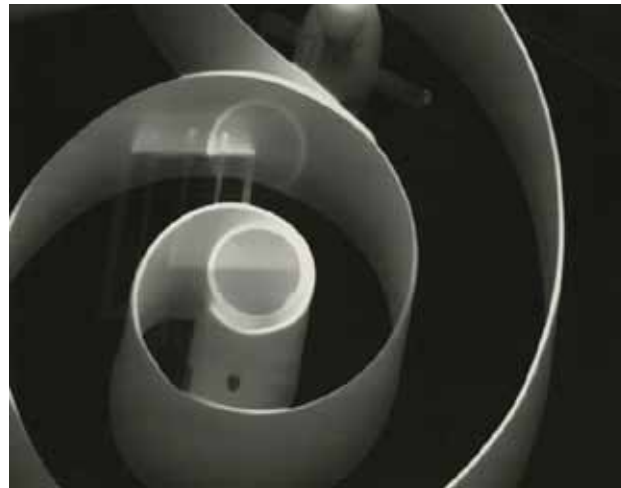
TOP: LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY, *PHOTOGRAM*, 1943.
BOTTOM: LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY, *LIGHT-SPACE MODULATOR (REPLICA)* 1938.

Another noteworthy individual who experimented with chance was Robert Rauschenberg, who created a series of paintings called *Combines* starting in 1954. These large works were created by Rauschenberg by going out into the New York City streets and gathering found materials. In his studio, Rauschenberg would then combine these disparate elements in a kind of painterly collage. This idea is reminiscent of the Dada artists, in that Rauschenberg was not as interested in logic and rules, as he was in chance and making. He and the Dadaists were curious about representing the modern, chaotic human existence through fragments and ephemera, instead of traditional still-life and literal representation. Rather than working inside the parameters of carefully thought out meaning and symbolism, Rauschenberg and the Dadaists combined disparate elements to synthesize meaning that could only really understood after the making was over. They put aside pre-rationalization in favor of making, and then figured out what they had made when they finished each piece—allowing chance to become a core part of their process.

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG, *UNTITLED*, 1954.

LEONARDO SONNOLI, *CORRAINI EDITIONS*, 2003.

A contemporary example of chance used specifically inside of graphic design is the Corraini Editions promotional booklet from 2003 by Italian designer Leonardo Sonnoli. As a publisher of creative work, Corraini wanted to emphasize their creative ideology in their promotional material, and left the entirety of the content and design up to Sonnoli. Placing all of the written content on the front page, Sonnoli decided to let the rest of the signature play with chance. Working with the printer's marks normally left to the side of a printed press sheet, he enlarged and formed an abstracted language, with forms laid out on sets of printing plates that were changed out at the discretion of the pressman, not the designer. He also used a split fountain on the press—a technique of using two different colors poured into either side of a single set of inking rollers—so that as the press ran, these colors would run together in a gradual and unpredictable way. Sonnoli also specified different coated and uncoated paper stock and varying ways of folding the signatures together so that each booklet was unique in many ways.

Unlike a digital tool like a computer, an offset press employs a physical, analog process that designers do their best to control with computers and software. In this case, Sonnoli embraced the analog, slippery nature of the press and exploited it to create something that was unique and unpredictable. The use of chance allowed for a design that could not have been simply designed, it could only have emerged from the framework Sonnoli created.

The wonderful thing about embracing and exploiting chance when making design is that by its very nature, you do not know what you will get. This means that your design process has to be an adventure — there is no roadmap when you do not even know what your destination is. This also means you will have many false starts, since using chance in your design process inevitably means making lots of failures. While the rewards for working with chance can be tremendous, there are some issues to be aware of. There is potentially a financial limitation to working this way, as clients generally do not like to spend money for no return. Another important consideration is that designers are often thought of as "problem solvers" who need to come to a "fix" at the end of the process — a solution to the problem. A design process using chance often creates more problems than solutions.

Since chance creates a lot of things that do not work, editing becomes a very important part of the design process. In editing, a designer picks and chooses among all of the output of chance based work. This is actually much more important than it may seem at first. I work often with a camera using unpredictable methods, and I generate lots and lots of stuff to sort though. In some ways, the editing process is actually where the "design" happens — where I see what fits and what does not with the project I am working on. The determination of fit becomes an interesting mix of practical skills (aesthetic sensibilities, looking at legibility, semiotics) and gestural intuition (what feels right, what I am drawn to). Working with chance means the designer has to be open to working both intuitively and pragmatically at the same time.

Chance can be thought of as a tool, rather than just a methodology or approach. The use of tools is something I find particularly interesting about the practice of graphic design. Most designers have very specific and often very polarizing opinions about what they use to make design. Some people are happy at sitting down in front of their computer and moving pixels around a screen. Others will only work with analog tools such as the letterpress or pen and ink. Some are interested only in precise, predictable methodologies, while others only look for happy accidents or serendipity. There is a middle ground, where the designer chooses what they think the right tool for the job will be, using different processes for creation depending on what they think is most appropriate. Chance can be seen as another tool to use at certain times for certain kinds of projects. The use of chance is not necessarily a retaliation against predictability, it is not the only way to work, or suggests that working with predictable tools and predictable methods is wrong. It is simply another tool in the designer's toolbox.

FERRETS, JELL-O.

THE FERRET-JELL-O HYPOTHESIS

A big part of what chance does on a fundamental level is what I call "The Ferret-Jell-O Hypothesis." This is a simple idea that states when we push disparate things together that have no relationship, the human brain forces a meaningful relationship onto them. Ferrets and Jell-o have nothing to do with each other, until you put them side by side, and then a dialog begins in the mind of the viewer. Working with chance often involves the practice of physically combining disparate, unrelated elements together into something new — like screws and pianos, or street garbage and oil paints. When the logic of such combinations is disregarded, unexpected and magical results can happen. Inside of a framework of chance is a place where ferrets and jello can come together into something wonderful and meaningful. This is why the ideas of chance are so important to recognize — chance makes things happen that would otherwise never exist, and allows designers to talk in new ways to those who see their work.

I have spoken about chance as a process, and chance as a tool. What about chance as an attitude? Chance can simply become an acceptance of the unknown, of embracing the real potential for failure. It does not need to be about bouncing lights off of a sculpture, or what colors you pour into a press. It can simply be how you approach making. My work is largely based on using chance and unpredictability — I find that pushing pixels around a computer screen results in me creating work that is far less engaging than it should be. However, when I work with chance in an improvisational manner — co-creating with my design process to see what happens — I am often pleasantly surprised with the results. To me chance is less of an ideology or a Dadaist reaction to modern society, and more of a framework to making — it is a tool that gives me favorable results, and an attitude towards making that helps me move past boring, predictable design work. The poetics of chance helps me bring poetry into my design work, making it more emotive and engaging, less literal and predictable.

A STILL FROM THE TITLE SEQUENCE OF FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT'S FILM "FAHRENHEIT 451"

FIREMAN / FIREMAN

In François Truffaut's film version of Ray Bradbury's, *Fahrenheit 451*, books have been banned and are burned upon discovery by a team of people called "Firemen" — the title of the story refers to the temperature at which paper books burn. Early in the film, a character asks the main protagonist "is it true that a long time ago firemen used to put out fires and not burn books?" He answers by explaining how ridiculous that idea is — of course that never happened.

I think this idea of role changing from one who helps to one who hurts is something to take seriously, especially as design educators. A fireman used to be a giver — of life, safety and protection; but in this story he is now someone who takes away — knowledge, creativity, and even something that keeps us human: the ability to imagine. Are teachers of design slowly becoming Teachers in a Bradbury sense of the word? Design teachers should be there to give, both of themselves and of that they have learned and studied to their students. Encouraging knowledge and promoting excitement and creativity is the design teacher's bread and butter. What happens when teachers stop doing that?

There is a fine line between teaching and directing. A subtle but significant difference exists between encouraging creative discovery and directing paths of creation. I have heard design teachers refer to their roles in the classroom as "art directing." I find that not only wrong but vulgar — art directing students is a great way to teach them how to be employees, not designers. I think most design teachers teach for the right reasons and often in the right ways, but enough of them act like Bradbury's Firemen to make me concerned — policing students in what to do and how to do it, instead of allowing them to read whatever books they like to discover their own paths and curiosities.

DESIGN EDUCATION JUSTIFICATION

These readings (listed below) are all asking the same thing: *What is design?* Some of the readings further extrapolate the question and ask: *What is design education?* Possibly a more accurate way to phrase this would be: *How are we educated in design?*

~~As a group of students taking the very first tentative, awkward steps towards next spring when we defend our thesis, these questions bear some relevance. There seem to be a lot of people spending a lot of time trying to define "design." Sometimes they are defining it versus art, and sometimes versus society, and sometimes, versus itself. It makes me wonder why we need to define design at all. The "end-user" or target audience who will be actually looking at, experiencing, or using design really needs to understand the definition. They will not be able to use these objects more effectively if they understand why it is not art.~~

~~These definitions appear to exist only in an esoteric sense, so the choir being preached to knows what song to sing. From an academic perspective, I can see a need as educators shape curricula and departmental pedagogy, and try to dial in on what exactly their institutions' stance on design is. Personally, when it comes to the academics, I am far more interested in how the process of a thesis works. How are we educated in design? becomes a very poignant question that I ask myself constantly. I have a huge number of subjects, ideas, thoughts, insights, processes, references, and questions that will apparently all gel into some kind of a topic that I will spend the next 18 months developing, questioning, refining and ultimately presenting and defending. And after that, I will likely spend the rest of my life continuing to explore this topic.~~

~~What I find most off-putting about these essays is the need they have to prove design research as a relevant pursuit. They often compare design research to scientific research, PhD dissertations, and so on. These authors are trying to convince~~ ~~the reader that design research has merit and should be paid attention to. Again, we are preaching to the choir; if I did not believe in the relevance of a design thesis, I would not be attempting to get my MFA. To someone outside of design academics, these essays may be more interesting; to me, they are selling me on something I have already bought.~~

~~Where these essays get interesting is the idea of "practice-based research." I am reading and responding to these at the end of week 2 of a 15-week Spring semester, and so far I have not really made anything yet. Part of why I am at the MFA program at VCU as opposed to other schools is this program has a strong interest the idea of thinking through making. Previously, I have made, and I have thought, but I really have not thought through making as much as I would like. Starting to create frameworks this semester to do exactly that is very intriguing. The ideas of being able to both ideate through making as well as ideate through thinking and researching will bring my work to the level of interest that has been missing previously.~~

AN ATTITUDE TOWARDS DESIGN

TYPOPHOTO

In 1925 László Moholy-Nagy coined the term "typophoto" in the periodical, *Elementaire Typography* (Hollis). He was trying to clarify a new medium of graphic design: the synthesis of type and image. Moholy-Nagy considered typophoto an idea about designers mastering the use typography and images as a combined method of communication, and to be more precise in how they communicate with their work. Type and image are no longer two separate things that happen to be together on a page, but were now a single unified idea of messaging and meaning within graphic design. He was also talking about not just precision, but also sophistication and creativity — using things like metaphor and symbolism in how designers communicated with their work. Moholy-Nagy had a visionary idea of what graphic design should (and would) become. In the new world of graphic design, type and image are not two different things, but really one, new thing — a synthesis — and this is what I find particularly fascinating.

