CAPTURE CONTROL CIRCULATE

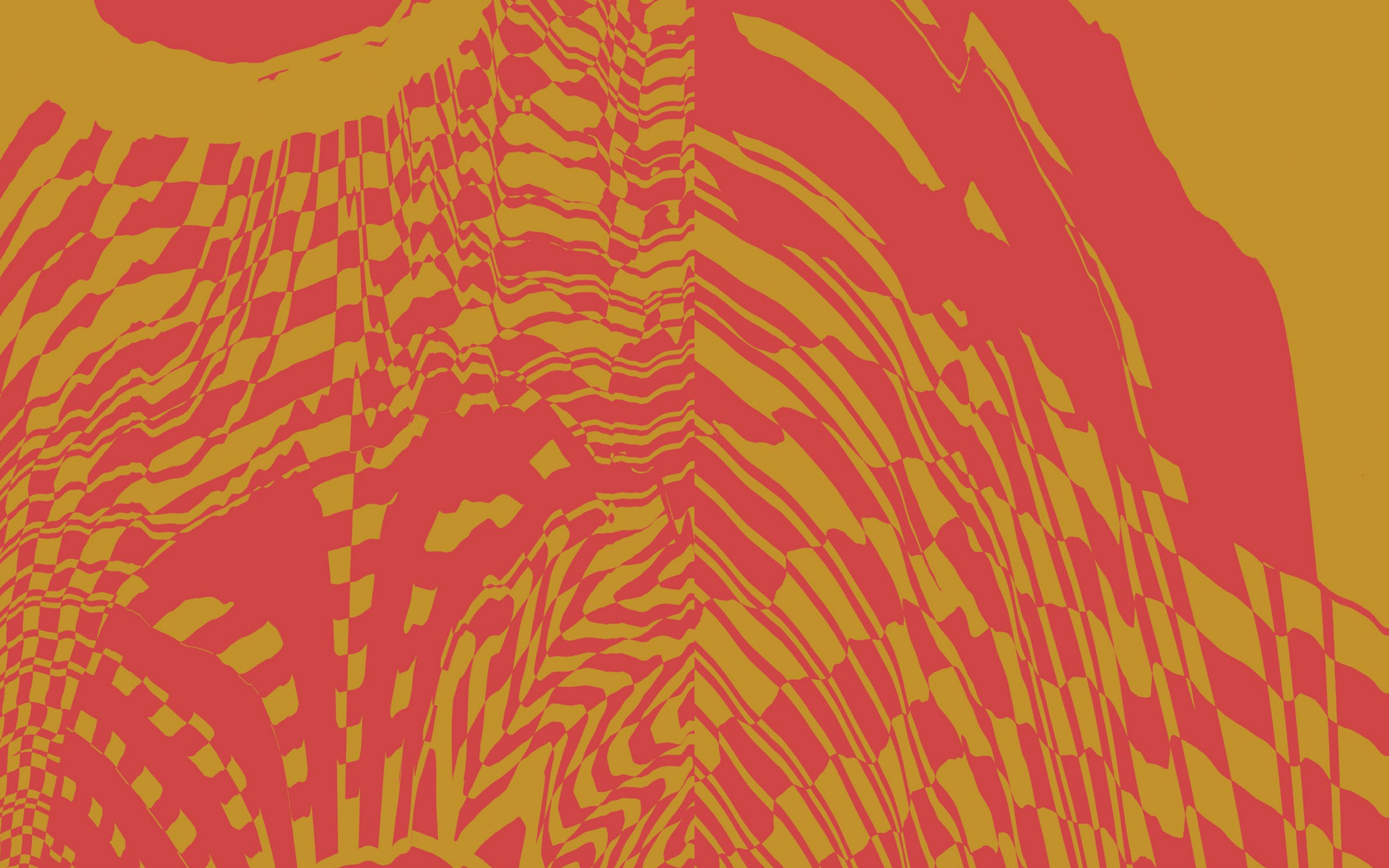*Can We Queer Regulatory Power in Graphic Design?*

By Adie Fein

Capture, Control, Circulate addresses regulatory power, the transmission and enforcement of culturally-sanctioned behaviors and identity. How does regulatory power operate in graphic design and what—if anything—can the graphic designer do to subvert that operation? The methodologies for subversion explored in this book typically draw from queer and trans* experience and thought. Therefore, the work herein takes up issues of identity, normativity, marginalization, and community.

This thesis also considers design education, and its contemporary emphasis on the capture and control of content. It advocates instead for an educational model that centers circulation; that is, graphic design's capacity to platform, to publish, and to distribute. *Capture, Control, Circulate* imagines how design education can build community through informal platforms for collaboration, distribution, and collective celebration.

QUEER

CAN A BOOK BE A FAGGOT?

THINGS

QUEER
THINGS
adie
fein

I can never tell you now what I had often said before

Because promise is a pendulum just swinging at the door

How can graphic design visually represent queer subjects, like gender, legibility, or transition, and how might such representations affect material forms or influence audiences? Queer Things investigates the possibility of "queer

design objects," specifically books and typefaces. Hence this volume also prompts the question of whether formal ideas can advance queer political and theoretical concerns: Can a publication enact identity? Can a typeface subvert gender stereotypes? Or is graphic design nothing more than a visual container for content? That is, beyond mere association, attraction, and representation, Queer Things probes the potential of graphic design aesthetics to catalyze substantive social effects through symbolic contest.

green carnation

NEITHER SUSTAIN NOR DISAVOW

Education as Transition

ADIE FEIN

MAY 2022

I am transitioning.

I found that I was nonbinary when I was 25, as I considered graduate school. I admitted that I was transgender when I was 28, as I entered graduate school. I began to insist upon new pronouns when I was 31, as I exited graduate school. My gender transition has become inseparable from my education.

School is an excellent place to transition. It is one of the few socially acceptable places for an adult to make a fresh start. No student needs to have a history. For many, is a quick process. They discover their gender identity and then urgently transition: switching names, pronouns, clothing. My transition, however, has been gradual. I have always taken on deliberate step after another, relaxing each time into my new self. And as my gender progresses, so does my schooling. Transition and education have interwoven, becoming literally and conceptually entwined. And with both, I have found that having progressed, I could never return.

And yet transition is never fast enough. Trans people are always waiting on others to authorization.

My parents named me Adam, and my friend named me Adie. I have, in the final semester of graduate school, begun to introduce myself as Adie. This is another step in my transition. You will have read Adie in the abstract of this thesis book. You will find it on my diploma. I will sometime in the future legally change my name to Adie. However, I am not asking others to stop using Adam. My relationship to my birth name is one of non-urgent alienation. I neither disavow nor sustain it.

I have experienced this sentiment many times throughout my transition. At one point, I accepted all pronouns: he, she, they, so on. I hoped that others would use them haphazardly, to linguistically render a gender ajumble. This feeling expresses refusal, a rejection of identity, or, as Édouard Glissant says "to consent not to be a single being."[2] To use all pronouns is to insist there is no stable self that can be fixed by a word. It was never that 'he' or 'she' was thoroughly wrong but incomplete and dishonest. I neither sustained nor disavowed any set of pronouns.

I am generally skeptical of the phrasing "these are my pronouns." While that sentence does so much to convey the importance of pronouns to a trans person, and the dignity that a speaker can offer in correct usage, they also have an essentializing effect: These are my pronouns; these are the pronouns I was born with; these pronouns are rooted in the soft soil of my soul. When I share pronouns with other people, I say, "You may use they/them pronouns in reference to me." My phrasing addresses several issues: it is a request for behavior change, and it is a claim to human dignity.

Parents: Richard and Susan Fein, who have always supported me. I am grateful!

Friend: Kylie McDermott, "secret hero of these poems,"[1] whose enduring support sustained and advanced me. I would not be myself — this self — without you. I am grateful!

1. Allen Ginsberg. *Howl, And Other Poems,* (San Francisco: City Lights Pocket Bookshop, 1956.)

2. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* (Ann Arbor: The University Of Michigan Press, 1997.)

And yet, it is also an appeal to opacity: My internal use of pronouns—what set I use when I think to myself—is not the world's concern. And furthermore, "my pronouns" may in some unknown future no longer belong to me. That is, for me, pronouns are not a commitment. It has never been clear that my pronouns will be stable. They may change in the future (or not). They reflect an identity that may shift further. Transition has always signified a state of impermanence for me. I have been transitioning for six years and it is unclear when it will end—if it ever ends. nicole killian described trans* to me as an "eternal becoming."

They/them is not a concession to identity. Like unspecified gender markers, "they/them" pronouns are obscure spaces full of possibility. They is a plural space.[3]

Perhaps because my education is ending, I have lately felt sentimental. This has expressed itself is an intense desire for high school teen romances, which, in turn, has prompted reflection on our cultural narratives around schooling. Namely, high school is the best years of our lives. But then, with new independence, ungrad is actually the best years of our lives. Yet, with an established sense of self, grad school really, truly, finally, is the best years of our lives. We have a cultural narrative of education as progressive—it advances to a climax of some kind. What does it mean to think, instead, about it as an eternal becoming? Of school as a transitional space? Of education as a transition? Perhaps what we do in school—our work, our thesis—is not the climactic articulation of some final vision, but the expression of transient intersecting forces: self, cohort, faculty, family, friends. Education as transition suggests that one can enjoy and value the products of school without considering them resolved. I do not want to recover my past work but to return to it as a new person, to view it again freshly. This is education as the emergence of an alternative self, informed by the past yet different and divergent.

* * *

Alright, I am transitioning.

The thesis in many graduate programs is conclusive: one project that expresses terminal and hard-won values. The attitude within the RISD graphic design graduate program is to make, make, make—and then later one organizes that making into a practice. The graphic design thesis captures the student's making, working, and thinking from the previous years; and therefore, our theses are (not conclusive but) summative. Typically, that work in the thesis is curated,[4] and the selected projects serve as evidence for a viewpoint on, framework for, or methodology in design. This is thesis as life story, thesis as grand narrative, thesis as the unification of educational experience into a

I have never worked like this. I have always priveledged the thinking before the making. Many people related to the program have treated me horribly for this reason—or went further, deemed me a failure.[5]

Or "life as thesis," which suggests how such narratives may obscure labor or non-academic experiences.

3. For additional discussion on this point, refer to "The Politics of Non-Representation" and "Gender Tools" in *Queer Space,* pages 4 and 60.

4. Some students include all or most work that they made in the program. See for example *Re: Ornament* by Aleks Dawson or *Community, Harana & Karaoke: Towards a Theatrical Design* by Ryan Diaz.

5. Elsewhere, I discuss feeling better suited to a Ph.D. program, see "Sorrow Note," in *Queer Study,* page 4. I dissuaded myself there, but am convinced now, as I write this thesis, that it *would* have been a better fit.

(Of course, I imagine my wish to make graphic design may not be approved of in a Ph.D. My fantasy is that, where writing in RISD GD is treated as a deficiency, design might be seen as a quirk in a Ph.D.)
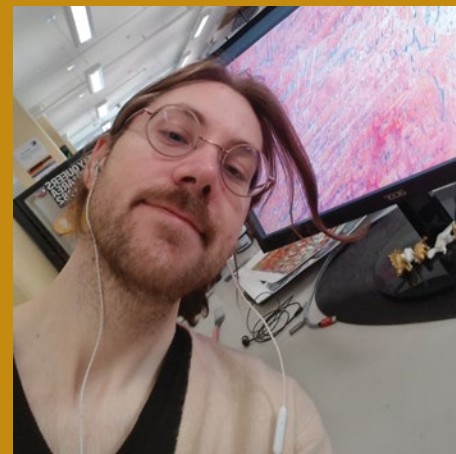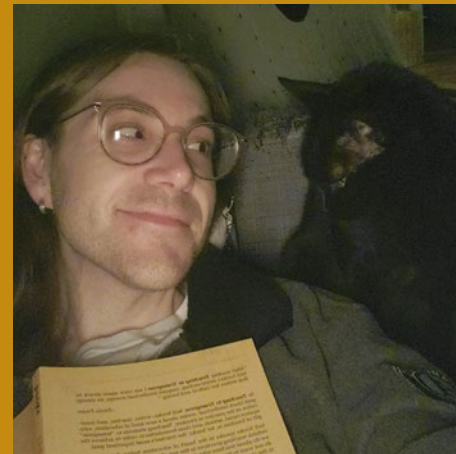
holistic account. Such as approach makes three implicit claims: that we may learn something about a person from their work; that what we learn may establish an identity; and that this identity may explain the past, may justify the present, and may anticipate the future. I will not argue that these claims are untrue. I do however wish to struggle against them, undermine them, consider their alternatives.

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World,* Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes, "categories are unstable, we must watch them emerge within encounters. To use category names should be a commitment to tracing the assemblages in which these categories gain a momentary hold."[3] I see identity as something that has only a momentary hold in our lives. I was a man before I was nonbinary. I was cis before I was trans. And I see education as offering a similar, only momentary, hold. To neither sustain nor disavow a project is to withhold narrative traction and to trouble the framing of past-present-future as a simple, linear, and inevitable progression. The work is an expression but not the irreducible definition of my practice. I am in a different space as I write this thesis than when I made most of the work. I have different intellectual commitments and professional ambitions. I see myself and my place within the field differently. Even my hopes for how graphic design as a field might progress are different now. To arrange the work into a unified narrative, then, feels as incomplete and dishonest as 'he' or 'she.' I do not want to bring the past into alignment with the future, to make this current self seem inevitable. Instead, I associate with the work within this thesis as I do my birth name: I sit in uneasy relation. I neither disavow nor sustain it.

I have been thinking about the refusal of identity for as long as I have identified as nonbinary. Before entering graduate school, I built visual brand systems that contradicted themselves, exceeded their own identity. In graduate school, refusal was a common strategy for critiquing the institution or gender. This thesis expresses refusal in several ways, like the multi-volume structure that has no prescribed sequence, the handwriting that problematizes or personalizes the work, or the many different authors who are credited. This thesis—existing under the uniform title[7] of *Capture, Control, Circulate*—is an expression of transition: pluralistic, multivocal, diffuse, circuitous.