In a more basic way, typophoto is simply what it says: the photography of typography. During my undergraduate design studies when I discovered that I could actually photograph type and make it do new things, an entire universe of design opened up to me. Over the years this had led me to an even deeper path exploring how I work: I am especially drawn to using the camera as a tool of graphic design. To me, the camera is a device that helps me to create form, rather than record existing form. It can be a tool of creation, not recollection. Even so, typophoto has become much more to me than images of type. On a macro level, typophoto is really about my attitude towards design, a way of thinking about the relationship of Mitch Goldstein, Designer with how I make, what I make, and why I make it the way I do.

TYPO-PHOTO: THE CLASS

Exploring this attitude has become not only the core of my thesis studies while pursuing my Masters in Fine Arts in Graphic Design/Visual Communication at Virginia Commonwealth University, but also the basis of a class I have taught twice at vcu called *Typo-Photo*. I changed the name from the correct "typophoto" to the more fragmented "Typo-Photo" to indicate that this is a derivation, not a re-creation, of Moholy-Nagy's ideas. The class provided a place for me to explain and test ideas I was looking at for my thesis. This class ran in the Summer and Fall of 2011 at vcu, and was made of mostly graphic design students in their senior year. My description of the class was:

This experimental workshop will explore ways to integrate the camera and photo graphic image-making into your design process to create engaging and unique objects of graphic design. We will look at examples of historical and contemporary uses of typophoto, staged photography and expressive typography. We will learn techniques for working with your images and integrating them into your design work. We will spend the majority of the semester using the camera to experiment with new design processes and discover alternative ways of working with type and image. Lectures about relevant topics and demonstrations of technical processes will occur throughout the semester.

I also had some specific objectives to convey over the course of the semester, beyond just using a camera and type, including:

— *Learn how to use emergence and play in the design process.*
— *Discover how to use the camera and other imaging methods to author design work.*
— *Learn to synthesize disparate design and methodological elements in your work.*
— *Explore authorship and the pursuit of your own voice as a designer.*
— *Learn methods for incorporating type, image and type as image into your design.*
— *Learn to work with typography as an expressive, emotive element of design.*
— *Embrace the unpredictable, fortuitous nature of working experimentally.*
— *Learn how working with extreme design constraints can inspire your work.*
— *Learn how to use and exploit the friction of making to elevate your design process.*

The students were assigned a total of four projects, each based on an idea present in my version of typophoto: Play, Emergence, Fortuity and Synthesis. The Play project was simply that: playing around with a camera and typography. Students had a week to create at least 100 compositions using a couple of given words. The Emergence project tasked them with creating a promotional poster for an exhibition of their choice at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, using techniques they had discovered during the Play assignment. It was called "emergence" because by having a basic idea of the content and context of the poster, the poster itself would emerge from the process of creation. I encouraged the students to not worry too much about what they were going to do, or how they were going to work, and instead asked them to think briefly about the content of their poster and then simply go for it: start making stuff. This way of working is something I do regularly and I wanted to see how others would use it. The results were generally very favorable — students worked with type and images in ways many of them had not considered before. Encouraging them to experiment let them arrive at posters that were outside the more predictable formal ideas they had worked with in the past.

The last two projects are really one project in two parts: Fortuity and Synthesis. First, I had the students watch the great Danish film, *The Five Obstructions,* where filmmaker Lars von Trier challenges his mentor Jørgen Leth to remake one of his short art films five times, while adhering to bizarre limitations imposed by von Trier. During Fortuity each student was asked to choose his or her favorite project they have done while at vcu. Then they were asked to blindly pick three random — and somewhat ridiculous and silly — limitations out of a hat. These limitations were then used as a catalyst to re-imagine their project in any way the saw fit. The Synthesis part of the project asked them to synthesize what they had worked on so far with a randomly chosen short essay from the *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* website into some kind of deliverable object, thing, performance or experience. These two projects diverged significantly from the strict idea of Moholy-Nagy's typophoto, but still embraced the idea of creating new things from disparate ideas or entities.

LESSONS

That is what the students did, but what was the class really talking about? Conceptually the course was about two big kinds of ideas wrapped up in the typophoto attitude towards making: systems of discovery and the exploitation of process. The course manifested these ideas both in how the students worked and how I taught the class — so both the students and the teacher got a lot out of the class.

A lot of graphic design is taught in a prescriptive way: this is right, this is wrong; this is good, this is bad. I think this is fine as students begin the journey to becoming designers — they have to start somewhere and being trained in the mechanics of design is a good place to start. There is technical, vocational knowledge to being a designer that must be learned at the beginning of the education process. However, there is a point at which prescriptive teaching must end, and reactive teaching must begin. This is the moment when students stop trying to make the teachers happy and start trying to make themselves happy. When they stop thinking in terms of right and wrong and start thinking in terms of interesting or not interesting, engaging or not engaging, exciting or boring. Instead of pushing through to a final deliverable or idea, they instead react to the process of making and see where it takes them. Understanding prescription and reaction are both valuable, and designers work with both throughout their careers, however in design school reaction takes a notable back seat to prescription.

As a course, *Typo-Photo* was not very interested in prescription, it was primarily interested in reaction. These students were seniors and ready to try something outside of what they had been taught so far. For the Fortuity and Synthesis projects, the only real impetus was to just be making — don't worry about how useful the stuff was, or what it would become, or how it would be marketable, or how it would round out your portfolio. Instead, just shut up and make stuff. See what happens. Let the process tell you what you were doing, instead of you making your process do what you want. I was so intent on them not worrying about and getting paralyzed by what they were doing that during Fortuity I explained there was no deliverable at all — the project did not end in any kind of thing they needed to

be concerned with — all they had to do was make and see what happened. This freed them in a number of ways: since they did not have to make anything useful, they were free to make anything they could imagine. Since there was no deliverable, there was no attempt at reconciliation of format or size or medium. Since there was no specific content or direction, they were free to diverge at any given time in any direction. The project was about discovery, and the class was a framework for that discovery to happen. When the Synthesis part of the project came into play and they were asked to now create a deliverable, they had already made so much interesting stuff that the preoccupation with the "final thing" was gone, it was now just another step in the process.

What the students were doing were creating systems of discovery: working through their projects in whatever way gave them new stuff. The medium was irrelevant, what mattered is that they were setting up what ifs. Things like "what if I made these abstract images into an animated film with a zoetrope?" Or "what if I make by using the stuff from the last round of making to make the next round?" Or "what if I kept working into a reflected pattern?" The what ifs resulted in some wonderful, unexpected things that would not have happened had the students been concerned with the use of their making.

Students also learned to exploit their process. Since every student was working with different content, different aesthetics, and different attitudes, each was free to push their own process as far as it could go. The initial two projects — Play and Emergence — emphasized the tools of abstraction and discovery, like the camera. Many students had never used a camera to manipulate form and typography before, but doing so loosened them up in terms of how to use these tools at our disposal. Some students stuck with the camera. Others played with video, or a scanner, or natural media in unusual ways. Ultimately what they were all doing was using design methodologies in ways that resulted in unexpected things. Instead of predictably pushing pixels around InDesign, they were seeing what happens — instead of letting the tools use them, they were using the tools.

Students also leaned to work with their process in a manner of improvisation. In improvisational theatre there is the golden rule of "yes, and..." This basically means that an offer (an idea, situation, element or concept) made by one actor is immediately accepted and added to by the other actors. In design, this means that the students are co-creating with their process — they make their design an offer by way of a process, the process then offers something it created, and the student builds on that making, and so on. Instead of simply trying to get to the end of the project, they are just getting to the next offer, and then adding to it over and over. This encourages the students to simply see what happens. They were part of an improv acting troupe, only in graphic design: getting together where their process and saying "what if?" and "yes, and..." and then letting it take them wherever it wanted to.

AN ATTITUDE TOWARDS TEACHING
The class encompassed a lot of ideas that all were interrelated with each other — an overall conversation about how designers make and think about design. There was also another, more secluded conversation, and that was between me, the teacher and the activity of teaching design. I have been teaching design for more than six years, and this class has helped me understand and clarify the things I find important as a teacher of design. Most of the specifics of the class, like improvisation and unpredictability and gesture are ideas I am also investigating in my, but this class helped me understand a more specific idea about the role of the teacher in the design classroom, and how that changes from teacher to teacher and even from class to class. The design teacher is a lot of things — some right and some wrong. I have seen teacher as coach, as friend, as art director, and even as belligerent asshole. There are teachers who are your mom, your friend, your enemy, or your mentor.

Who I think I am as a teacher — and what I see far too infrequently — is an instigator. vcu Interior Architecture professor Camden Whitehead has been known to say that "a design teacher should give their students the tools, lead them into the woods, and let them fight their way back to civilization." The teacher is the person in the classroom who instigates the activity of discovery, the one who lights the fuse on the bomb of process. I think this is a valuable role for a teacher to have, especially one who is teaching upper class or graduate level design students. Students remain interested in being told what to do and how to do it for only so long; but give them a catalyst to investigate and discover in thief own way keeps the students on their toes and encourages them to direct their own education. During the class I felt like a benevolent devil sitting on their shoulders, whispering "what ifs" and "yes, ands..." into their ears. My role in the Typo-Photo class was both as critic and as instigator — in addition to critiquing student's work, I was daring them to do it in the first place.

A DESIGN EDUCATION MANIFESTO

School is hard. Design school is especially hard because so much of it exists within the abstract, the opinion. There are few, if any, absolutes as you go through design school. Much of design education is about learning some key techniques and then trying to apply them to your work in interesting ways. The following are some thoughts I have about how to go through a design program and get the most out of the experience, and beyond as a creative professional.

ALWAYS TAKE RISKS.

It is easy to learn and then repeat exactly what you have learned. However, you will not grow that way. I can see value in the regurgitation of knowledge if you are a lawyer, but I have a hard time with it as a design student or a creative professional. You should be pushing yourself and you should be taking risks, especially in school. Big risks. Trying what may not work. Asking questions that may not have answers. Seeing if what you throw against the wall sticks. In my experience, taking risks in school has always paid off big time.

BE AGGRESSIVE.

There are many opportunities available while in design school. For example: collaborative projects, extracurricular activities, and freelance work. These opportunities will not always come to you, you must go get them. Every school has a publications department that designs and produces internal and external collateral. There is no reason that you should not be the person designing these projects. Make contacts and ask for work. If you are talented and a little lucky, you will get it.

Be aggressive in terms of your academics as well. There are two kinds of design professors at school: pushers and pullers. Some professors will push their knowledge on you. Others will make you pull what you need from them. Ask questions of both. Challenge their statements. Ask for precedents. Beyond the curriculum of the class, ask your favorite faculty who they know that needs an intern (because they do know people, I assure you). Ask faculty if they need any assistance with their own work. Find out which exhibits they enjoyed at local museums. It is very important that as a design student you do not sit back and let things happen to you. Be aggressive and create your own luck and opportunities.

BREAK THE RULES.

I lecture to my students that they should "fuck the rules" as long as they have a good reason. I have consistently found that the students who are conservative, stay inside the lines and try to appeal to the teacher, are the students who do the most predictable work. Not bad work, just predictable. Defying the rules forces you to stray from the path of least resistance and ultimately make work that is more interesting, more meaningful and more fun to create.

But, that does not mean just be a contrarian for its own sake. It does not mean ignore any and all guidelines. It means take the requirements into consideration and break past them with good reasons and solid ideas. Breaking the rules just to be different is foolish, breaking the rules because you have a much better idea is smart.

LOOK AT EVERYTHING. DISMISS NOTHING.

Each designer is born from a unique experience. Classmates in the same program will have different educations depending on which teachers they have, what field trips they take, and what books they pick up. As a designer you need to always be looking at the world around you. You need to see everything — the kind of detailed seeing taught in freshman drawing classes — not just looking, but really seeing. You need to be an observer as well as a maker. You should rid yourself of any preconceptions of what is and is not worthy of your attention. Everything has potential to be interesting and influential. Not everything will be, but the more you see the better your chances are at seeing something that will be useful to you.

BE OBSESSIVE.

The saying goes that "necessity is the mother of invention." I concur, but I think for designers the saying should be obsession is the mother of invention. Obsession is what drives you to explore and find out as much as possible about something that interests you. I do not mean that being clinically obsessive/compulsive is something to aspire to — I have been told that is neither fun or interesting — but I do mean you need to be intensely immersed and engaged in what you are doing. This obsession can move you past understanding and awareness into a translative process where you will start to make things. We are usually taught that obsession is unhealthy, and in some cases that is true. When it comes to how a designer looks at the world, obsession can provide an incredible explosion of ideas as you

become so engrossed in something you start to reinvent it inside your head. Obsession can often help you to move through the threshold between thinking and making. You should never hold back your excitement about something that interests you, and by the same token, you should not hesitate to be obsessive about many things since you never know where your interests will lead.

BE UNCOMFORTABLE.

Comfort is tremendously overrated, especially as a designer. You know you can skew some type, add some color, toss in an image and make a decent piece of design. Maybe it's not great, but it's good enough. It is easy to get into the habit of making the kind of work you are comfortable making. Truly great, interesting, inspiring design comes not from comfort but from discomfort. It comes from the fear that what you are doing might really suck, but it also might just be brilliant. Discomfort makes you reexamine what you think you know and how you think things should work. Being uncomfortable helps you make decisions from the gut, it makes you push harder and take more risks. Grabbing that fear, holding onto that uncomfortable, scary place lets you push past expectations and into the unknown — into a process of discovery as opposed to regurgitation.

BE OPINIONATED.

You should have opinions about design and the world around you. Preferably, you should have strong opinions. Ideally, you should have strong and informed opinions. Every great designer I have ever met has an active stance on design, they do not passively allow work to wash over them. They have opinions about what they see. Having opinions means engaging in some kind of internal analysis of the work you see and formulating a response to it. As an educator I do this constantly in the classroom, and I try to do it constantly in the professional world as well. Opinions about design force you to pick a side, and define what kind of designer you are.

There are plenty of designers out there who punch a clock in the morning, mindlessly flow some text into InDesign all day, and then leave at five and don't think about design until the next morning. There are designers who casually ignore art and design while they look for the next reality show on TV. Then there are

the other designers who make more design in their spare time. Their idea of a good time is to look at typography or experiment with painting or photography. These are designers who are fully immersed in working visually, designers who are actively engaged in becoming better at what they do every day.

BE A COP.

They say that when you are a police officer you are on duty 24/7/365. Cops always look at their surroundings from a cop's perspective. They notice things others do not. They act as a cop would in an emergency situation whether or not they are in uniform. Most cops I have met and read about always carry their firearms and badge, even while on vacation. It is not something they turn off at the end of their shift.

A designer needs to act like a cop. When you are a designer, you are a designer 24/7/365. Always noticing, always observing, always designing, even if only in your head. Carrying a camera with you at all times is a good habit — capture interesting details you come across, not just because you have an assignment due, but because it is in your nature as a visual artist to observe and process the world around you. Inspiration comes from everywhere and nowhere, all at the same time.

One of the greatest things about being a designer is that you do not finish your design education when you leave design school. You continue learning for the rest of you life, and you should carry these ideas with you as you develop and mature into a creative professional.

(this scares the shit out of me)
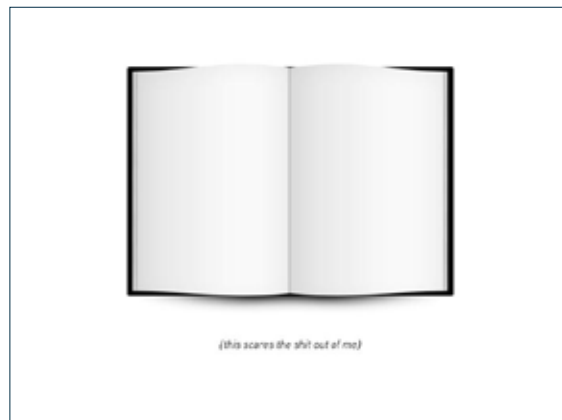
CREATIVE FRAMEWORKS?
in other words, creative frameworks are ways
to approach making good stuff, hopefully great stuff,
occasionally fantastically awesome stuff.

MUSIC VIDEO & FILM TITLES
short
singular
stylized
outside conventional expectations
highly conceptual

exaggeration
physical integration
sampling / recontextualization } **POETIC**
juxtaposition
hyper-reality
systemic construct

CREATIVE FRAMEWORKS IN MUSIC VIDEO & FILM TITLES

This is a transcript of a lecture given to graphic design students at vcu.

Today we are going to look at creative frameworks, specifically in music video and film title sequences. And really, this lecture is mostly about graphic design, I promise.

So how is this about graphic design, anyway? It is important to think about graphic design beyond just printed books and posters — graphic design encompasses or directly relates to almost all visual media. In fact, I think of film and motion work as nearly the same discipline as graphic design, except that film tends to move around a little more. All the same principals of narrative, form, metaphor, meaning, etc… are all there. By looking at film, video and motion you can extend your vocabulary about graphic design. This can help you get more ideas, think about design in a more sophisticated way, and make better work.

So, what do I mean when I say "creative frameworks?" Put simply, frameworks are ways to provide you the designer with something to start binding together the big three components of most design: type, image and meaning.

I look at these frameworks as places to start from. They are a big-picture way to think about what you are working on. This is worth consideration because of this: the blank page which is something that scares the shit out of me as a designer. Frameworks provide a conceptual way to move past this vast emptiness and start making. In other words, these frameworks are ways to approach making good stuff, hopefully great stuff, sometimes fantastically awesome stuff.

Why look at music video and film titles? First, we should consider what they have in common with each other. They are usually short: five minutes or less — a perfect short-attention-span nugget. They are singular — they can exist within themselves, and do not necessarily have to reference the outside world directly. They are stylized — highly expressive and very visually engaging. They generally live outside conventional expectations, and can be borderline in terms of readability, linearity, etc… Last, they are often highly conceptual — can be based solely in concept instead of a traditional linear narrative.

In terms of "graphic design" lets look at posters; depending on what you are doing this can apply to a lot of design. Again we see the same ideas. Posters especially are very similar to music video and film titles — almost identical in many ways.

So lets look at some specific frameworks. These are just six of infinite possibilities, but I do think you see these six pretty frequently as guidelines to help the creators of the work get moving. Obviously there will be a lot of gray area here, and a lot of overlap. But the thing to really remember, and in my opinion one of the most important things about being a designer is that these are all poetic ways of making design. To me the word poetic best describes what I strive to be when I am working. I think of working poetically as an amazing blend of meaning and form and metaphor and message — to me it is the pinnacle of what design can (and maybe should) be.

Lets look at the first one — **exaggeration**. This is taking something that is essentially "real" and pushing it farther to make it something new and interesting.

Wax — *"California"*
This is a great video by Spike Jonze — you know him from films like *Being John Malkovitch* and *Where The Wild Things Are.* So what happens here? A guy was trying to catch a bus. This video takes a very simple, banal event and then exaggerates it into something interesting. The idea is boring — but light him on fire and film it in slow motion and you get something poetic.

Bat For Lashes — *"What's A Girl To Do?"*
Another video of a somewhat unusual but banal scene that becomes extraordinary through exaggeration — just a girl riding a bike. At night. Kind of.

Physical integration is where the elements of design become real things inside of the construct of the video or title sequence. The design elements are actual things that are reacted to by the piece.

Panic Room — David Fincher, director
The film is all about isolation and a kind of impending doom — the titles help to amplify this by physically hanging over New York City at a giant scale.