Another expression of refusal within this thesis is the avoidance of one singular framing, one totalizing narrative. You, dear reader, may be tempted to consider *this current essay* as an introduction to the thesis as a whole. That does not feel accurate to me, to Adie. For example, already

Many trans people would be opposed to, even discomfited by, this description.

portions of this essay feel out of date as it was written. Another illustration: other writing in other volumes will contradict this essay, in its description of work, of the goals of graphic design, the tasks of graphic designed education, and even in its description of this thesis project, *Control, Capture, Circulate.* Or, consider that the title of the thesis project derives from another essay (also titled "Control, Capture, Circulate") which appears in the middle of *Queer Study;* one may be tempted to think of that essay then as offering the singular framing narrative. Again, that does not feel accurate to me, to Adie. This essay ("Neither Sustain nor Disavow") is located here, in this volume, because it explains how my relationship to "queer design" has changed over time, focusing at one time on "queer objects." For much of the duration of graduate school, I was invested in how formal objects could express or challenge identity, and those explorations into "queer objects" appear on the following pages. This essay also does more than any other text to illuminate the design choices within the thesis project; so naturally, it makes sense for this essay to appear where the design of material objects is addressed. However, that does not afford this essay primacy, because I made many different things while at the Rhode Island School of Design. And I was many different people. I was many designers, students, educators, peers, and collaborators. I cared about many different things. And of those many moments past, I neither disavow nor sustain them.

That is, again, the design of this thesis is pluralistic, multivocal, diffuse, circuitous. Yes, I know this may still be quite opaque. No, I am not going to tell you, "I chose these colors because they signify these qualities," or "I chose this typeface because it signifies these qualities." In part that is because I am less convinced of the possibility and importance of graphic design engaging in symbolic, discursive contestation;[8] that is, as one of my advisors said, not everything has to be deep; sometimes it is okay to just make something that looks good. And, in part, I just do not personally find that to be a compelling, interesting, or meaningful approach to design.

6. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 29.

7. See also "Uniform Title," in *Queer Power,* page 102.

8. For more on this idea, see "En/Decoding Gender" or "Graphic Design as Behavior Management" in *Queer Power,* pages 66 and 128.

Queer Books

This section considers how the publication might not only represent queer subjects but perform queer acts. The following work explores how the formal features of the book—sequence, type, paper, and so on—can enact performances, like transition or illegibility.
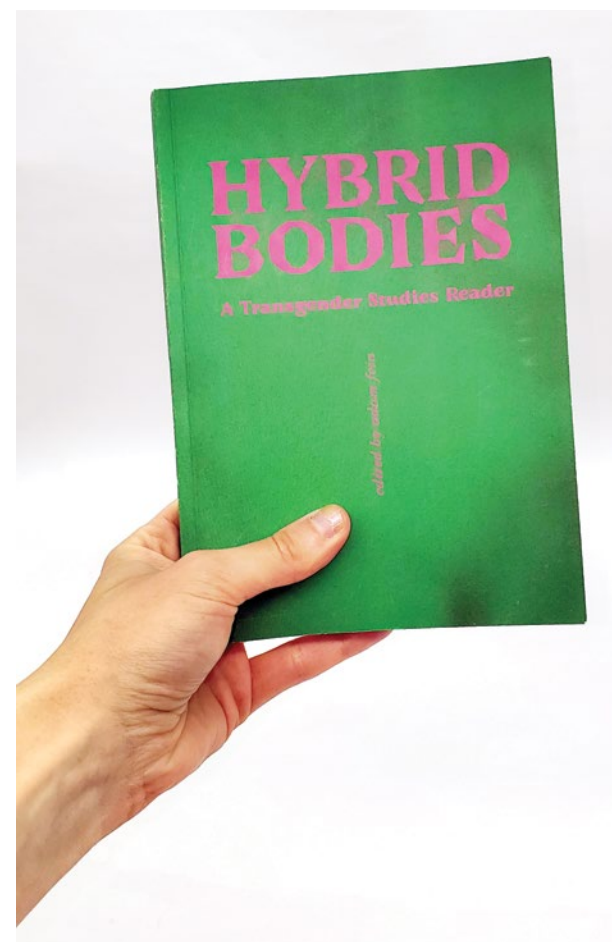
HYBRID BODIES

ADAM FEIN

DECEMBER 2019

This book features five foundational essays in trans* studies, from Donna Harraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" to José Esteban Muñoz's "The White to Be Angry: Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag."

In addition to the academic texts, the book contains a parallel visual history of Frankenstein's monster. This archive begins with the first representation, a lithograph in 1823 for the play "Presumption, or the fate of Frankenstein," and ends with promotional photography for the 2019 ballet "Frankenstein."

The book design explores formal metaphors for transness and transition. Over the course of the book, the running heads (a variable font) expands; the footnotes gradually change color; a 'scroll indicator' progresses at the bottom of the page. This work was foundational for my practice. It marks my first notable attempt at a conceptually queer or trans* book.

ABOVE The footnotes slowly transition from green to purple across the length of the book. Trim size is 5 ⅞×8 ¼".

OPPOSITE Endnotes transition from green to purple across within their contained text block

Can a book be trans? NO! I am happy with this project, but it really demonstrates the limited possibilities of queer aesthetics.*
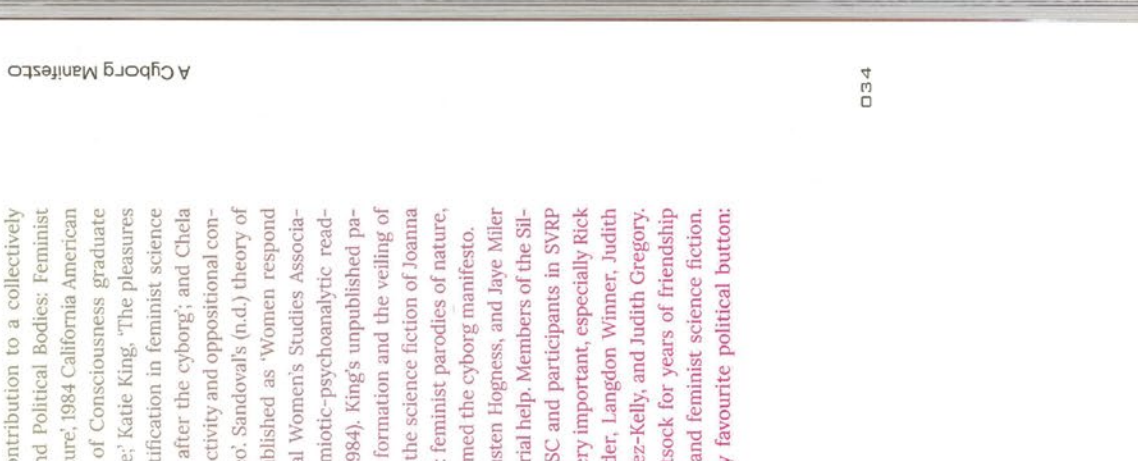
Hybrid Bodies

YBORG
S TO
LIST-FEMINISM
TIETH CENTURY

Hybrid Bodies

snatched it away to suction the sticky green me
airways. "It's a girl," somebody said. Paul, I think
did a jumble of dark, unsolicited feelings emerge
some quiet back corner of my mind? This mor
was not the time to deal with them. I pushed the
they were too strong to avoid for long.

　　After three days we were all exhausted, sligh
that complications had forced us to go to Kaiser
the birth at home. I wonder what the hospital
our little tribe swarming all over the delivery r

Hybrid Bodies

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI—

The Irish Frankenstein in "Punch, or the London Charivari"
1882, engraving
John Tenniel

Hybrid Bodies

(not to mention among women) along every p
has made the concept of woman elusive, an exc
trix of women's dominations of each other. For m
who share a similar historical location in white, p
dle-class, female, radical, North American, mid-a
sources of a crisis in political identity are legion
tory for much of the US left and US feminism has
to this kind of crisis by endless splitting and sea
essential unity. But there has also been a grow
of another response through coalition—affinit

Hybrid Bodies

appropriation by her son. Writing marks Morag
it as the body of a woman of colour, against t
passing into the unmarked category of the Ang
the orientalist myth of 'original illiteracy' of a
er was. Malinche was mother here, not Eve b
forbidden fruit. Writing affirms Sister Outsider,
before-the-Fall-into-Writing needed by the
Family of Man.

* * *

Hybrid Bodies

Charles Ogle as the Monster in the first film
adaptation, "Frankenstein"
1910, film
J. Searle Dawlet, Edison Studios

Hybrid Bodies

Each of these women told me what a profo
experience it had been simply to meet anoth
self. I was inspired by their accomplishments
organization serving thousands of members), b
have a different focus. I was less willing to thi
as a pathology or disability, more interested
medicalization entirely, and more interested s
pan-intersexual identity across the divisions
gies in order to destabilize more effectively th
assumptions underlying the violence directed

Hybrid Bodies

EMPIRE
BACK
UAL MANIFESTO

Hybrid Bodies

*who was ready to obey, who was happy to sub
will of another [...] her master, her creator, h
tween [Andreas] and her stood Werner Kreut
and salvaged.*[26]

Hoyer has the same problems with purity and
that recur in many transsexual auto-biograp
The characters in his narrative exist in an his
enormous sexual repression. How is one to ma
between the "male" self, whose proper object of

Hybrid Bodies

　　These representations all manifest a profoun
rican clitorectomy that contributes to the sile
similar medicalized practices in the industrializ
genital cutting is barbaric ritual; "ours" is scienti
ures; ours normalizes the deviant. The colonialis
these representations of genital cutting are eve
obvious when images of intersex surgeries are
images of African FGM. Medical books describing
clitoral surgery on white North American inter
almost always illustrated with extreme genital

Hybrid Bodies

Susan Denberg as Christina in "Frankenstein
Created Woman"
1967, film
Terrence Fisher, Hammer Film Productions

Hybrid Bodies

suggesting that in the transsexual's erased hist
a story disruptive to the accepted discourses
originates from within the gender minority itse
make common cause with other oppositional
the transsexual currently occupies a position w
which is outside the binary oppositions of gen
For a transsexual, *as a transsexual,* to generate
and representational counter-discourse is to sp
the boundaries of gender, beyond the construc
nodes which have been predefined as the only

Hybrid Bodies

of sheer panic that, if said of other minorities,
only in the most hate-riddled, white supremaci
cist rags. To quote extensively from one letter t
popular San Francisco gay/lesbian periodical:

*I consider transsexualism to be a fraud, and
in it [...] perverted. The transsexual [claims]
change his/her body in order to be his/her "t
this "true self" requires another physical fo
manifest itself, it must therefore war with na*

Hybrid Bodies

this: to find self within the dominant public sph
deny self. The contradictory subjectivity one is
just the fragmentary subjectivity unspecified p
dition; instead, it is the story of the minoritaria
the majoritarian public sphere. Fortunately, this
end at this difficult point, this juncture of painf
Sometimes misrecognition can be *tactical.* Ide
can also be manipulated and worked in ways th
ratives of self that surpass the limits prescrib
culture.