Barbarella — Arcady and Maurice Binder, directors
This is one of my favorite title sequences ever. I suspect most of you have not seen this (except those of you over 50). This movie is really wonderful in a very silly way. Jane Fonda plays something of a space exploring sex addict in the 40th century. I don't really know how else to describe this, but note that it is from 1968 and that should help. As you watch this remember that there is no Photoshop, no AfterEffects, this is all done in camera and with an optical printer. I love the way the type plays with her and she romps around her fur covered spaceship, kinda sorta covering up her naughty bits. The titles help to reinforce the idea that Fonda's character is the center of the film and exists in a playful romp of sexuality.

Sampling and recontextualization is taking something that exists and reusing it in a different way or place. You can borrow an existing language — sound, music, graphics, whatever, and reuse it to a different end.

Thank You For Smoking — Shadowplay Studios, directors
This is a great movie about lobbyists for the tobacco industry. A really nice use of taking an existing graphic language and repurposeing it for the titles — those of you who smoke should recognize some of these.

Kutiman — *"The Mother of All Funk Chords"*
This one is kind of unusual. Kutiman has taken a bunch of videos uploaded to YouTube and resampled them into a piece of music. Note that what you are hearing is all legit — this actually is the music from all of these videos mixed together.

Juxtaposition takes different things, sometimes completely unrelated, and puts them together to create new meaning. This is something we do a lot as designers.

Se7en — Kyle Cooper, director
This is another one from David Fincher — a very dark, very moody film about a serial killer and the cops who are after him. This is a brilliant film and the title sequence sets it all up perfectly. This is from Kyle Cooper, who was from the firm Imaginary Forces, who are among the most sought after designers for film titles. He has since moved on to his own firm.

The Dog Problem — Howard Nourmand, director
This movie has a wonderful title sequence that far outweighs the rest of the movie in terms of quality. The story is about a writer who is in therapy, so the director uses Rorschach inkblots as the basis for the titles.

Hyper-reality is kind of a catch all, as I think we can argue that all of these examples are hyper-real. What I am specifically talking about is looking at reality from a very narrow viewpoint that can make the real into something more than real, a kind of highly attenuated reality.

The Fall — Tarsem Singh, director
This is from Tarsem Singh who did the movie The Cell and the REM Losing My Religion music video. This is highly symbolic, very beautiful film, and the titles show what happens before the beginning of the movie to set up the plot. It is filmed and edited in such an extreme way it becomes hyper-real.

Dexter — Digital Kitchen, directors
One of my favorite title sequences ever, the opening to Dexter. For those who do not know the show, he is a serial killer who only murders people who are bad. He also has a family and a child, and is a very likable character who is both normal and nuts at the same time. This sequence really manipulates reality in a way that makes you wonder what you are looking at.

Last is the **systemic construct** — my favorite of all. You may have heard this called "relational design" which simply put is the idea of taking a bunch of data or source material, and letting the material itself dictate the design. The designer or director is setting up a system and parameters that the visual material is run through and allowed to just do its thing. In a way this is similar to programming a design.

The Chemical Brothers — *"Star Guitar"*
This video is a perfect example. You know director Michel Gondry from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and a few other films, but I think his best work is in music video. He is basically programming an idea of how the source (the music) will inform the visuals for the video.

SOUR — *"Hibi No Neiro"*
This video is brilliant, from a Japanese band called SOUR. This is done entirely using amateur video of their fans from YouTube. This was planned and choreographed but the director uses the grid as a system the video works inside of.

To conclude, think about how all of these videos and titles work on a conceptual level that dramatically elevates them — and think about how these ideas can translate into graphic design. And remember one word:

Poetry. Everything I have shown you today is poetic in different and interesting ways.

A GRAPHIC DESIGN READER

This is a simplified list of books, films, and websites that I give to every student ion every class I teach. I have evolved this list over the past few years in an effort to not forget about some of the interesting and delightful media that is out there. Students are encouraged to close Facebook or Tumblr to instead read and watch some of the items listed here.

BOOKS (BY AUTHOR)

Notes on the Synthesis of Form
Christopher Alexander

Avant-Garde Page Design
Jarosluv Andel

Inside the Word
Phillipe Appeloig

A Century of Graphic Design
Jeremy Aynsley

Camera Lucida
Roland Barthes

Mythologies
Roland Barthes

*The Work of Art in the Age
of Mechanical Reproduction*
Walter Benjamin

79 Short Essays on Design
Michael Bierut

Edward Fella: Letters on America
Blackwell & Wild

Labryinths
Jorge Luis Borges

The Elements of Typographic Style
Robert Bringhurst

A Short History of the Printed Word
Robert Bringhurst

The Solid Form of Language
Robert Bringhurst

History of the Poster
Josef & Shizuko Brockman

136 Points of Reference
Ellery Browns

I Am Almost Always Hungry
Cahan + Associates

Invisible Cities
Italo Calvino

Graphic Design for the 21st Century
Peter Fiell

The Art of Looking Sideways
Alan Fletcher

The Business Side of Creativity
Cameron Foote

Working Title
Piet Gerards

Blink
Malcolm Gladwell

Outliers
Malcolm Gladwell

The Tipping Point
Malcolm Gladwell

Visualizing Research
Gray & Malins

Designing Design
Kenya Hara

Design Literacy 1 + 2
Steven Heller

Graphic Design Manual
Armin Hofmann

Graphic Design A Concise History
Richard Hollis

Black & White Photography
Henry Horenstein

Chasing the Perfect
Natalia Ilyin

Emergence
Steven Johnson

Essays on Design
John Christopher Jones

A Type Primer
John Kane

Tellmewhy
Karlssonwilker

The Cheese Monkeys
Chip Kidd

Robert Brownjohn: Sex And Typography
Emily King

Typography: Macro- and Microaesthetics
Willi Kunz

Countersign
Daniel Libeskind

The Space of Encounter
Daniel Libeskind

Einstein's Dreams
Allan Lightman

El Lissitzky
Sofia Lissitzky-Coopers

Thinking with Type
Ellen Lupton

Ed Ruscha
Richard Marshall

A Smile in the Mind
Beryl McAlhone

*Jan Tschichold: A Life in
Typography*
Ruari McLean

Understanding Comics
Scott McCloud

The Medium is the Massage
Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore

A History of Graphic Design
Philip B. Meggs

Design Writing Research
Miller & Lupton

A Designers Perspective
Bruno Monguzzi

Vision in Motion
László Moholy-Nagy

Morphosis Buildings and Projects
Morphosis Architects

Grid Systems in Graphic Design
Josef Müller-Brockmann

A History of Visual Communication
Josef Müller-Brockmann

This Rimy River: Vaughn Oliver and Graphic Works 1988-94
Vaughn Oliver

Invisible Monsters
Chuck Palahniuk

Production for Graphic Designers
Alan Pipes

Jan Van Toorn: Critical Practice
Rick Poynor

No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism
Rick Poynor

A Designers Art
Paul Rand

100 Pictures
Gerhard Richter

Typography
Emil Ruder

The Soul of a Chef
Michael Ruhlman

Wooden Boats
Michael Ruhlman

The Situationist City
Simon Sadler

Designed by Peter Saville
Peter Saville

Hella Jongerius: Misfit
Louise Schouwenberg

How to be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul
Adrian Shaunessy

Type, Image, Message
Nancy Skolos and Thomas Wedell

On Photography
Susan Sontag

Stop Stealing Sheep & Find Out How Type Works
Erik Spiekermann

The Creative Habit
Twyla Tharp

washsoakrinsespin
Tolleson Design

Vas: An Opera in Flatland
Steve Tomasulla

Bareback: A Tomato Project
Tomato

Process: A Tomato Project
Tomato

Type Design: Radical Innovations and Experiments
Triggs

New Typography
Jan Tschichold

Envisioning Information
Edward Tufte

It Is Beautiful — Then Gone
Martin Venezky

Complexity and Contradiction in Architecure
Robert Venturi

The Floating World; Ukiyo-e
John Warwicker

Paperwork + More Paperwork
Nancy Williams

FILMS (DIRECTOR)

24 Hour Party People
Michael Winterbottom, 2002

8 1/2
Federico Fellini, 1963

Adaptation
Spike Jonze, 2002

Blade Runner (Director's Cut)
Ridley Scott, 1982

Barton Fink
The Coen Brothers, 1991

Basquiat
Julian Schnabel, 2001

Be Kind Rewind
Michel Gondry, 2008

The Big Lebowski
The Coen Brothers. 1998

Blow-Up
Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966

Brazil
Terry Gilliam, 1985

Brick
Rian Johnson, 2005

Chinatown
Roman Polanski, 1974

City of God
Fernando Meirelles, 2002

The Conformist
Bernardo Betolucchi, 1970

The Conversation
Francis Ford Coppla, 1974

Dark City
Alex Proyas, 1998

The Diving Bell & The Butterfly
Julian Schnabel, 2008

Encounters at the End of The World
Werner Herzog, 2007

Exit Through the Gift Shop
Banksy, 2010

Enter the Void
Gaspar Noé, 2009

Fantastic Mr. Fox
Wes Anderson, 2009

The Five Obstructions
Lars von Trier & Jørgen Leth, 2003

Helvetica
Gary Hustwit, 2007

Idiocracy
Mike Judge, 2006

It Might Get Loud
Davis Guggenheim, 2009

Joy Division
Grant Gee, 2007

The Kid Stays in the Picture
Burstein & Morgen, 2002

Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out Of Balance
Godfrey Reggio, 1982

Man On Wire
James Marsh, 2008

Our Town
James Naughton, 2003

Pi
Darren Aaronofsky, 1998

Playtime
Jacques Tati, 1967

Phantom Museums: The Short Films of the Quay Brothers
Stephen & Timothy Quay, 2007

Pulp Fiction
Quentin Tarantino, 1994

Requiem for a Dream
Darren Aaronofsky, 2000

Rushmore
Wes Anderson, 1998

Slacker
Richard Linklatter, 1991

The Social Network
David Fincher, 2010

Synecdoche, New York
Charlie Kaufman, 2008

Talking Heads: Stop Making Sense
Johnathan Demme, 1984

Trainspotting
Danny Boyle, 1998

Underworld Live: Everything, Everything
Tomato, 2000

Waking Life
Richard Linklatter, 2001

The Work of Director Michel Gondry
Michel Gondry, 2003

The Work of Director Spike Jonze
Spike Jonze, 2003

PERIODICALS AND INTERNET

Print
Eye
Baseline
Graphis

balladora.blogspot.com
bitique.co.uk
fastcodesign.com
dezeen.com
watchthetitles.com
blog.frankchimero.com
ilovetypography.com
laborandcurse.com
lineandunlined.com
mrgan.tumblr.com
thenewgraphic.com
todayandtomorrow.net
thoughtcatalog.com
visualnews.com

designcrit.com/typophoto

TYPO-PHOTO: EXPERIMENTING WITH PHOTOGRAPHY IN GRAPHIC DESIGN

László Moholy-Nagy coined the term "typo-photo" in 1925 to mean "the synthesis between typography and photography." This experimental workshop will explore ways to integrate the camera and photographic image-making into your design process to create engaging and unique objects of graphic design. We will look at examples of historical and contemporary uses of typo-photo, staged photography and expressive typography. We will learn techniques for working with your images and integrating them into your design work. We will spend the majority of the semester using the camera to experiment with new design processes and discover alternative ways of working with type and image. Lectures about relevant topics and demonstrations of technical processes will occur throughout the semester. Prerequisites: A basic knowledge of photography. A computer (or access to a computer) with Adobe Photoshop and InDesign. Access to at least one good quality digital camera (DSLR), although you may choose to experiment with low-quality digital and film cameras such as webcams, cell-phone cams, Holga, Lomo and pinhole cameras, and tangential equipment like scanners and projectors.