Hybrid Bodies

Aaron Eckhart as Adam Frankenstein in "I, Frank-
enstein," in which Frankenstein's creation survives
into the modern day
2014, film
Stuart Beattie, Lakeshore Entertainment, SKE Films
and Hopscotch Features
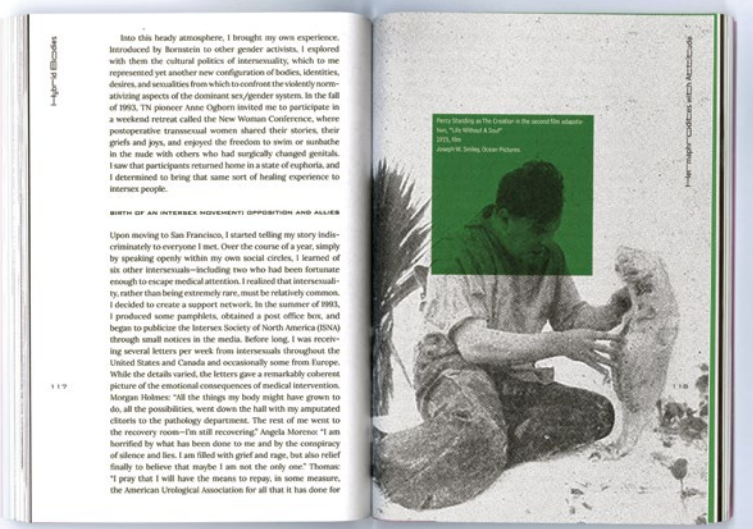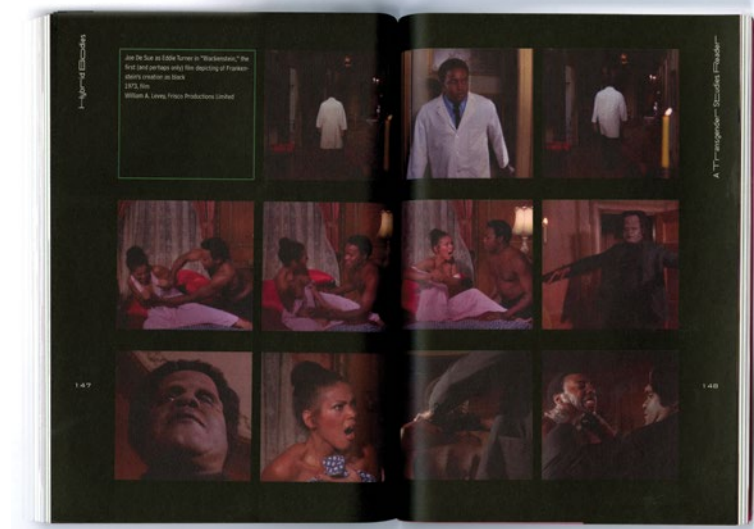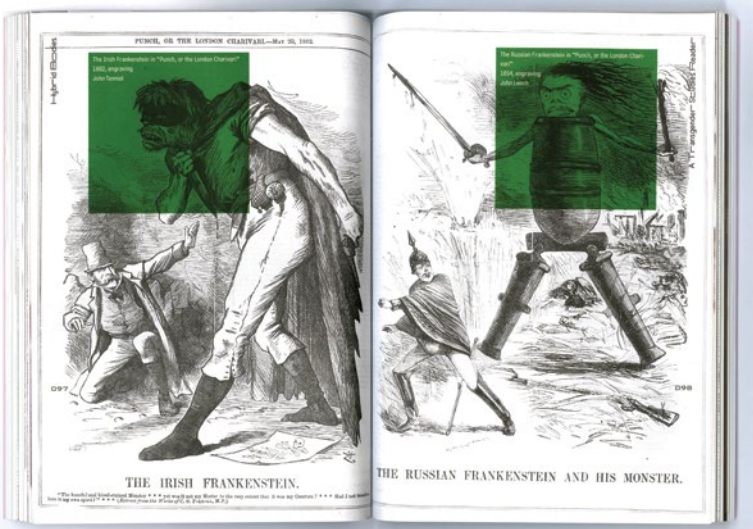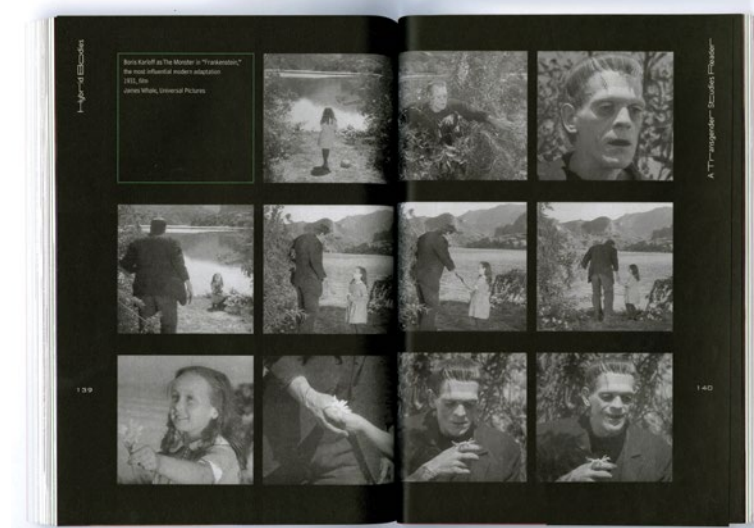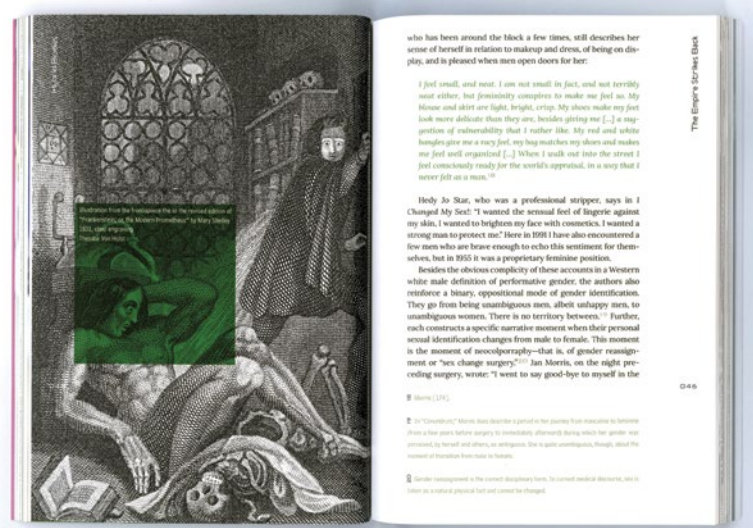
The book contains a parallel visual history of Frankenstein's creature, running from 1823 to 2019. The creature was always understood to be frightful but not always ugly or even monstrous. Minoritized people are uniquely analogue to the creature, who is textually described as intelligent, kind, gentle—and nevertheless marginalized.

If not obvious, I identify very strongly with Frankenstein's creature, occasionally thinking of myself as a gender monster. (and I think the book's narrative makes a strong case for trans* as subaltern.[1])

1. See "The Politics of Non-Representation" in *Queer Space,* page 4.

Dalila Di Lazzaro and Srdjan Zelenovic as the
Female and Male Monster in "Flesh For Franken-
stein," the first 3D and X-rated film adapatation
1973, film
Paul Morrissey, Compagnia Cinematografica
Champion
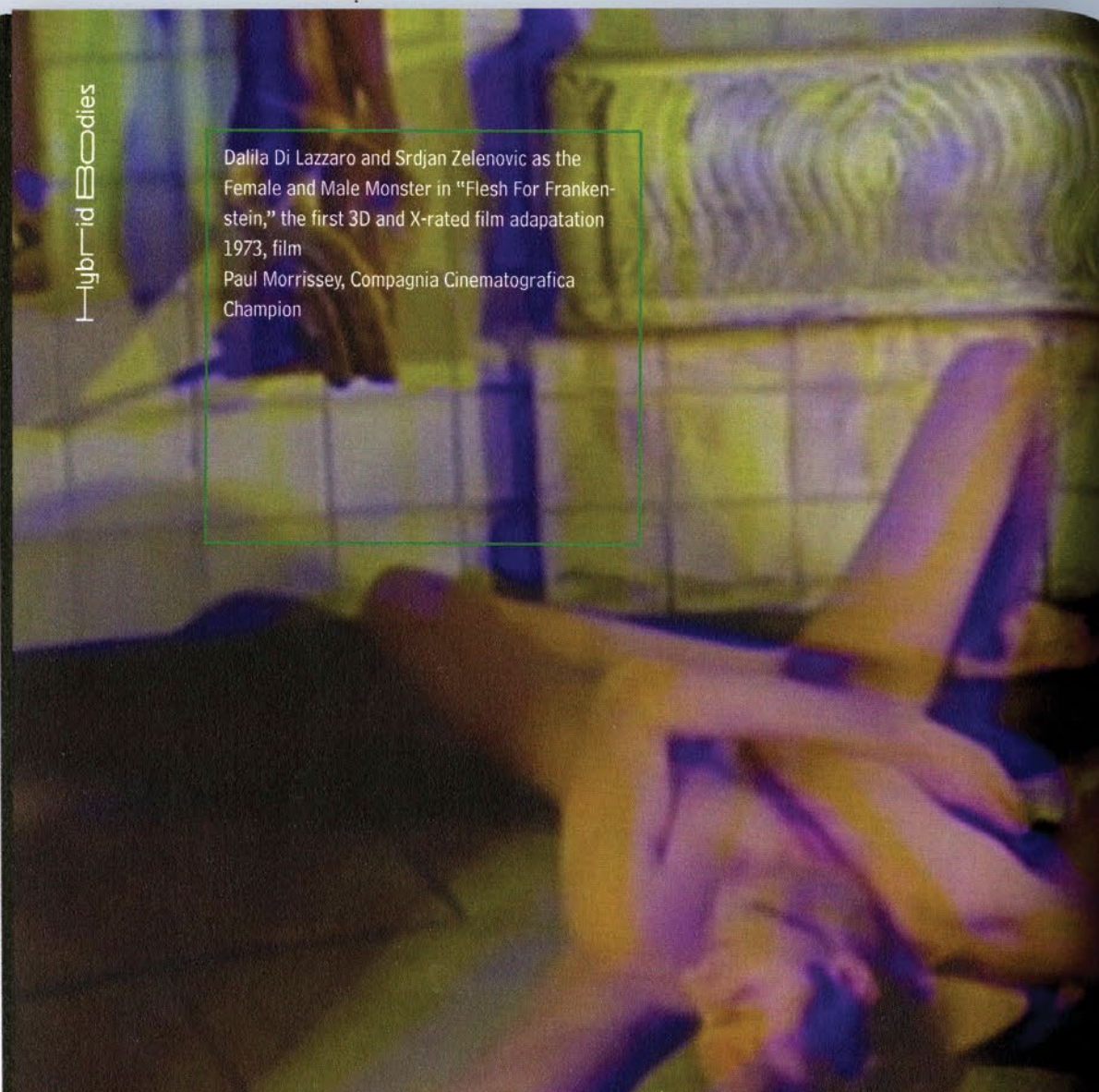
EL LISSITZKY & OH NO TYPE CO.

ADAM FEIN

OCTOBER 2020

Graphic design can entrench identity and conceal alternative ways of being. This publication explores how design can represent identity as unsettled and evolving.

It is a type specimen, showing off the typefaces of OH no Type co. The spreads are marked sequentially with large numbers, set in one of foundry's fonts. The book is spiral bound and cut down the middle so that the top and bottom can flip independently. This allows the reader to refigure the numbers (replacing the top of the 2 with the top of 7, for example) or to create new glyphs (perhaps by combining an 9 and a 5). The form and identity of the glyphs becomes flexible and fluid.

The publication is composed of two papers, a full-size and half-size page. The book is cut in half so that the top and bottom portions can flip independently. Trim size is 6 ¼×10 ⅛".

Topography of Typography

Letters by James Edmonson

Typographical Facts

Writing by El Lizzitsky

JAMES EDMONSON
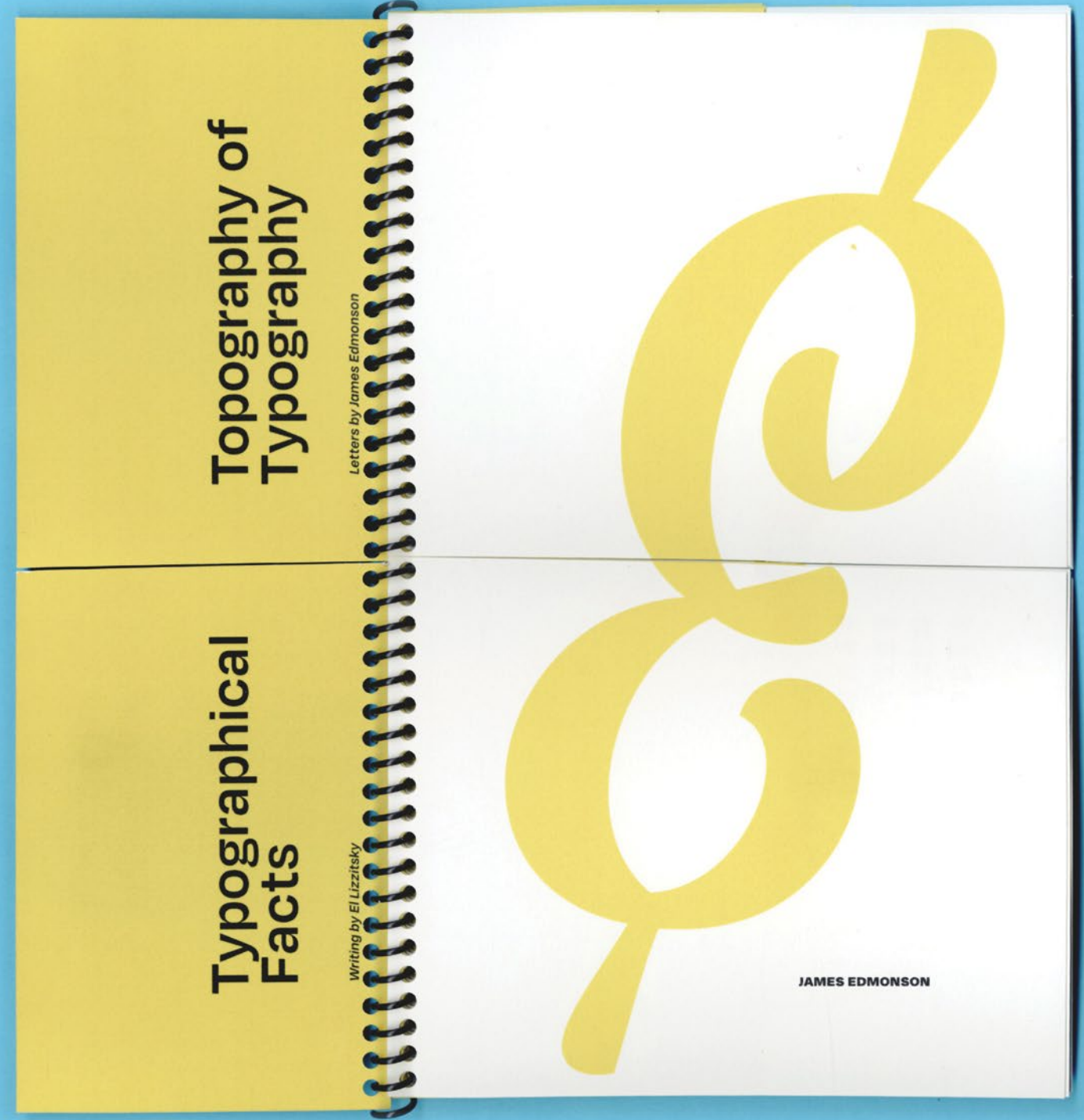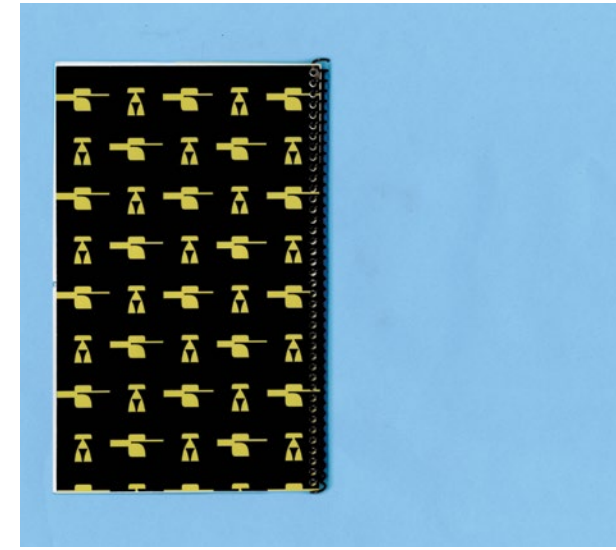
The book contains the design work of El Lissitzky, his electro-library manifesto, and glyphs from OH no Type co.

The front and back covers are the letters "EL" tracked tightly to create a formal pattern.

The top and bottom sections of the book flip independently. This allows the user to try alternative reading sequences and to generate new numerals. The book 'queers' the numerals by producing new formal and semantic possibilities.

This project is a good example of why graphic designers must relinquish control rather than permit or enable audiences. Here, the object limits possibility—even as the book pretends to speculation and generation. That is, the actual glyphs the audience can construct are limited by the design. The capture and control of the content always already defines the horizon of audience behavior.
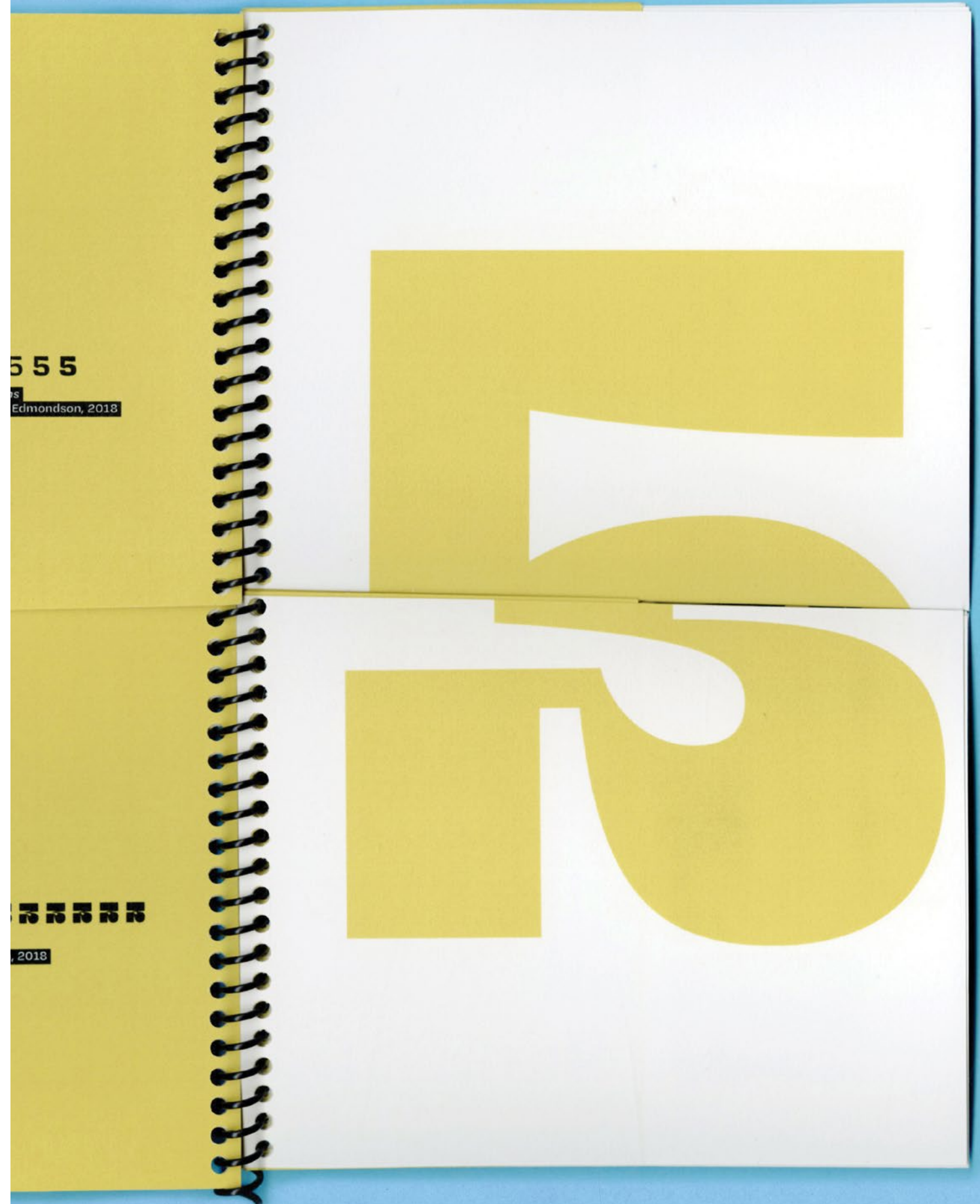
LEGIBILITY IS VIOLENCE

ADAM FEIN

OCTOBER 2020

Individuals exist at the confluence of various power dynamics. Identity is constructed at the intersection of power-produced categories: race, sex, gender, class, beauty, intelligence. Most of these categories change, but some are perceived as permanent and natural. Modern critical theories, like feminism, queer theory, and trans* theory, have called such categories into question. The transgender experience, by definition, is one that demonstrates gender—and attendant identity broadly—is not settled. A person can move from one position to another. During transition, the person moves through the spaces in between position-alities: gaps, holes, voids. The gender queer person is an occupier of those in-between spaces.

"Legibility is Violence" interrogates how gender queer identities operate at the intersections of power and politics. It is directly concerned with the use of pronouns, includ-ing neopronouns, and how their adoption can concretize (stiffen transitional and fluid) gender queer identities. This work imagines fixed pronouns as interpellative, a process through which ideology hails a person and the person, in response, recognizes themselves as a subject of ideology. Pronouns becomes an apparatus that constructs gender queer subjectivity. Ultimately, "Legibility is Violence" ar-gues for the refusal of pronouns and therefore of narrative, intelligibility, and completion.

The central component of the book is 18 colored pag-es, each containing 18 lines of poetry. The poem presented on each page is not sensible. The book cannot be read through as a linear narrative. However, each line of poetry is individually perforated. The reader is able to remove the unintelligible lines in order to create a coherent poem. "Leg-ibility is Violence" offers the reader the choice: preserve the book as a whole; or destroy the book to establish legibility.

The following pages reprint the introductory text of the book.

Critical theory analyzes society and culture in relation to power. How does power shape society: the clothes we wear; the values we hold; who we can become? Critical theory on race, in particular, developed concepts about how an individual exists at the confluence of various power dynamics. A white woman has a different relation to power than a white man, and consequently each person experiences different modes of discrimination and privilege. The individual person's relationship to power can be described through the matrix of domination, a metaphorical grid on which a person can be mapped in relation to the axes of power.[1] Positionality describes the different points people occupy on this grid. One occupies a different space—often literally—as a poor, black man than as a wealthy, white man.

Some categories that define a person's position are constructed, for example, beauty; and some categories can change, for example, income. However, many of these power-inflected categories are perceived as permanent and natural. Feminist, queer theory, and trans* theories have consistently called such categories into question. Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex,* "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[2] The transgender experience, by definition, is one that demonstrates gender—and attendant identity broadly—is not settled. A person can move from one position to another. During transition, the person moves through the spaces in between positionalities: gaps, holes, voids. The gender queer (or nonbinary) person is an occupier of those in-between spaces.

More precisely (and less controversially,) during transition the person, at least, passes through and occupies a variety of social roles & presentations.

It is now a common (and welcome) courtesy, at least within moderately progressive spheres, to ask a person for preferred pronouns. Misgendering, or using incorrect pronouns to refer to transgender person, can cause harm, slight to severe. Asking for pronouns recognizes the dignity of the transgender person and their freedom to be free from harm within society. But asking for preferred pronouns can be analyzed as a revolutionary activity; one that admits not only the instability of identity and the distance between mind and body, but also the radical possibility of existing in irregular and even unthinkable positionalities.

Queerness is often described as not normative. This is meant as "not normal" (or not majoritarian) and as expansive (or multivocal, diverse, and inclusive.) However, the function of pronouns is normative. They define a possible positionality and so circumscribe everything that might populate that position. Even neopronouns, that seek to symbolize in-between spaces, define a position over time as it attracts signifers, like aesthetics or naming conventions.

Neopronouns are "unofficial," "ahistorical," constructed pronouns. For example, ae/aer was first used in the sci-fi novel *A Voyage to Arcturus* written by David Lindsay.[3]

1. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* (New York: Routledge, 2002.)

2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989.)

3. David Lindsay and J. B. Pick, *A Voyage To Arcturus,* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1992.)
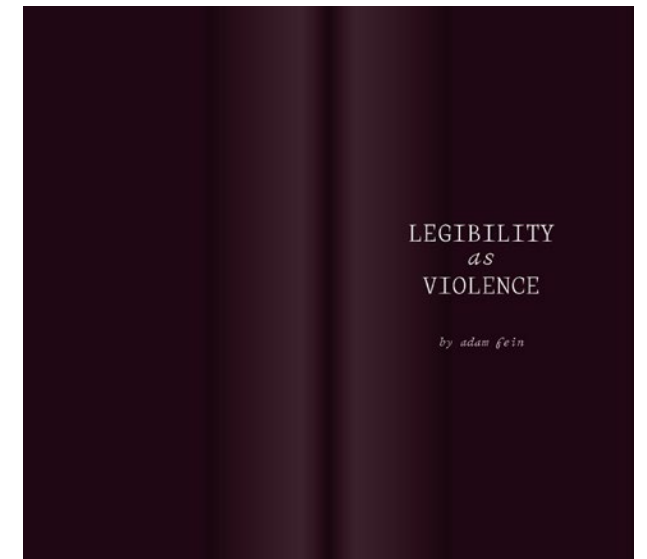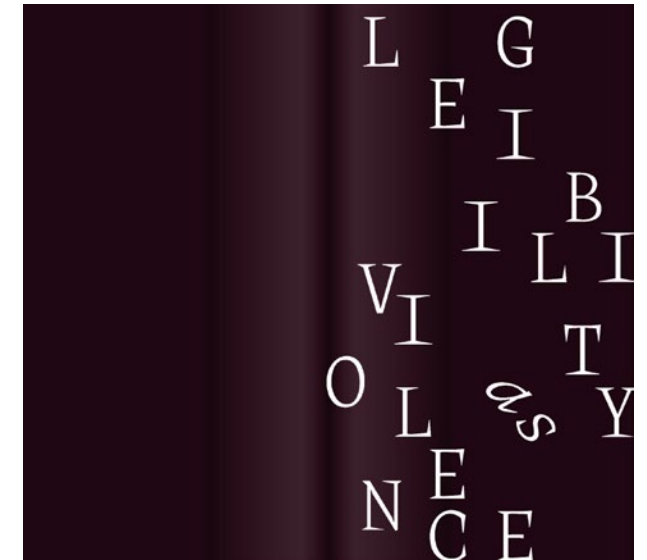
The title of the text is made (more) legible across the introductory matter sequence. The book performs legibility as an effect of regulation. Trim size is 5 ³⁄₈×9 ³⁄₄".

(It is a trope, for example, that nonbinary people choose objects for names: Sage, Ash, Rain.) There is nothing about pronouns in and of themselves that produce this effect; rather it is the concretizing effect of names, which always in time become prescriptions. But as the most transparent social signal of gender identity, pronouns are an important object of critique. As concepts with normativizing force, pronouns limit the trans* imaginary, eliminating the in-between spaces that trans* individuals occupy.

Pronouns work as a system of discipline. In the *History of Sexuality,* Michel Foucault describes the process by which sexuality was reified (frozen into a category) in the nineteenth century:

[The power of nineteenth-century 'bourgeois' society] acted by multiplication of singular sexualities. It did not set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexuality, pursuing them according to lines of indefinite penetration. It did not exclude sexuality, but included it in the body as a mode of specification of individuals. [...] It produced and determined the sexual mosaic. [...] These polymorphous conducts were actually extracted from people's bodies and from their pleasures; or rather, they were solidified in them; they were drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices. The frozen countenance of the perversions is a fixture of this game.[4]

The homosexual, for example, was one mode of behaving in the world until power—psychiatry, jurisprudence, literature, etc.—isolates and freezes this perversion. For Foucault, this is the invention of a the homosexual, what he call a new "species," and which we now recognize as an "identitiy." Pronouns, also operating through modes of power, functionally reify identities. Pronouns define points within a matrix, which become the only cognizable positions. The "species"—the identity—homosexual eliminated the position of the 'non-homosexual man who has sex with men,' a possibility that became impossible. So too does the singular "they" at least begin to transform behavior, desire, phenomenology into a static identity.

To be extremely clear: At issue is not whether using binary or recognized pronouns is good or bad; nor whether situating oneself in defined positionalities is good or bad; nor whether the people who do such thing are right or wrong. In fact, the author emphatically believes that persons should ask one another for preferred pronouns and that a person can never be wrong for transitioning into the positionalities that aligns with their identity. The authenticity or legitimacy of any individual's identity is not in dispute.

This whole essay is real slippery shit. I don't intellectually disagree with it — in fact, I may be more convinced than ever of the dangers of naming[6]—but I have changed my name and exclusively use they/them pronouns now. Have I failed to line up to my politics? Though like sure I did change my mind about the significance of "they" from a kind of neopronoun to an opaque symbol of refusal.[7]

4. Michel Foucault, and Robert J. Hurley. *The History gf Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction,* (New York: Vintage, 1990,) 47–48.