PREREQUISITES

A basic knowledge of photography. A computer with Adobe Photoshop and InDesign, and at least basic knowledge of the software. Access to a digital camera with manual controls (compact or DSLR). You may also choose to experiment with low-quality digital and film cameras such as webcams, cell-phone cams, Holga, Lomo and pinhole cameras, and tangential equipment like scanners and projectors

OBJECTIVES

— Learn how to use emergence and play in your design process.
— Discover how to use the camera and other imaging methods to author design work.
— Learn to synthesize disparate design and methodological elements in your work.
— Explore authorship and the pursuit of your own voice as a designer.
— Learn technical methods for incorporating type, image and type as image into your design. –Learn to work with typography as an expressive, emotive element of design.
— Embrace the unpredictable, fortuitous nature of working experimentally with design.

READING & REFERENCE

Type, Image, Message. Skolos + Wedell
It Is Beautiful — Then Gone. Martin Venesky
No More Rules: Graphic Dedign & Postmodernism. Rick Poynor
Vision in Motion. László Moholy-Nagy

EXERCISE: PLAY

CONCEPT
Play, noun: activity engaged in for enjoyment and recreation, behavior or speech that is not intended seriously.

METHOD
Choose a single pair of words from this list:

love & hate
life & death
good & evil
light & dark
this & that
us & them
top & bottom
winner & loser
show & tell
hope & despair

Using the techniques discussed in class as a starting point, come up with as many compositions of your words as possible—try for at least 100 notably different compositions. You may use any equipment or method you wish, and you may change how you work as many times as you like during the assignment. Stick to one pair of words for the entire project, but you may break them apart and rearrange them any way you like. You may use any typeface you wish, and each composition must include both words and the ampersand. Do not use any other imagery other than the typography itself, however you should explore with tone, texture and materials as you make your compositions.

A benefit of working with digital photography is the ability to make a lot of work quickly. You should not worry about precise refinement, instead try to generate as many compositions as possible, many of which will likely not be very interesting. Do not worry about what the words you are assigned mean, look at them only as form and content to work with.

OBJECTIVES
— To use typography and photography to creatively author your design work.
— To explore how to use content and tools together to reveal unexpected outcomes.
— To become familiar with using photography in an abstract, expressive way.
— To look at typography as form and expression instead of readable text.
— To explore ideas of emergence in your process.
— To learn to work quickly and intuitively instead of carefully and deliberately.

TIMELINE
Assigned: Monday 29 August
Due and final crit: Wednesday 7 September

DELIVERABLES
The final deliverable size, color, etc... of this project is up to you. For purposes of discussion you will keep your compositions digital. We will project them during class, so bring them on a flash drive or disk as PDFs, JPGs or TIFFs.

PROJECT: EMERGENCE

CONCEPT
Emergence, noun: the process of coming into being, or of becoming important or prominent; the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.

METHOD
You will design a poster for a past, current or upcoming exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. You can choose which exhibition you like from this website:

www.vmfa.state.va.us/Exhibitions/

Your poster must include the full name of the exhibition, the dates the exhibition runs, and the name of the museum (you do not have to use the Museum's logotype, but you must include the full name or "VMFA"). For example:

Civil War Redux: Pinhole Photographs of Re-enactments
May 21, 2011 – September 18, 2011
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Additional text and any images are up to you. Ignore any existing branding that the VMFA has already created for these exhibitions. The poster must be 36" x 50" vertical format, full bleed. Regardless of what form your typography takes, make

sure you are typesetting everything perfectly; use the correct dashes, punctuation, numerals, etc. Any images you use must be original imagery you have created and you should not trace or recreate an existing photograph, drawing or illustration (do not use or remake clip-art, stock photos, etc.). It will benefit you to execute many fast explorations with varying ideas initially, which you can then examine and see which way of working best fits with the content of the poster.

OBJECTIVES
— To explore emergent ways of working with your design process.
— To work with content in a meaningful way while maintaining visual engagement.
— To examine the communicative and semiotic qualities of typo-photo.
— To learn to work with type and photography at a macro and micro level.
— To explore play and use in design.

TIMELINE
Assigned: Wednesday 7 September
Fullsize mockups: Monday/Wednesday 19/21 September
Due and final crit: Monday 3 October

DELIVERABLES
One full-size, trimmed copy of the final poster at 36" x 50", vertical format only. Remember to author your poster with "Design: Your Name" at the bottom in approximately 7pt. type. Full-size prints can be made in the Graphics Lab on the 2nd floor of Pollak.

PROJECT: FORTUITY

CONCEPT

Fortuity, noun: a chance occurrence, the state of being controlled by chance rather than design; luck.

METHOD

As we have seen so far in this class, Typo-Photo is an attitude towards making and thinking about design, not just an aesthetic starting point in your process. This project pushes that idea further. You will use fortuitous and seemingly irrelevant limitations to redefine how you create design in terms of process and concept.

In this project you will also be asked to take almost total control: you will choose the content, how you will work with it, what you will make, what format and medium you work in, if the work has a limited context or specific audience, and what the deliverables will be.

Take the project you declared as your favorite as a starting point, and use the limitations you choose in class to recreate, rethink or remake it. Use the combination of old, existing work and new, random parameters to spark ideas on how to take the existing project and create new realizations of it. On 31 October, you will choose a new set of limitations to work with.

You will decide how much of the original project you use in terms of form, concept and methodology. How literally or loosely you interpret the limitations is up to you. If you are not sure of how to start, think of the most outrageous, ridiculous thing you can possibly think of doing, something you know you should never do, and then do that.

This project is self-directed and self-motivated, therefore it is up to you to keep making it interesting for yourself. You should find your own ways of working, your own process and your own relationship with how you think about graphic design.

As you work, you will likely become confused and paralyzed about what to do next. When that happens, stop thinking and make something. You will likely become irritated and not understand why you are being made to work this way. When that happens, stop thinking and make something. You will likely start finding yourself over-thinking and pre-rationalizing your next steps. When that happens, stop thinking and make something.

This project has exactly one requirement: *you must make.* You may not do nothing.

OBJECTIVES

— To embrace constraints in your design process.
— To allow yourself to be confused.
— To embrace fortuity in both how you choose to work, and in how you think about what you are working on.
— To learn to overcome seemingly impossible restrictions through creativity and iteration.

TIMELINE

Assigned: Wednesday 12 October
Obstruction One Due: Monday 31 October
Obstruction Two Due: Monday 21 November

DELIVERABLES

At your discretion. Note that a series of experiments or a "body of work" is a perfectly acceptable culmination of this project.

PROJECT: SYNTHESIS

CONCEPT

Synthesis, noun: combination or composition, particularly the combination of ideas to form a theory or system; the final stage in the process of dialectical reasoning, in which a new idea resolves the conflict between thesis and antithesis.

METHOD

During the Fortuity project, you worked against limitations to make without a predefined outcome or use — you have been only concerned with process, not with deliverable. Doing so has freed you from the normal requirements of graphic design, such as "how will I use this?" or "is this readable enough?" and other pragmatic considerations. For this last project in Typo-Photo, you will be synthesizing what you have worked on in Fortuity with a short written essay to produce a final piece of your choosing.

There are three requirements for this project:
1. You must incorporate a new random limitation, in addition to the original three.
2. You must incorporate an essay from *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* in any way you wish (mcsweeneys.net/tendency).
3. You must create a final, cohesive deliverable.

The essay you pick will likely have no relationship whatsoever to your existing work and therefore will not make much sense in terms of how they can work together. That is intentional: you will be creating something new and original by taking two things that may not normally have a conversation and forcing them into a dialog with each other. How you chose to work these parts together in terms of concept, readability, voice, narrative, etc… is entirely up to you.

Unlike the last project, this project must end in some kind of a deliverable in any format you choose, including print, motion, video, interactive, website, installation, performance, etc. The primary "content" of the deliverable can be anything you like, such as the essay from *McSweeney's*, a translation of your process into something new, a different version of the original favorite project you started with, false content you make up, or something else entirely. Whatever you do, the final deliverable must be understandable by itself; someone who has no idea what you have been working on will need to be able to understand the point/concept/metaphor/ideation/process/whatever of the final piece. While not required, it is strongly suggested you do not simply document your process; the final deliverable should not just be a process book (see the note under deliverables.)

This project is not concerned with how well you represent the essay from *McSweeney's*, it is concerned with how you use the essay as a catalyst to make new, interesting stuff. This project is asking you take disparate elements and combine them into something new; it is about exploring how you use your voice as a designer to make new, interesting things.

TIMELINE

Assigned: Wednesday 9 November
Due and final crit: Wednesday 7 December

DELIVERABLES

Two copies of your deliverable, one of which your instructor will keep. If your deliverable is something fleeting, such as a performance or temporary installation, you must provide careful documentation in the form of multiple photographs of it to complete the project. Note: You must also provide some documentation of the artifacts you have made during Fortuity and Synthesis in the form of simple photographs. More on this in class.