5. Foucault, *The History gf Sexuality,* 43.

6. See "Uniform Title," in *Queer Power,* page 102.

7. "The Politics of Nonrepresentation," in *Queer Space,* page 4.
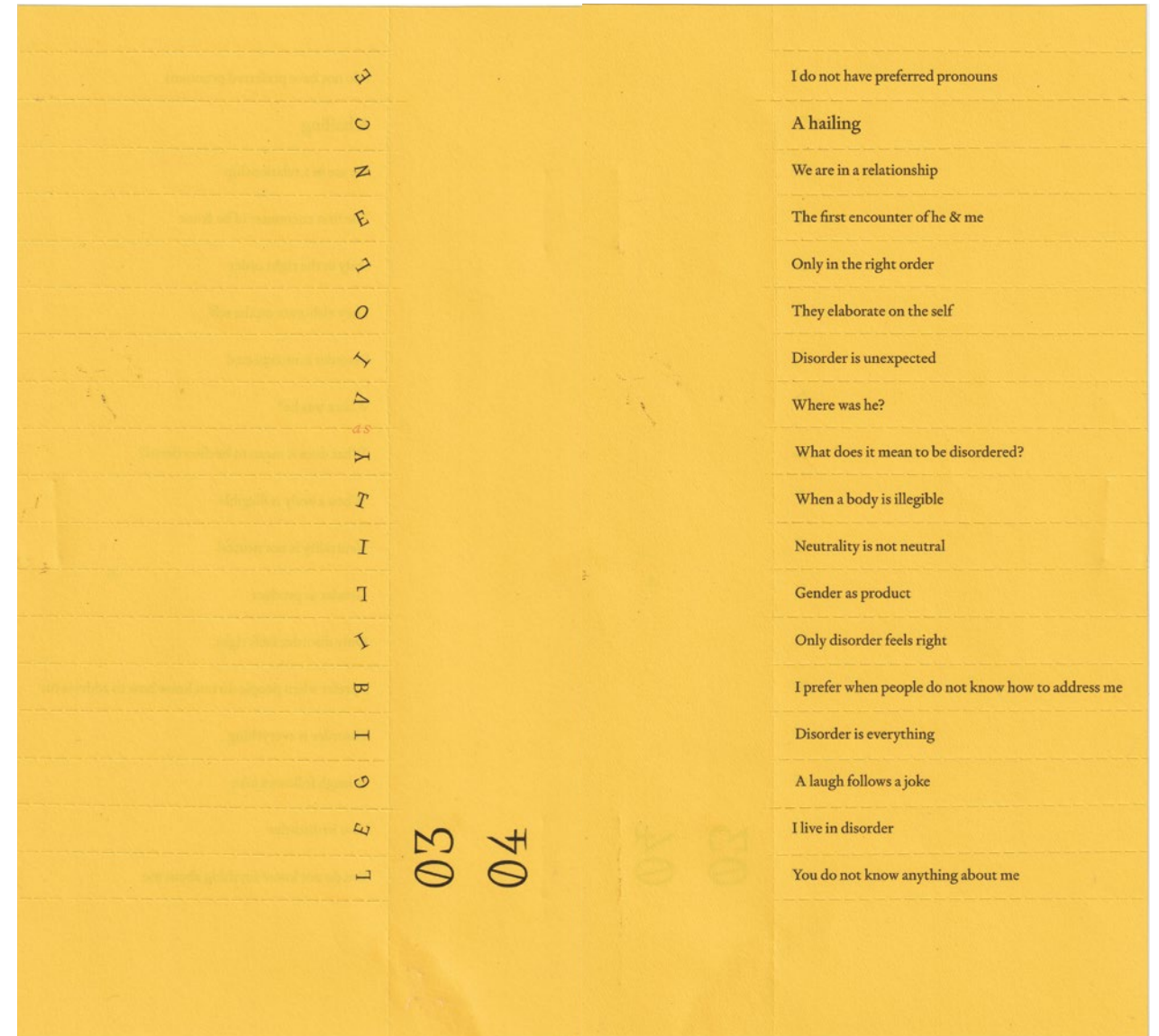
The principal portion of the text is a series of pages with 18 line poems. Each line is separately perforated. The poems do not make sense, but the pages can be torn to create understandable, or legible, poems.

Judith Butler writes in the preface to *Gender Trouble* that the goal of the book is to "open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized."[7] The purpose of this book, "Legibility is Violence," is the same: not to problematize any identity or to bring any person to crisis, but to open up the field. To that end, this critique again follows Butler, who writes "It would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself."[8] Pronouns impose limitations upon the thinkable itself. The main purpose of this book is to motivate a refusal of pronouns as a methodology for expanding the possibilities of gender, to encourage persons to seek out the gaps, holes, voids in the gender matrix, to occupy the in-between spaces.

The title of this book is "Legibility is Violence." The use of violence is similar to what Butler calls "the mundane violence performed by certain kinds of gender ideals."[9] Violence, in this use, is not an murderous act and does not reflect the violent actor so much as the cultural context they inhabit. Among other senses, the violence that Butler describes refers to oppression, for example, the limited professional roles of women. However, in this book, the scope of "gender ideals" is extended much further, such that all established gendered positions are called into question. And violence specifically describes the destruction of possibility.

Indeed it follows from this position that the individual does not choose an identity and so cannot be ethically responsible for occupying a pre-defined positionality.

The text can reveal an understandable, legible poem, when it is destroyed.

7. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999,) viii.

8. Butler, *Gender Trouble,* xviii.

9. Butler, *Gender Trouble,* xix.

MARGINALIA

ADAM FEIN

MAY 2021

How can graphic design renounce and refuse control?

The central design concept of this book is the inclusion of blank spaces,[1] empty areas where cards can be introduced to answer questions or create associations. The book attempts to surrender control to readers, permitting them to challenge or subvert the text. This is the graphic "designer resigning—to some extent—the capacity to control the audience's behavior and the narrative of the publication.

"Between Lights"[2] and "Sorrow Note"[3] are two essays originally published in this text. The former strongly influenced the design of this publication. The text discusses my color blindness and how it reveals that vision is socially constructed. Green, pink, and purple are all colors that are affected by color blindness, and therefore almost all elements within the book are printed in those shades.

1. For more on blank space, see the volume *Queer Space.*

2. "Between Lights" is reprinted in *Queer Power,* page 44.

3. "Sorrow Note" is reprinted in *Queer Study,* page 4.

Trim size is 5 ¼×9".

verts it into carbohydrates. On a different planet with a different star with different available light, the plants could have been a different color: red plants for yellow light. Instead, the abundance of chlorophyll in Earth's leaves and grasses has led humans to associate green with nature.

Green exists as frequencies between 575 and 525 terahertz.

Green is the color of Frankenstein's Monster. But only in film. The most influential representation of Frankenstein's creation comes from the 1931 movie, *Frankenstein*. The role of the The Monster was played by Boris Karloff. This depiction gave us the ugly, stumbling, groaning creature with a flat head and neck bolts. Black and white photography interprets the relative brightness of different colors. In early black and white film, colored makeup was applied to actors to create different shade of gray in the final film. A character might be painted blue, so that the character appeared as a brighter shade of gray. In the case of *Frankenstein*, The Monster was painted green; and advertising illustrations took up and ran with that inhuman shade. The limitations of chemical photography created a long-lasting symbol. In the book and early stage adaptations, Frankenstein's Monster is described differently: beautiful but unnatural, and monstrous because unnatural.

Green is a card permitting residence.

Green eyes are not truly seen—but brown pigmentation given a blue overcast through the refraction of light in the eyes.

Green is back.

Green is the new black.

Green is—

Gordon Hall writes that "silence as a non-oppositional form of resistance" in their essay "Extremely Precise Objects Of Ambiguous Use." Silence is imagined as a refusal, a non-response to a question that denies available options and yet does not posits alternative options. It is a mode of being with and alongside another, without insisting upon intelligibility. It is an action that negates while also setting up numerous unstated possibilities—non-articulation as speech and unseeing as sight. In No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, Lee Edelman describes queerness as a refusal to reproduce society.

In Private Tools, sex toys are recast in gelatin, becoming non-productive and anti-productive objects. In masturbation, the gelatin sex toy shatters. It is unflavored, not nutritious, and so inedible. The gelatin sex toy melts, molds and discolors in almost all environmental conditions, resisting potential value as a commodity or art object. And its transparency and instability make it a poor object of display. The gelatin sex toy resists functional, economic, and symbolic use. When analyzed for any value the gelatin dildo offers only a defiant and persistent "No!" The gelatin sex toy can only suggest a sexual practice that elides intelligibility, that refuses external validation. It is a ritual object of private value, a tool for an unknown figurative practice that confers some unseen identity upon the practitioner.

PRIVATE TOOLS

Nonbinary Objects. Winter 2020.

In 1793, the Republican Government of France declared the meter to be one ten-millionth of the earth's quadrant as it passed through Paris. The government cast a metal bar, of 90% platinum and 10% iridium, to be kept at 0° Celsius. This "prototype meter" was the material denotation—the indexical measure—of the meter. In 1953, Ludwig Wittgenstein stated, "There is one thing of which one can say neither that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris." Saul Kripke extended this idea in 1970, arguing that the length of the metre is "contingent," might change over time: it was not a fixed or a priori measure.

Prototype Body contrasts standardization against the body to frame gender transition as a durational performance. A 3D scan of the performer's body is used to create a sculpture of 90% platinum and 10% iridium. This sculpted prototype body becomes an indexical object, a benchmark to measure the performer's body against. The performer will begin hormone replacement therapy, and spend part of each day near the statue over the course of a year, the performer's body grows out of alignment with the prototype body, becoming literally deviant. The sculptural body becomes a backdrop against which the performance of identity becomes visible. As the performer's body changes, the viewer sees that identity and gender are unfixed, always. What does it mean when an indexical standard has a capacity for reference? Prototype Body suggests that his creations merely mythologize their subjects. Consequently, fixed frames become suspicious. The work suggests that no medium cannot accurately depict its subject.

PROTOTYPE BODY

Z. Fall 2020.

EVERYTHING YOU CA[...]
NOTHING YOU WAN[...]

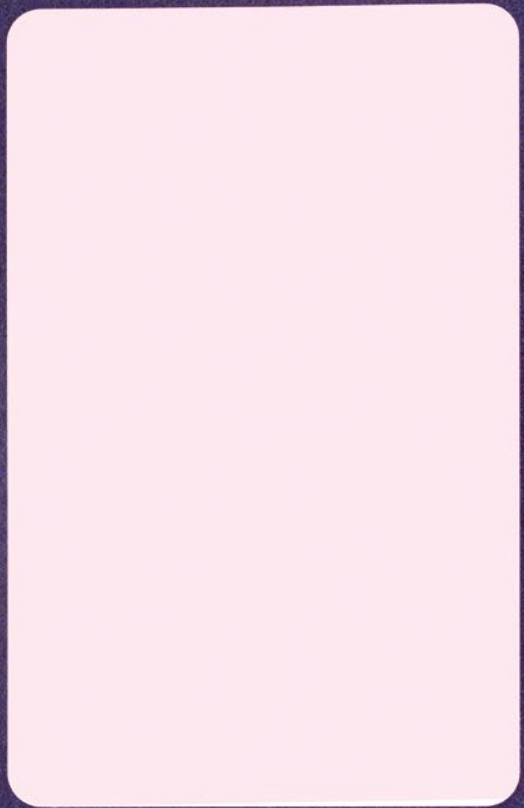*is this how
graphic design
renounces
& refuses
control?*

*is this how
graphic design
reproduces
& enforces
identity?*

The book provides blank spaces throughout the volume.
Readers are provided cards—some blank, some with projects,
some with text—to insert into the empty space. This insertion
can answer provided questions, intervene on the text, even
trouble or frustrate the designer's intentions.

KNOWLEDGE FROM BELOW

TEXT & IMAGES BY
MEGHAN SURGES

BOOK DESIGN BY
ADAM FEIN

MAY 2021

This is a thesis book by Meghan Surges, designed by Adam Fein. This book considers mass surveillance, administrative violence, and policing. As an alternative, Surges proposes "seeing and knowing from below," the disclosure and dissemination of marginal knowledge.

In the book design, we explore methods for visually representing alternative, naive or suppressed knowledge. Scans of worn, ink-stained photographs are preferred to crisp digital imagery. Broken specimens and incomplete projects occupy more space than the polished final pieces. Handwritten notes are of particular importance, suggesting non-professionalized and ephemeral deliberation. Scribbles on paper scraps or sketchy journal entries, these handwritten notes refuse legibility: they are often unreadable, fit untidily into the thesis narrative, and often brim with emotions—frustration, anger, and disappointment—that are flattened in the final, consumable art object.

The handwritten notes are juxtaposed against a digital aesthetic: pixel-based typography, low-resolution screen captures, JavaScript code. The digital reinforces the naivety of the handwriting; its inefficiency and irregularity. In turn, the handwriting exposes the distance of the digital. CCTV cameras and location promise insight, but we learn that omnipresent digital surveillance only reduces the human to a trackable token.

Thanks Meghan!
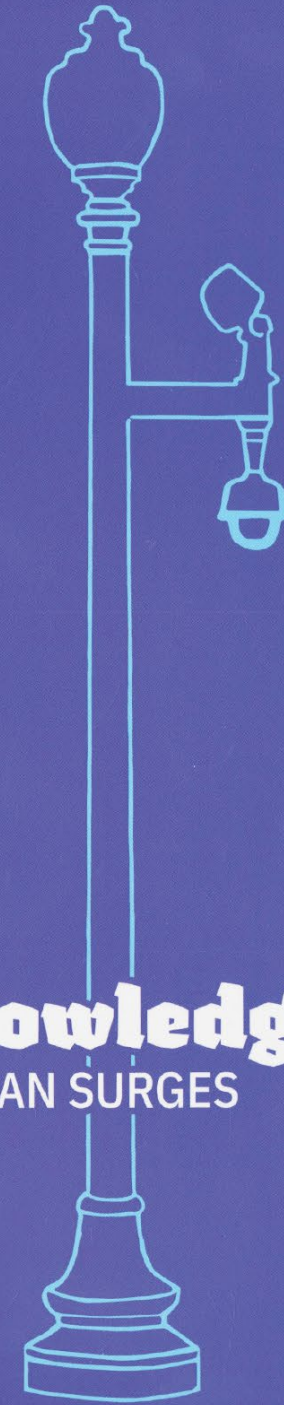
Knowledge from Below
MEGHAN SURGES

Trim size is 7 ⁷⁄₁₆×10 ¹¹⁄₁₆″.

MAKE A LIVING

To those who have suggested (subtly or not) that I could not survive as an artist, I didn't believe you. Resistance has always been the reason for my artistic practice. My practice hasn't paid my bills, but I dedicate my time to it off the clock. It adapts to changing circumstances, weathers the dulling force of professionalism, invites failure, and possesses me.

A job offer was my ticket to New York in 2017. An art fabrication studio had hired me as a project manager. I spent forty hours per week, for the next two years, at my desk in a dusty office, with a window looking out over the studio level below.

We never invited clients to the studio, a derelict Bushwick warehouse, which my boss described as a "post-Warholian art factory"[1] in an interview with *Interior Design* magazine.[1] The CEO and founder of the company appeared in the studio no more than four times in my entire period of employment there. I was nonetheless obligated to speak with her at least once a day. Mostly, she was posted in her luxury apartment, a glass palace on Park Avenue, yelling commands through speakerphone, or relaying information secondhand through an assistant.

I tried daydreaming on the job, but people needed me to answer the phone that was always ringing. A call from a client, framer, or wallcovering installer, would pull me instantly out of my reverie.