POSTER IN MOTION
THE ART OF MUSIC VIDEO
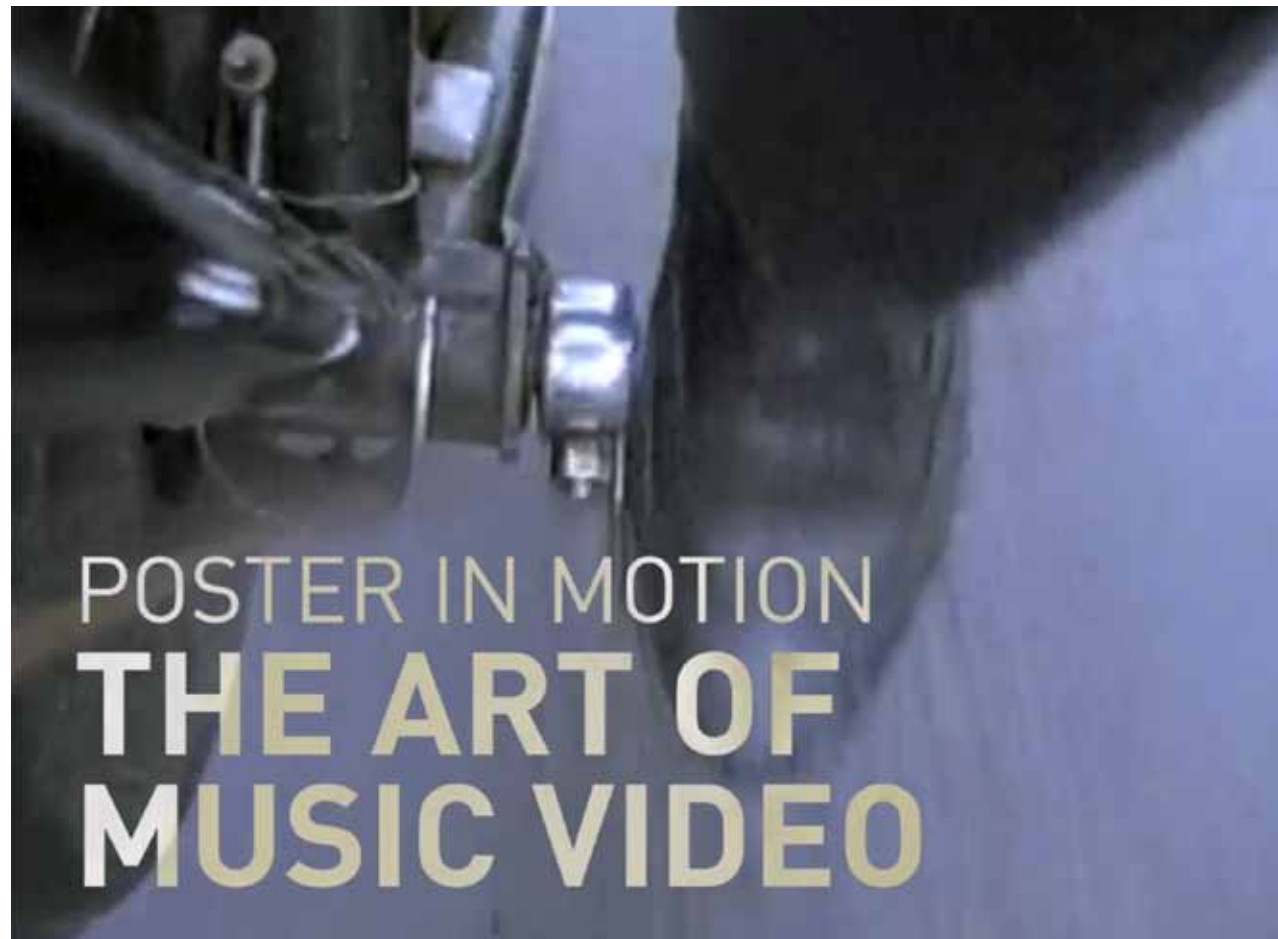
POSTER IN MOTION: THE ART OF MUSIC VIDEO

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Since the launch of MTV in 1981, the music video has become a part of our cultural media awareness and is often a place to find interesting and unexpected work from previously unknown creatives. The synthesis of motion and music provides a special playground for graphic designers, who can work outside of the normal rules of both filmmaking and design. Music video is much like a poster: a singular, highly conceptual piece of work that must be both communicative and evocative of the content it stems from, but can also play against the expectations and rules of visual communication.

Students will use this course to combine creative, emergent methodologies to generate expressive and meaningful music videos. This course encourages alternative methods of working, such as using low-tech methods like stop-motion, film or still photos to create the final work. Each student will pick music, design, ideate, produce and edit two full-length music videos during the semester. The course will include lectures and analysis of existing music videos and other motion work, as well as discussions of form, content and deep explorations of process and making. This class is not primarily concerned with teaching software or technology, but there will be some basic discussion of software, and alternative ways of working with motion.

PREREQUISITES

This course is open to Graphic Design Seniors, Graduate students, Juniors who are enrolled in Visual Narrative during the Spring semester, and non-majors with instructor permission. You should have interest in and some familiarity working with time-based media, as well as a deep love of music. During the semester we will briefly discuss Apple's Final Cut Pro, iMovie, iPhoto and Motion software, however what technology (or lack of technology) you use is at your own discretion.

OBJECTIVES

— Learn how to use conceptual and aesthetic frameworks to guide image and message.
— Experiment with time-based media using alternative technologies and methodologies.
— Explore gestural, emergent and improvisational methodologies in the design process.
— Learn to be playful and poetic while expanding your visual and conceptual vocabulary.
— Have fun and make awesome stuff.

SOFTWARE

The primary goal of this class is not to train you in using software. Since this class is about conceptual and methodological development using the art of music video, we will spend very little (if any) time talking about software other than on a cursory level. As an advanced design student — and since there are no specific technical requirements for the class — it is highly likely you already know or are at least familiar with the tools you will need to create finished projects this semester.

In order to spend time in class on what is important (conceptual development) the vcu Graphic Design department will be providing each student in this class with software training through Lynda.com. You will be given a login to access 10 weeks of video training for five software titles: Final Cut Pro X, Final Cut Pro 7, iMovie '11, Motion 5 and Compressor 4. The Lynda.com training includes sample files for each title.

It is very strongly recommended that you take advantage of this opportunity to learn or re-familiarize yourself with any software you do not feel competent in. Note that you may complete each assignment with any software package you wish, however these are the most popular tools used by amateurs and professionals working with time-based media. If you do not own any software mentioned, I recommend you get iMovie '11 as it is only $15 on the Mac App store. If you can afford it and plan on working with video beyond this class, Final Cut Pro X is a steal at $299, also on the App store. If you would like to work with motion effects, Motion 5 is only $50 on the App store — much cheaper than AfterEffects which costs $450 (academic version).

While you are not required to do any of these lessons, I suggest that you take advantage of the Lynda.com account. It is the best way to learn how to use software, and normally you would have to pay $38 a month for the same training gdes is providing for you at no cost. Your Lynda.com login will be based on whatever email you send me after the first day of class. You will have access to the training videos, along with all of the training files for the first 10 weeks of the semester — from 19 January through 31 March.

EXERCISE ONE

CONCEPT
Music video has an enormously varied reach, with infinite attitudes, styles, genres and aesthetics. To begin thinking critically about music video, we will watch and discuss as many as possible. Thursday's class will be spent watching and talking about music videos brought in by each student.

METHOD
Each student will bring in one music video to show the class. You should choose something conceptually and aesthetically interesting, engaging, or otherwise awesome. Please do not choose a video based on liking the song, choose it based on being interested by the video. You will present the video to the class, tell us what you think is interesting about it, and then we will discuss it as a group. You can find videos all over the internet, but it would be best if you can bring in a download of your video and not just show it to us on YouTube or Vimeo in case the internet connection in Pollak is acting up. The site www.keepvid.com is an easy way to download streaming video from most major websites.

OBJECTIVES
— To be exposed to as many kinds of video as possible.
— To think critically about what you are seeing.
— To think about time-based media in new ways you may not be familiar with.

TIMELINE
Assigned: Tuesday 17 January
Due: Thursday 19 January

DELIVERABLES
One interesting music video you will show and discuss with the class, preferably downloaded to a flash drive.

EXERCISE TWO

CONCEPT
This class is called Poster in Motion because it makes parallels between graphic design and cinema. This exercise asks you to make a direct connection between a poster and a music video by making one from the other. You will also begin to experiment with relationships between visual and audio components and see how they interact with each other.

METHOD
Using the poster you have been given in class, translate it into a quick motion piece of no more than 30 seconds in duration. There is no minimum time requirement, however it must be a time-based piece, not a static one. You must incorporate both visual and audio elements, and use the content of the poster as the basis for your final piece. You do not have to include all of the content from the poster, but your piece should attempt to convey a similar feeling and meaning as the poster.

It is important that you work quickly and decisively, and not worry about perfection or a solid justification of every single thing you do. You should react to what the poster says to you, and then make that into a video using any tools or methods you wish. Note that we are not concerned with how perfectly or accurately you recreate the content of the poster in your video, but we do want to see how creatively and expressively you can use audio and visual elements together to make something interesting and engaging.

OBJECTIVES
— To think about music video from a graphic design perspective.
— To start working with time-based media.
— To think conceptually about content.
— To learn to work quickly and reactively.

TIMELINE
Assigned: Thursday 19 January
Due: Tuesday 7 February

DELIVERABLES
One video no longer than 30 seconds in Quicktime format.

PROJECT ONE

CONCEPT
This project asks you to create a full-length music video using a conceptual framework that will help guide your design decisions.

METHOD
You may choose any song by any artist you like, however you will need to work with audio categorized as "music" (for example you may not make a video using only ambient street sounds.) Listen to the music and begin to develop ideas of how to visualize it and what sort of conceptual framework will help you structure your ideas. You will be given prompts in class on Thursday that may assist you in developing your ideas for the video (more on this in class).

OBJECTIVES
— Think about design from the standpoint of using conceptual frameworks in your design process..
— Extend the language of design into video and motion.
— Think about symbolism and connotation in how you make.
— Explore how music and video synthesize together into something extraordinary.