1. https://www.interiordesign.net/projects/15314-rottet-studio-reinvents-viacom-in-los-angeles/

Software translated the coordinates, tool paths, and cut settings into G-Code, lines of letters and numbers legible to the CNC router as a set of instructions. My first machining operation was "roughing" with a quarter inch bit. The bit's spinning and digging into a graphite block, clamped in place with an improvised fixture plate, translated the process back to me through the grating tunes of high speed steel. Through earplugs, I listened to its constant whine, moving into higher pitches with each descent along the Z axis. After this first pass, the graphite had a spiraling void resembling the work of termites. The second and third passes, done with a smaller bit, carved out a negative space more closely approximating the dome in my 3D model. Forgoing a fourth "clean-up" pass, I let the mold retain the paths of its making.

The cast glass domes looked like rough gemstones. They bent and shaped light in a dazzling way, thanks to the roughness of my mold. I trimmed the sharp edges but didn't polish the glass. The pictures taken by Checkpoint 005, which used one of these glass casts as a lens, were distorted like I wanted them to be.

```python
# timestamp.py
import os
import numpy as np
import cv2

# folder which contains all the images
os.chdir("/Users/msurges/Desktop/sky/12_4/544_spot")

# print current directory
print(os.getcwd())

num_of_images = len(os.listdir())
print(num_of_images)

for i in os.listdir():
    file_name, file_ext = os.path.splitext(f)
    print(os.path.splitext(f)) # uncomment to test
    f_cam, f_time = file_name.split('x')
    print(f_time) # isolates time from camera number # uncomment
to test
    image = cv2.imread(f, 1)
    new = cv2.line(image, (0,0), (720,0), (105,105,105), 80)
    font = cv2.FONT_HERSHEY_PLAIN
    new = cv2.putText(image, f_time, (30,30), font, 2,
(255,255,255))
    cv2.imwrite(f,new)
    # add something so it escapes the for loop when complete

cv2.waitKey(0)
cv2.destroyAllWindows()
```

```python
# coord_info.py
# use this script to display an original image in Python GUI
# select coordinates for a mask, to be applied to a single image
(using mask.py) or to a folder of images (using mask_all.py)

# note: imshow function does not always work in Jupyter notebooks
and Colaboratory
# works best when run from command line or IDE

from matplotlib import pyplot as plt
import cv2
import numpy as np

# set path to image file
path = r'/Users/msurges/Desktop/sky/masking/6.jpg'

# load image and get shape values (h, w, num. channels)
picture = cv2.imread(path)
print(picture.shape)

# display rgb image with plot lines
plt.imshow(cv2.cvtColor(picture, cv2.COLOR_BGR2RGB))
plt.show()
```

In July, a temporary autonomous zone was established downtown, near the Brooklyn Bridge entrance, and this became a battle-ground between citizens and police. Following public officials' announcements that they would not be taking measures to defund NYPD, as VOCAL and other groups demanded, protesters occupied parks near City Hall. Free Black Radicals started referring to the site as Abolition square. It was an organizing ground, with resources for political education and mutual aid, and a place to hold speak-outs against police violence.

Facing West 06/06/2020

2020-06-06 16_53.jpg

Facing West 07/31/2020 12:45:28 PM

805x2020-07-31.jpg

110x2020-06-06.jpg

07/15/2020 08:31:17 AM

145x2020-07-15.jpg

Facing West 07/15 3:27:50 AM

14x2020-07-15.jpg

07/15/2020 06:06:19 AM

14x2020-06-06.jpg

07/03/2020 01:21:44 PM

14x2020-07-15 13_21_45.jpg

Facing West 07/15/2020 10:10:50 AM

th 07/09/2020 03:26:18 AM

Facing North 07/09/2020 03:26:26 AM

Facing North 07/09/2020 03:26:38 AM

14x2020-07-03.jpg

14x2020-07-09.jpg

14x2020-07-15.jpg
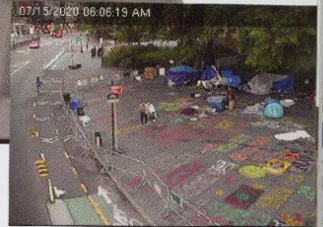
29x2020-07-31.jpg
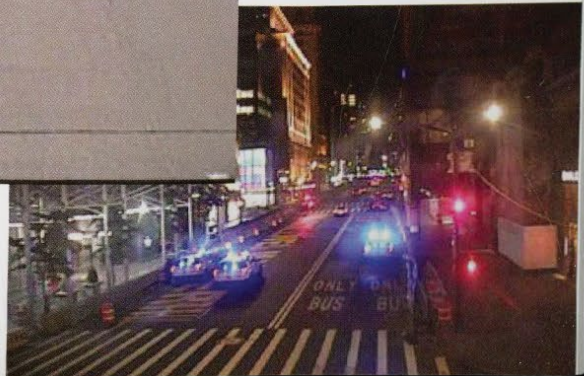
Camera 14, usually facing the entrance of the Brooklyn Bridge pedestrian path, revealed itself to be surprisingly mobile and flexible in its scope. During the course of the park's occupation by protesters, camera 14 routinely scanned Abolition square and its occupiers.

Soon after its incorporation in lighthouses, the fresnel lens found roles in other niches of modern life: railway signal lanterns and police beacons. I walk through Providence and notice small beacons everywhere. I see light fixtures with red lenses beneath the bridges. Blue emergency lamps line the campuses. I pass under flickering street lights in Kennedy Plaza and recognize the surveillance cameras conveniently attached. The flashing lights of police cars glare—piercing through the night, and through my windows. Even when I'm home, I feel constantly surrounded by and reminded of their presence. Spreading light without warmth, the beacons won't protect us.

EXPWY

September 2019

Two-channel video installation

Rear-view mirror monitors, wood, and acrylic
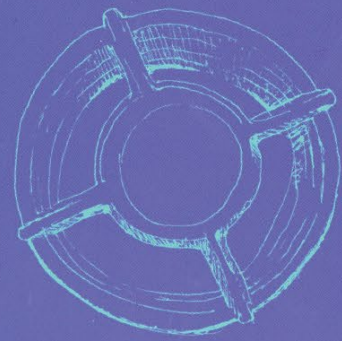
MASTERY IS NOT MY GOAL

Queer Type

This section considers how type design can express queer identity. The following typefaces explore the formal features that express gendered concepts in—and the potential to subverting those through—the design of letterforms.

JUICY GOTHIC

ADAM FEIN

DECEMBER 2019

This font was the initiating exploration into the combination of "masculine" and "feminine" features of letterforms in order to subvert gender stereotypes in typography.[1]

The font began as a revival of "Plain Black," a textura blackletter published in a 1832 Fann Street Foundry specimen book. The design emphasizes the fluid features of gothic scripts: curves are emphasized; forms are rounded; terminals drip with hyperbolic droplets; descenders have extra "swish."

The design of the publication plays with the Juicy Couture brand, like in the appropriation of the pink, and the ecclesiastical associations of gothic scripts, as in the bible-like cover. The publication contains essays on the history and contemporary use of black letter scripts, as well as photos illustrations and posters showing off the distinctive features of Juicy Gothic.

After spending so much time thinking about gender in typography, I now strongly believe projects like these (and Bosie[2]) are harmful. They reinforce gender stereotypes more than subvert them. They insist that the gendered formal features are meaningful. IDK I am just not sure that graphic design is capable of changing our perception of gender via symbolic form.
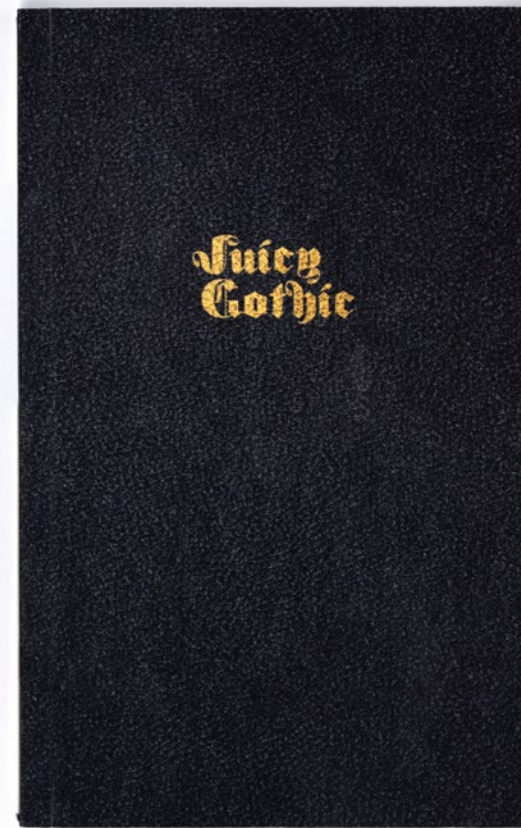
1. For more on gender and type, see "Gender Typing" and "En/Decoding Gender" in *Queer Power,* pages 50 and 66.

2. Bosie, *Queer Things,* page 78.

Juicy Gothic

its transformation into Gothic was complete. The characteristics of Gothic are lateral compression, angularity, and what I have called fusion, the overlapping of rounded letters, as in do.[1] In a more cursive form it became the bastarda. To these peculiarities of Gothic may be added the great increase of abbreviations. How much the newly founded universities of Europe, with their stationers and "pieces" (pecie) of books which they rented out for copying, with their impoverished students who needed inexpensive books rapidly produced, contributed to these developments is a matter not yet investigated, so far as I know. The development of Gothic indicated above applies particularly to France, Germany, and England. In Italy matters did not go so far. While the Carolingian script was degenerating elsewhere, in Italy it remained relatively pure and graceful. The large round hand of twelfth-century Italian manuscripts stands out among the more crabbed scripts developing elsewhere. It is true that Gothic script swept over Italy, but generally speaking it did not become so extreme as across the Alps. Furthermore, there was a very definite restraining force at an important and influential university center. It was at the University of Bologna that the new interest in Justinian brought about the production of numerous handsome large codices of that author and then of other authors, in a script appropriately called rotunda, Gothic though it was. A modification of this remained as

Salutati, and other early humanists. The humanists of the fourteenth century, men who read more, perhaps, than their predecessors, preferred manuscripts in large, clear writing, in littera antiqua, i.e., in the Carolingian script of the ninth to twelfth centuries, particularly, perhaps, the large twelfth-century Italian script already mentioned. Petrarch, Boccaccio, Salutati, and many others wrote in a legible Gothic script, a less formal variety of the rotunda, not compressed or angular but preserving the important Gothic element of fusion. I am here referring to their book hands, not to their cursive notarial scripts. It is important for the development of our theme to recall here what Petrarch and Coluccio have to say about contemporaneous handwriting. Petrarch writes to Boccaccio that a copy of his, Petrarch's, epistles is being made, not in the spreading luxuriant lettering, fashionable at a time when scribes are painters, that pleases but tires the eyes,
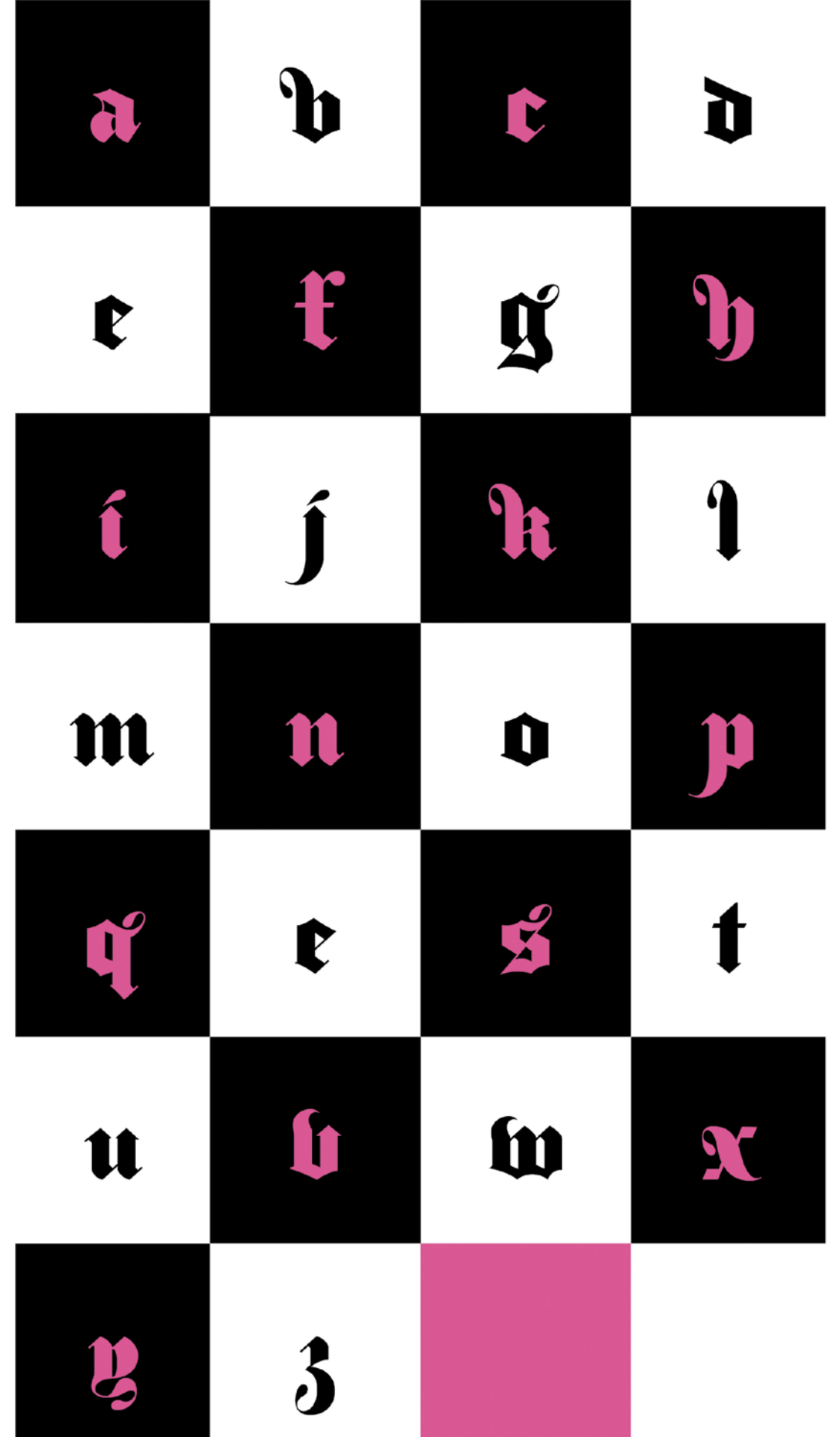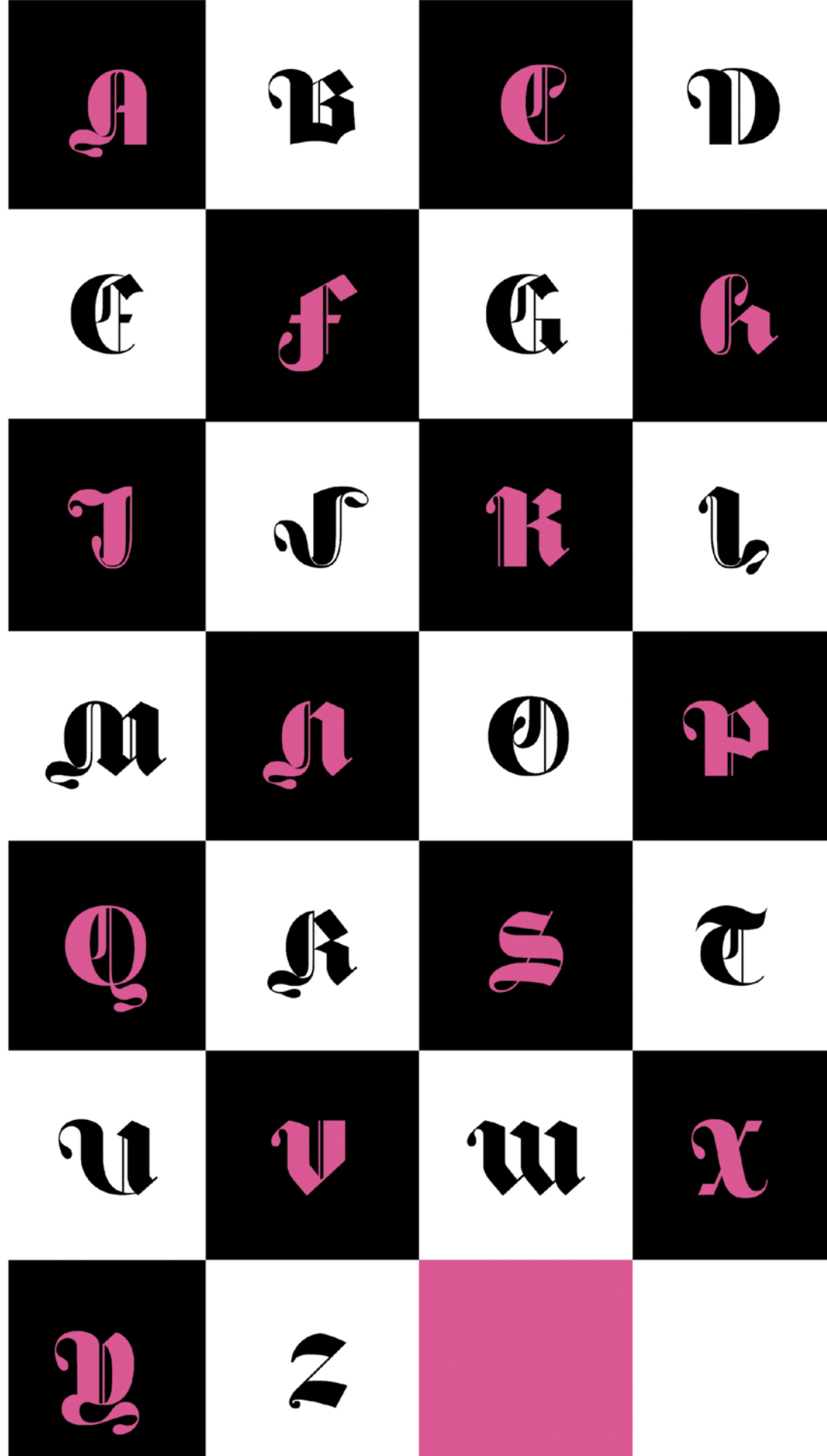
43

as if it were invented for anything else than reading, but in a trim, clear hand, appealing to the eye. He quotes Priscian's etymology of litera (quasi legitera,) i.e., legible. He adds that orthography and grammar will not be neglected. The former especially was in the scribe's province, as we shall have occasion to see. Elsewhere Petrarch well describes the minuteness, compression, and excessive abbreviations in contemporary manuscripts, which are hard on the eyes. The letters in abbreviations, he says, seem to ride piggyback. There are other passages in which Petrarch complains of the scarcity of satisfactory copyists. On the other hand, he praises a manuscript of Augustine given him by Boccaccio (Huic tali amicitie tue dono … et libri decoret vetustioris litere maiestas et omnis sobrius accedit ornatus. Fam. XVIII, 3, 9; 1355.) This manuscript, still in existence (Paris, B. N. lat. 1989), was, it is significant to note, written in the eleventh

44

century. Petrarch was sixty-two when in 1366 he criticized current handwriting as hard on the eyes. Coluccio was almost the same age sixty-one when in 1392 he wished to obtain a Cicero in littera grossa for his failing eyesight. **2**

In 1395 he asked his French friend Jean de Montreuil for a copy of Abelard in antiqua littera, as no other script was more pleasing to his eyes. The next year he wrote the same Jean that he wanted copies of Augustine and Quintilian in the best lettering, as like Italian script as possible. He seems to mean a script more like the plain Gothic he himself

2 Epist., ed. F. Novati, II (1893), p. 386. Boniface (born 680) was between 62 and 66 years old when he wrote that because of his failing eyesight he could not clearly make out tiny, joined letters and asked that a manuscript to be copied for him be written in discretis et absolutis litteris (Epist. 63). Were complaints such as these responsible for the development of Carolingian script a generation later, just as the complaints of Petrach and Coluccio, voiced when they were about the same age as Boniface, led to the humanistic reform?

45

used than the cramped French book hand, not to mention the bastarda. About the same time he wrote concerning a copy of Augustine that he had seen which was in rather large script and which he would like to obtain because he was now an old man. He went on to say that he would like to turn his fading eyesight away from the reading of his own copy, tiring because of the small letters, to the more pleasant task of reading a copy in a larger script. We do not know whether he received this manuscript, if it exists, it has not been identified. But the manuscript which Coluccio complained about is still available, and the writing is truly tiny: the body of each letter is about one millimeter high. In a writing space of 244 millimeters we find 59 lines, that is, each line, including spacing, is only some four millimeters high. Why so much attention to the complaints of two aging men of the fourteenth century? Because they explain what happened. It may at first

46

Trim size is 4 ¼×10 ⅞".

A B C D
E F G K
I J K L
M N O P
Q R S T
U V W X
Y Z

a b c d
e f g h
i j k l
m n o p
q r s t
u v w x
y z

Other European nations had jettisoned gothic letterforms in favour of the more 'simple' and 'graceful' characteristics of roman type, as opposed to the dark, angular, 'fussy' nature of gothic—barely legible to contemporary readers. The two styles were set against each other as polar opposites, with the very character of gothic type portrayed as somehow darker in nature. In his 1900 essay, Plain Printing Types, typographic scholar Theodore Lowe DeVinne issued a damning statement, describing blackletter as "a degenerate form of the roman character."

Despite criticism, blackletter became a defining part of the German nation's visual character, with everyday books and newspapers published in gothic type, and children learning blackletter script at school. Some scholars even refused to read German publications set in roman type. However, during WWII blackletter was characterised as the 'German type,' and debased and militarized by the Nazis for propaganda. Although the script was forbidden in 1941—ironically by the Nazis themselves—blackletter remains touched by its cultural associations, unable to entirely shake free of its history.

Today gothic letterforms retain a dark historical resonance, but have also found new homes in visual language, particularly in that of subcultures. Yvonne Schwemer-Scheddin says, "For current music and youth cults, blackletter is a means of proclaiming multiple identities: a collective, a people, a race, a nation, heavy metal, black metal, gothic—all of which celebrate brutality, or in a highly artificial way, the symbolism of death and destruction."

Morte d'Arthur by Thomas Malory, first published in 1485 by William Caxton in a Textura blackletter.

Text excerpted from "Typography: from Gothic to Blackletter" by Emma Tucker.

Opening spread for "Gutenberg's Textura." The background is a manipulated image from Gutenberg's bible.

A spread showing off one of the distinctive features of Juicy Gothic:
the fluid titles above the lowercase i and j.
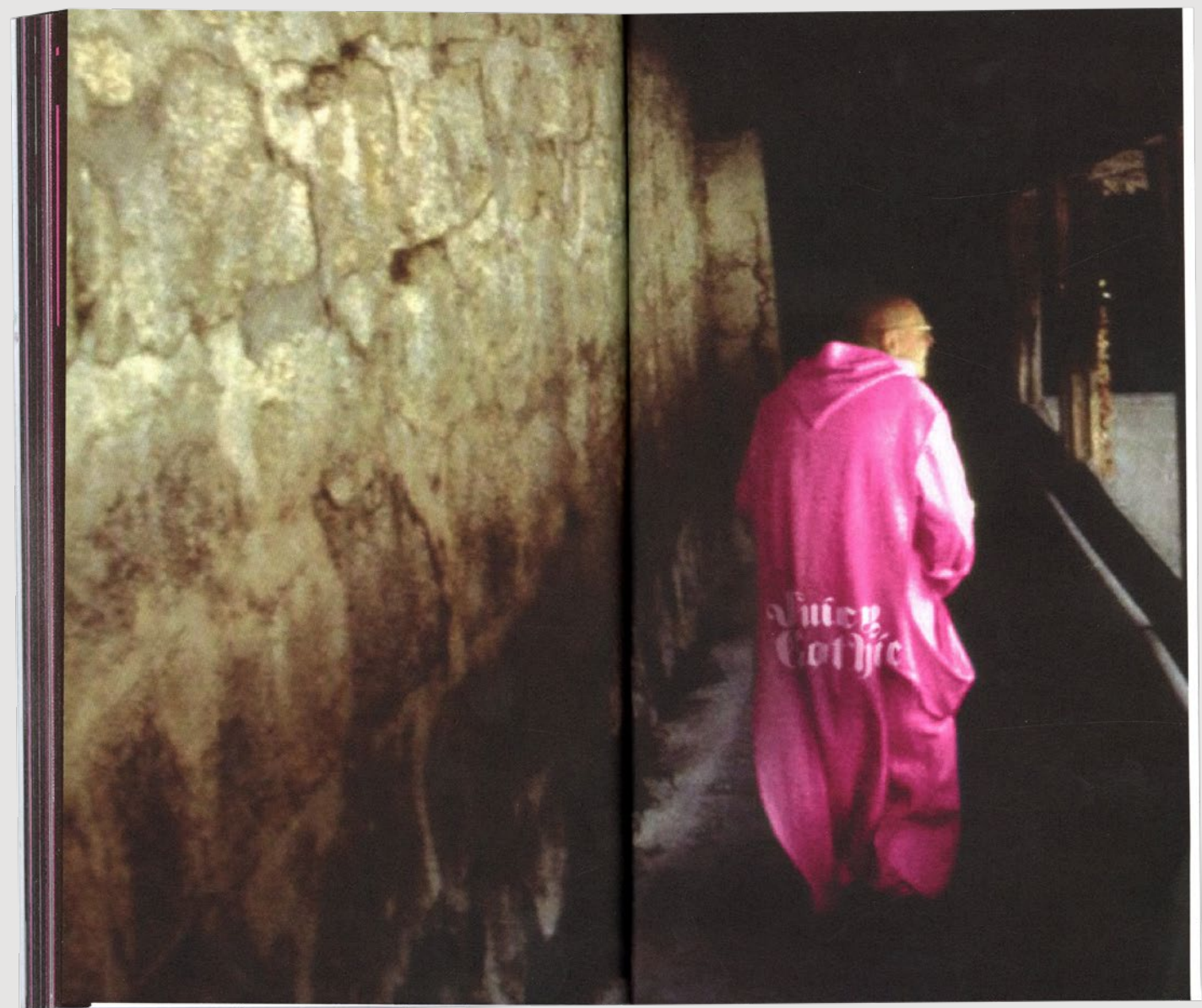
Many peers and critics connected Juicy Gothic to Juicy Couture.
This spread is a visual joke connecting three items: the typeface,
the ecclesiastical history of black letter, and the clothing brand.

BOSIE

ADAM FEIN

DECEMBER 2020

This font is an exploration of traditionally "feminine" formal choices to a "masculine" genre of typeface design.

The font is modeled most closely on News 701 and Volta, faces that were idiosyncratic interpretations of clarendons that emphasize readability. The design features dramatic curls (as in the r, f, and ear of the g) and exaggerated terminals (as in tails of the a and t). The italic is especially flamboyant, being unusually rounded and angled, with embellished ball terminals.

Bosie is named after the pet name Oscar Wilde gave to his lover, Sir Lord Alfred Douglas.[1]

WELCOME

1. Oscar Wilde is also a central figure in "Melmoth," see *Queer Power,* page 22.

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS a.k.a.

BOSIE

was an English poet & journalist
and a lover of Oscar Wilde.

kite

fair

WHITE

Bosie
40 pt

Bosie italic
200 pt

fo

re

Bosie
200 pt

"Oh, something like, 'Charming boy—poor dear mother and I absolutely inseparable. Quite forget what he does — afraid he — doesn't do anything—oh, yes, plays the piano—or is it the violin, dear Mr. Gray? Neither of us could help laughing, and we became friends at once."

"Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one," said the young lord, plucking another daisy.

Hallward shook his head. "You don't understand what friendship is, Harry," he murmured, "or what enmity is, for that matter. You like every one; that is to say, you are indifferent to every one."