TIMELINE
Assigned: Tuesday 7 February
Song chosen & played in class: Thursday 9 February
Footage shot: week of 28 February
Rough cut: week of 6 March
Final cut: 20 March

DELIVERABLES
A full-length music video in high quality. Note that you must include a 5-second title card (white text on black background) at the beginning of the video that includes:

Artist name
"Song Title"
Record label & year
Directed by: Your Name

PROJECT TWO

CONCEPT
This project asks you to create a full-length music video using any conceptual, aesthetic and methodological decisions that you choose.

METHOD
You may choose any song by any artist you like, however you will need to work with audio categorized as "music" (for example you may not make a video using only ambient street sounds.) You may work any way you wish but you must use the entire song from start to finish for this video. You may want to try and find a song that is under 4 minutes in length. You will not be allowed to edit the song down even if you are running out of time to work.

OBJECTIVES
— Extend the language of design into video and motion.
— Think about symbolism and connotation in how you make.
— Explore how music and video synthesize together into something extraordinary.

TIMELINE
Assigned: Tuesday 8 March
Song & Concept presented to class: 27 March
Final cut: Tuesday 1 May

DELIVERABLES
A full-length music video in high quality. Note that you must include a 5-second title card (white text on black background) at the beginning of the video that includes:

Artist name
"Song Title"
Record label & year
Directed by: Your Name

EPILOGUE

GER

STAGE MANA...ed "Our Town." It...

This play is ca...directed by A......lo

produced and I will see Miss C...

B......]. In it you; Mr. H......, and m...

F......; Mr. G......

...e town is Grover's

The name of th...sachusetts line: la

across the Masgrees 37 minutes.

longitude 70 d...s May 7, 1901. The

town. The day I

...nning to show som...

The sky is beg...ut mount'n. The m...
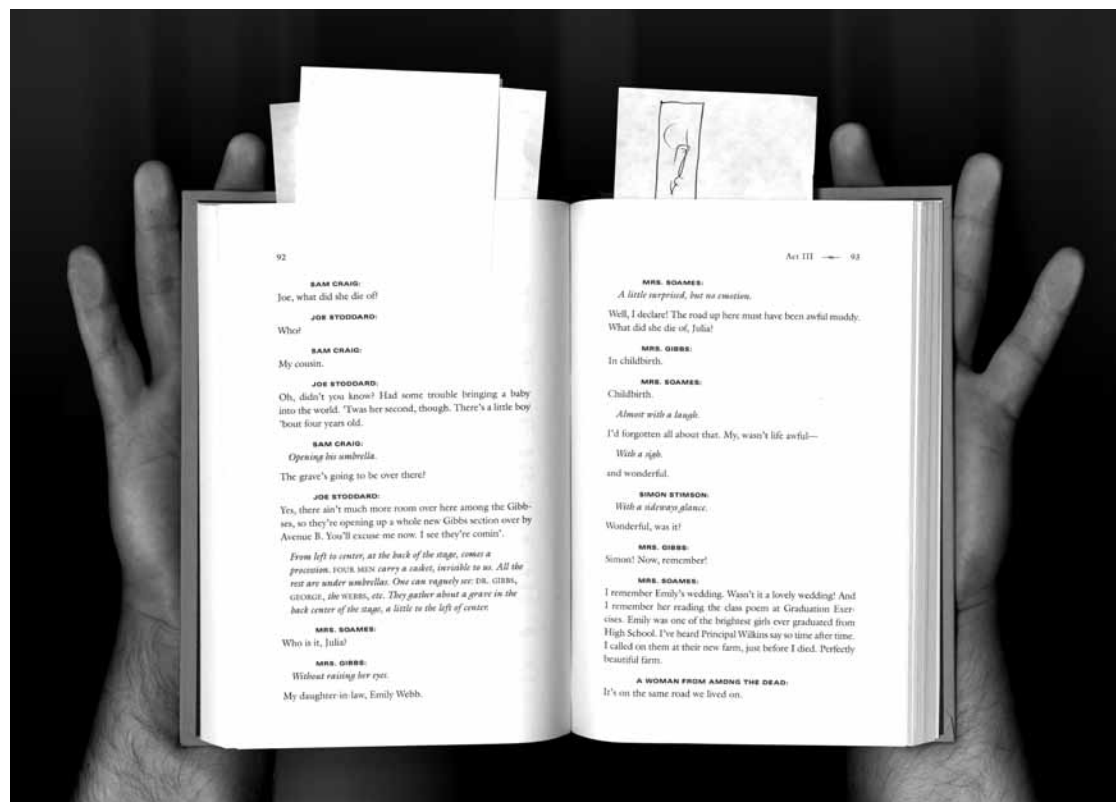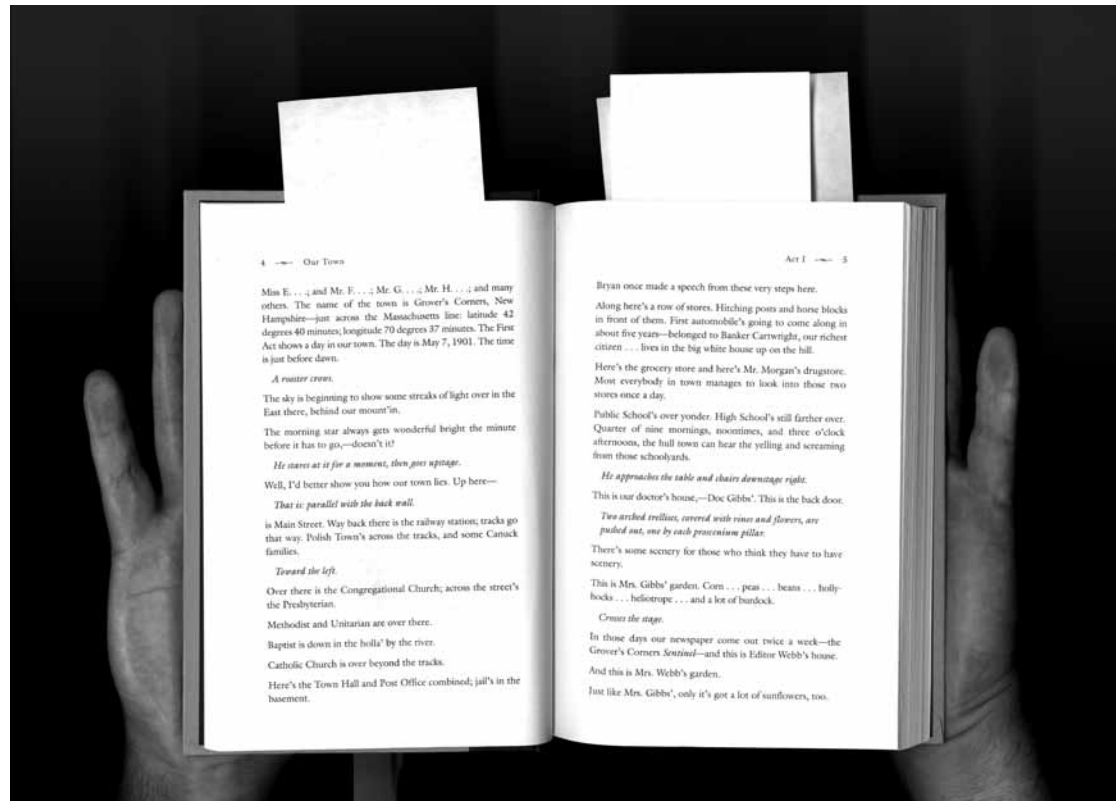
there, behind q...te before it has to

bright the min...

was written by Thornton Wilder;

r: produced by A......, directed by

...: Miss D......; Miss E......; and Mr.

any others.

Corners, New Hampshire—just

...titude 42 degrees 40 minutes;

The First Act shows a day in our

time is just before dawn.

...e streaks of light over in the East

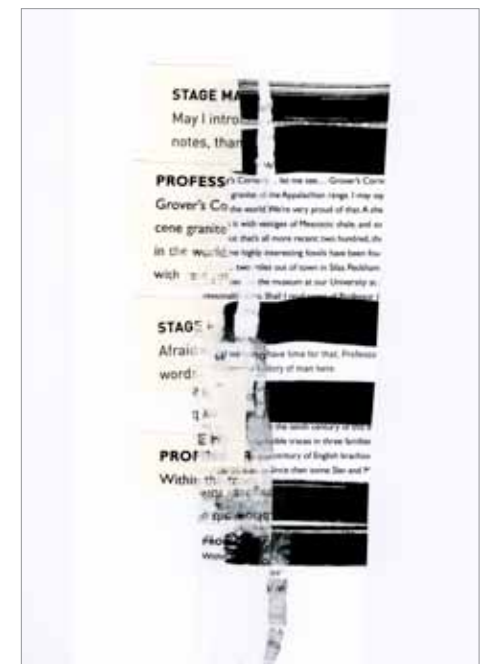...orning star always gets wonderful

go.—doesn't it?

OUR TOWN

Thornton Wilder's seminal 1938 play *Our Town* is the story of a small New Hampshire community at the turn of the twentieth century. At first glance, it appears to be a simple three-act play about life, love, and death among a group of rural New England townsfolk. However, the play is actually a deep and complex meta-narrative about the characters in the play, the structure of the play itself, and the nature of theatre. The character known only as STAGE MANAGER guides us through the play, often breaking the fourth wall and directly addressing the audience. The play travels back and forth in time, leaping between the past, present, and future. Wilder specified in his stage directions that there is to be no set, no backdrops, no special effects, and no costumes.

Our Town is as much about making a play as it is about the story of the characters in it. The richness of the narrative comes entirely through dialog and the actors' portrayals of their characters. These compositions are enlargements of collages made from small sections of the script that represent key moments in each of the three acts. Each section was typeset and collaged by hand using various materials including glue, tape, and ink. The collages were then scanned and printed on oversize panels (2' x 10'), reminiscent of curtains behind the proscenium arch. The gestural, impulsive nature of collage is a response to the twists and turns of the narrative, and the analog nature of the early 1900s. Parallel to the way the characters evolve and reveal themselves in slivers over the course of the play, these compositions are visual metaphors providing a glimpse into the nature of the story.

STAGE MANA...[GER]

STAGE MANA...lled "Our Town." It
This play is ca...directed by A..... [o
produced and I will see Miss C....
B......]. In it you...; Mr. H......; and Mr.
F......; Mr G......

...he town is Grover's
The name of this...
across the Massachusetts line: la
longitude 70 d...s May 7, 1901. The
town. The day i
...nning to show som
The sky is begin...mount'n. The m
there, behind ...ite before it has to
bright the min...

...was written by Thornton Wilder;
...r; produced by A......, directed by
...; Miss D......; Miss E......; and Mr.
...any others.

...Corners, New Hampshire—just
...titude 42 degrees 40 minutes;
...The First Act shows a day in our
...time is just before dawn.

...e streaks of light over in the East
...orning star always gets wonderful
...go,—doesn't it?

STAGE MA...

May I intro...duce Profess...

notes, than...

PROFESS...r's Corners... let me

Grover's Co...the Appala...granite of the Appala...
...the world. We're very...
cene granite...it with vestiges of M
...ut that's all more rec...
in the world....me highly interesting
...two miles out of to
with vestiges...see...in the museum a
...reasonable time. Shall I read...

STAGE M...

Afraid...id we...o have time
words...the history of ma

PROF...

Within the town...

PROF...
Within...

GEORGE
Emily.

EMILY
I think it's awfully important too.

EMILY
I think it's awfully important too.

GEORGE
Listen, Emily, I'm going to tell you why I'm not going to Agriculture School.

Well, let's have Mendelssohn's "Wedding March!"

Once in a thousand times, it's interesting.

Mar...

STAG[E MANAGER]
This...
by T...
A...
In i...
E...
m...
...he road up here must have bee...
...e of, Julia?

...-law, Emily Webb.

T...AES

...gotten about that. My, wasn't life...

...IMSON
l, was it?

7...BS
...: Emily's wedding. Wasn't it a...
...mber her reading the class poe...
...Emily was one of the brightest...
High School. I've heard Princip...
...er time. I called on her at their...
...d. Perfectly beautiful farm.

...FROM AMONG THE DEAD
...e road we lived on.

T...
...OM AMONG THE DEAD
...smart farm.

of
m
de
do

---

t goes so f...
that was g...
up the hill...

...s, mayb...
...ld. Good-...
...by to clo...
...nd coffee...
...eeping an...
...r nobody...

...as going o...realize lif...
...ill—to r...
...ings ever

...e. So a
...e back...—they...

Do human...ings ever...
every minu...

Do human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?

...ts, mayb...
The saints and poets, maybe—they do some.
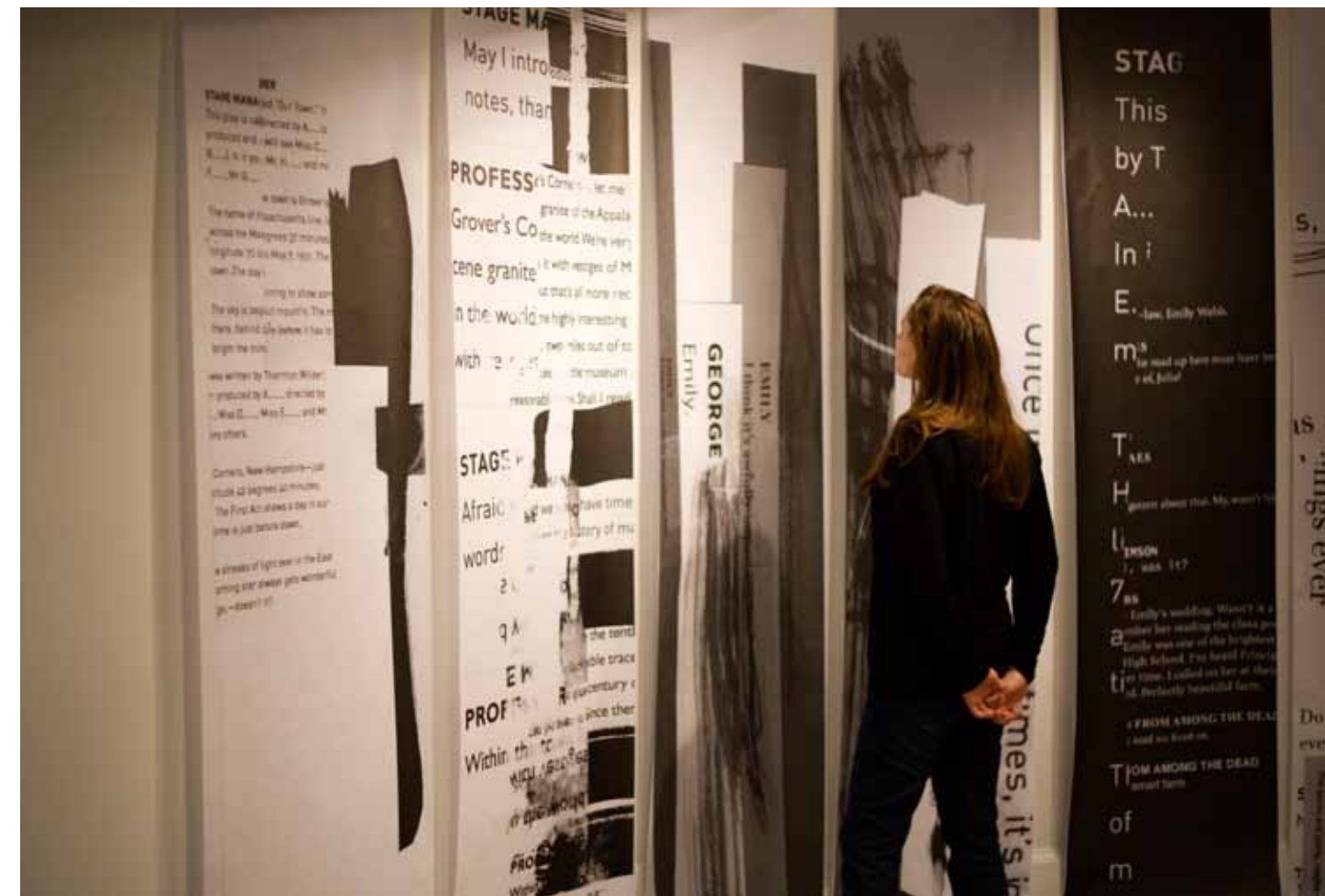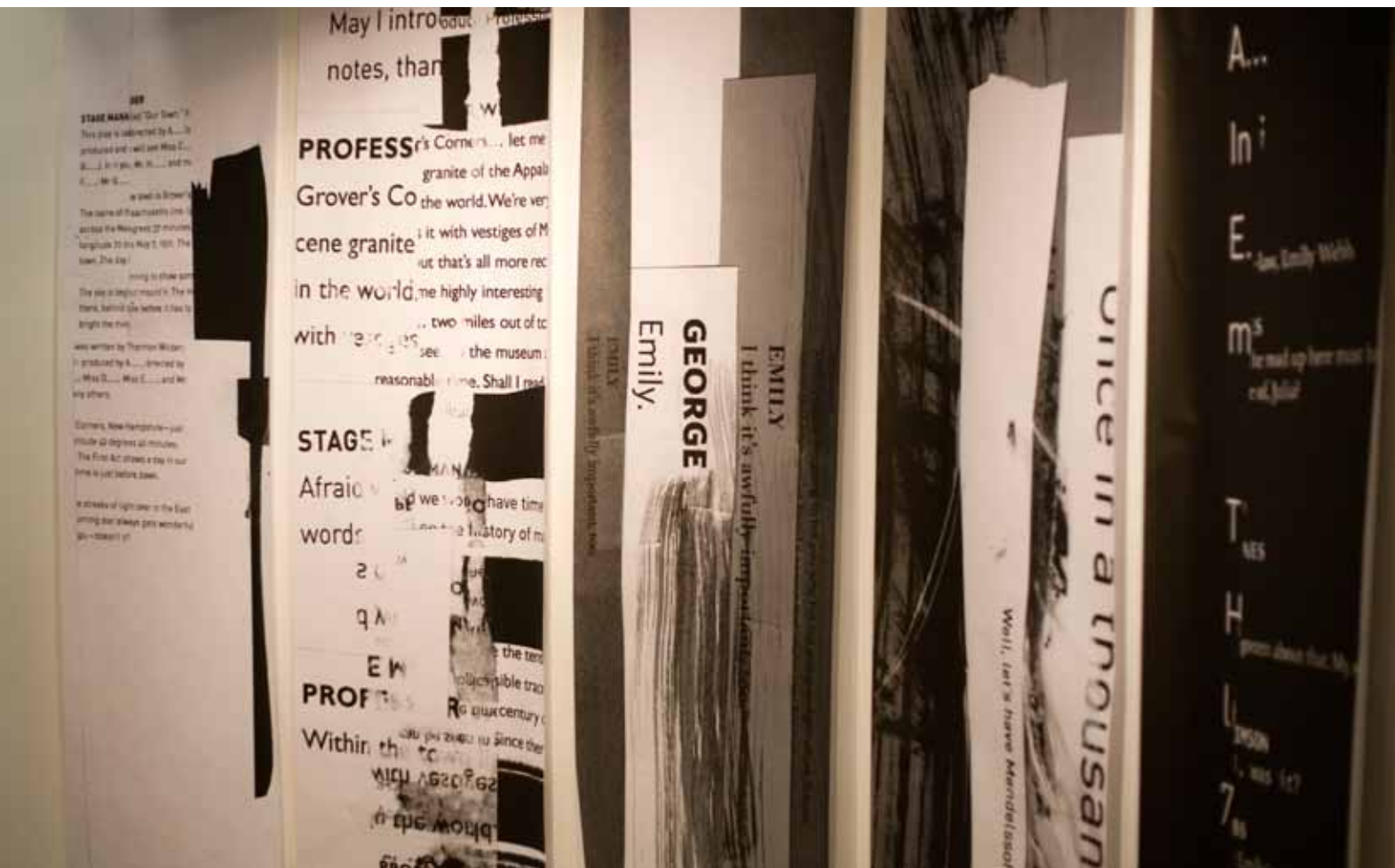
STAGE MANAGER
No.

S...
N...

T...
...ts, maybe

At the core of any designer's activity is the process they engage with to create design. Process is not only a way to get from an idea to a completed work, it is also what determines our attitude towards design. This is the place where both the design and the designer are created. The gray area between nothing and something is where we go to discover design, and in turn to discover who we are and what matters to us. In this thesis I am investigating the nebulous place between ideas and things, thoughts and artifacts, and being just a person to becoming a designer. Every designer works differently, but we share something in common: through process, design is discovery.