"How horribly unjust!" cried Lord Henry, tilting

DAISY

Bosie
40 pt

his hat back and looking up at the little clouds that, like ravelled skeins of glossy white silk, were drifting across the hollowed turquoise of the summer sky. "Yes; horribly unjust of you. I make a great difference between people. I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects. A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies. I have not got one who is a fool. They are all men of some intellectual power, and consequently they all appreciate me. Is that very vain of me? I think it is rather vain."

"I should think it was, Harry. But according to your category I must be merely an acquaintance."

RATHER

Bosie
40 pt

wiz

pox

vote

gun

Bosie italic
200 pt

Dearest of All Boys,

Your letter was delightful, red and yellow wine to me; but I am sad and out of sorts. Bosie, you must not make scenes with me. They kill me, they wreck the loveliness of life. I cannot see you, so Greek and gracious, distorted with passion. I cannot listen to your curved lips saying hideous things to me. I would sooner be blackmailed by every renter in London than to have you bitter, unjust, hating. You are the divine thing I want, the thing of grace and beauty; but I don't know how to do it. Shall I come to Salisbury? My bill here is 49 pounds for a week. I have also got a new sitting-room over the Thames. Why are you not here, my dear, my wonderful boy? I fear I must leave; no money, no credit, and a heart of lead.

Your own,

Oscar

Dearest of All Boys,

Your letter was delightful, red and yellow wine to me; but I am sad and out of sorts. Bosie, you must not make scenes with me. They kill me, they wreck the loveliness of life. I cannot see you, so Greek and gracious, distorted with passion. I cannot listen to your curved lips saying hideous things to me. I would sooner be blackmailed by every renter in London than to have you bitter, unjust, hating. You are the divine thing I want, the thing of grace and beauty; but I don't know how to do it. Shall I come to Salisbury? My bill here is 49 pounds for a week. I have also got a new sitting-room over the Thames. Why are you not here, my dear, my wonderful boy? I fear I must leave; no money, no credit, and a heart of lead.

Your own,

Oscar

My Own Boy,

I got your telegram half an hour ago, and just send a line to say that I feel that my only **hope** of again doing beautiful work in art is being with you. I wish that when we met at Rouen we had **not** parted at all. There are such wide abysses now of space and land between us. But we **love** each other.

Goodnight, dear. Ever yours,

Oscar

Dearest of All Boys,

Your letter was delightful, red and yellow wine to me; but I am sad and out of sorts. Bosie, you must not make scenes with me. They kill me, they wreck the loveliness of life. I cannot see you, so Greek and gracious, distorted with passion. I cannot listen to your curved lips saying hideous things to me. I would sooner be blackmailed by every renter in London than to have you bitter, unjust, hating. You are the divine thing I want, the thing of grace and beauty; but I don't know how to do it. Shall I come to Salisbury? My bill here is 49 pounds for a week. I have also got a new sitting-room over the Thames. Why are you not here, my dear, my wonderful boy? I fear I must leave; no money, no credit, and a heart of lead.

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Your own,

Oscar

Thumbì!

It is silly of you, for there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men quite jealous, if old men are ever capable of any emotion."

"I know you will laugh at me," he replied, "but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it."

Lord Henry stretched himself out on the divan and laughed.

"Yes, I knew you would; but it is quite true, all the same."

"Too much of yourself in it! Upon my word, Basil, I didn't know you were so vain; and I really can't see any resemblance between you, with your rugged strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is Narcissus, and you—well, of course you have an intellectual expression and all that. But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face. The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid. Look at the successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous they are! Except, of course, in the Church. But then in the Church they don't think. A bishop keeps on saying at the age of

nat. Liqui officab iniam cuLaborepe litasitas untiam re, adi rersperferia namus elique exeribe rferunt aut que cusciat. Aspiet exceari bustiosam, que volorem et perovid ut laccatis autemperae. Explabo reptur, occus se volorunt ra dus. Namus ea quiasi cus dolorio ipicid que pratempor anti

volumque net ant litatur, verro veliqui stibus eat explia corumquae ommolestrum explitem dolorrum entiam, sant quos restior porionse pa cores et volum qui dolorerum laborest, sant rercimil et est ut erum ea nem voluptae doleniat volorep erendipsae nu. Ebit hit a nimus. Accumquia porum

"Basil, you are more than an acquaintance."

"And much less than a friend. A sort of brother, I suppose?"

"Oh, brothers! I don't care for brothers. My elder brother won't die, and my younger brothers seem never to do anything else."

"Harry!" exclaimed Hallward, frowning.

"My dear fellow, I am not quite serious. But I can't help detesting my relations. I suppose it comes from the fact that none of us can stand other people having the same faults as ourselves. I quite sympathize with the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders. The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property, and that if any one of us makes an ass of himself, he is poaching on their preserves. When poor Southwark got into the divorce court, their indignation was quite magnificent. And yet I don't suppose that ten per cent of the proletariat live correctly."

"I don't agree with a single word that you have said, and, what is more, Harry, I feel sure you don't either." Lord Henry stroked his pointed brown beard and tapped the toe of his patent-leather boot with a tasselled ebony cane. "How English you are Basil! That is the second time you have made that observation. If one puts forward an idea to a true Englishman—always a rash thing to do—he never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong. The only thing he considers of any importance is

congé

GOODBYE!

HAMMANIM

ADIE FEIN

NOVEMBER 2021

This is a variable font with an "affinity" axis. As affinity increases, the letterforms begin to resemble one another more: the aperture of the c and e shrink, making them appear like an o; ascenders and descender curve and grow slender, making them less obvious; some letters drop below the baseline, making the i and j nearly identical.

The font explores slowness, one possible strategy for subverting the reproduction of cultural norms through graphic design,[1] including gender in typography. Graphic design is a tool of rapid communication, and it relies on the immediacy of cultural associations. Gender stereotypes are one such association; they are intellectual shortcuts, creating easy connections between abstract visual form and social identity. The introduction of slowness—enacted here as the inability to easily discern letterforms—frustrates the rapid communication of meaning.

olive

olive

olive

olive

* The sample text in this section is from "Known Unknowns: an Introduction to *Trap Door*" by Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton.

1. See "En/decoding Gender" in *Queer Power,* page 66.

xerox
xerox
xerox
xerox

crop
crop
crop
crop

water
water
water
water

doubt
doubt
doubt
doubt

nite
nite
nite
nite

we are living in a time of trans visibility. yet we are also living in a time of anti trans violence. when produced within the cosmology of racial capitalism the promise of "positive representation" ultimately gives little support or protection to the very people whose lives and labor constitute the ground for the figuration of this moment of visibility. this is the trap of the visual: it offers—or, more accurately, it is frequently offered to us as—the primary path through which trans people might have access to livable lives. representation is said to remedy broader acute social crises ranging from poverty to murder to police violence, particularly when representation is taken up as a "teaching tool" that allows those outside our immediate social worlds and identities to glimpse some notion of a shared humanity. to the degree that anyone might consider such potential to exist within representation, one must also grapple and reckon with radical incongruities—as when, for example, our "transgender tipping point" comes to pass at precisely the same political moment when women of color, and trans women of color in particular, are experiencing markedly increased instances of physical violence. we must attempt to think through this fundamental paradox, attending to implications for the political present and the art historical past, particularly with regard to persisting—if incomplete—legacies of representation.

WHAT IS QUEER DESIGN?

Perspectives from Historians, Artists, Designer, and Educators

QUOTATIONS FROM
ANDY CAMPBELL
DAVID J. GETSY
GORDON HALL
nicole killian
YVONNE LEBIEN
TOTO LIN
RICHARD MEYER
NAT PYPER
CHRISTOPHER REED
PREM SAHIB
PAUL SOULELLIS
RAMON TEJADA
JOHN VOSS

The very idea of a "queer artist" seems oxymoronic. If we continue to support a system in which art is used to establish individual success/authority/genius/immortality for the artist, aren't we directly engaged with a mode of creativity that undermines queerness and elevates the authoritarian self? [...] Queer artists only learn how to use their experiences; we're never taught how to talk about our experiences in their own term. We're only taught the language of capitalism, how to use the queer mythos for a macho individualist end. [...] I think of queerness as multiple, as an anarchistic approach to sexual/gender identity: this would mean it couldn't be fit into a single piece, a single book, a single authoritative person.[1]

Yvonne Lebien
Betraying Authority: Notes on Queer Art

The aim of [queer art and design] is not to be admitted to the normal but to question its categorical centrality and the clandestine ways in which is is relentlessly enforced. [...] Perhaps the best way to understand the stance that self-nominates as queer is to see that it is, fundamentally, adjectival. It does not stand alone. Rather it attaches itself to nouns, willfully perverting that to which it is appended. It is a tactical modification—this name 'queer'—that invokes relations of power and propriety in its inversion of them. That is, its utterance brings with it two operations. First, it appropriates and affects the thing that it now describes (a queer what?). Second, this attachment of 'queer' to a noun necessarily cites the standard and assumptions against which it is posed (the presumed 'normal' that it abandons). [...]

While 'queer' draws its politics and affective force from the history of non-normative, gay, lesbian and bisexual communities, it is not equivalent to these categories nor is it an identity. Rather, it offers a strategic undercutting of the stability of identity and the dispensation of power that shadows the assignment of categories and taxonomies.[2]

David J. Getsy
Queer Intolerability and its Attachments

1. Yvonne Lebien, "Betraying Authority: Notes on Queer Art," in GenderFail Reader 2, ed. Be Oakley (New York: GenderFail Press, 2020,) 45–48.

2. David J. Getsy, "Queer Intolerability and its Attachments," in Queer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016,) 13–15.

These could be epigraphs for for this entire thesis.

The world is not as simple as binaries of "same vs. different." Differences lurk within narratives of cultural continuity, while sparks of identification and empathy may be struck in the comparison of cultures far removed from one another. [...] This may be schematized as a matrix of continuities and disjunctures between various ideas of art and homosexuality.

Listed along the top of the matrix are categories that historians have distinguished as different conceptual forms used to understand behaviors that look homoerotic to modern eyes: normal behavior (adolescent play or formal initiatory rites) associated with maturation; sexual encounters in which one person is perceived as transcending gender norms; a separate identity shared by people of comparable age and status who are seen as constitutionally different from those who engage in heterosexual sex [...]; and a performative role, which does not imply an inevitable or permanent core identity, but is a self-conscious choice among options available in a particular society [...]

Ranged along the other axis of the matrix are conceptions of how crafted objects (what we call "art") might relate to sexual identity in different cultures: depictions of homoerotic acts or of the pople associated with them, whether these are made by insiders or outsiders for admonition or arousal [...]; eroticized objects associated with the same-sex interactions, even if they do not illustrate sex acts; and products of sexual minorities—that is, people identified as deviant or different because of their homosexuality.[4]

Christopher Reed
Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas

I don't think that the use of queer aesthetic forms necessarily secures any political capacity. In fact, declaring something 'political' can sometimes be problematic in the sense that you are inadvertently defining the parameters for how it can operate.[3]
Prem Sahib
What Does It Mean To Make Queer Art Now?

The accepted verdict on [...] the way to make queer work is to utilize one of three strategies: make work that is auto-biographical from a queer subject position, show things that are metaphors or symbols for this positionality that the viewer will be able to recognize (what I refer to elsewhere as the "glitter problem"), or make work that displays queer bodies directly.

I am interested [instead] in work that teaches me phenomenologically how to move through the world and how to perceive differently, in ways that will make queerness and gender variety more possible. How can you change your mode of embodiment?[5]
Gordon Hall
New Space Education And How It Works

Queering design means making a conscious and repeated choice to side with my queer colleagues who do challenge the status quo. [...] You have to challenge the cis- and heterosexist (and racist, and ableist, and classist) underpinnings of the systems designers work in to make meaningful change. [...] In a queerer field, we would encourage users to make decisions based on informed consent and not slick heuristics. We would let them define themselves instead of forcing them into binary choices that determine how we talk to them and what we allow them to do. [...] I think the queerer design becomes, the more diverse our visual output will be as more people are recognized for their work without having to filter that work through a dominant idea of what "good design" looks like.[7]
John Voss
A Practical Approach To Queering Design

3. Prem Sahib, "What Does It Mean To Make Queer Art Now?," *Frieze,* May, 2014, www.frieze.com/article/queer-time-and-place.

4. Christopher Reed, "Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6–7.

5. Gordon Hall, "New Space Education and How It Works" in *FLEX (*New York: Kent Fine Art, 2014,) 10.

6. John Voss, "A Practical Approach To Queering Design," *Medium,* December 2, 2020, medium.com/queer-design-club/a-practical-approach-to-queering-design-f331bb-c948a7.

There is no queer typography, only queer acts of reading and writing. It feels new to say this now, but this is a statement that owes so much to more than three decades of queer theory and gender studies that brought us, among other things, the understanding that "gender is an act one does, rather than a thing one is" [...] we need to stay with queer as an action, actively engaging with the past and the future as a verb. As in: queer acts of disrupting, interrupting, agitating, and surviving against normative logics of success.[8]
Paul Soulellis
What is Queer Typography?

Sometimes, it's not enough to see characters that look like you. To remedy this, queer and trans game designers are changing the interactive media landscape, innovating experiences that uplift the queer community. So how do you design a game "queerly"? One way is to think of queering as subverting norms of capitalistic, linear gameplay, by exploring a values-based, futurist perspective instead. Many game designers begin designing by focusing on the feelings they want players to have. In my games, I strive to create feelings of abundance, catharsis, and solidarity, which align with personal values like intersectionality and self-care.[9]
Toto Lin
Queer and Trans-formative Game Design

Decolonizing, queering, colorizing as an action requires that we take ACTIVE steps to break the dam (the confines, the grid, the systems, the safety) design traffics in. Create openings for the neglected perspectives and ideas from the edges of the grid to explode outward—not seep out, but explode. Make spaces (big spaces) in your book shelves, leave spaces in our syllabi, literally leave spaces blank to explore this idea/action responsibly; leave spaces for other to talk and share their non-western, nonbinary, non-"designed" work. Simply get out of the way and let others occupy the space. Let's go beyond style and hipness and more towards opening up.[10]
Ramon Tejada
We Must Topple the Tropes, Cripple the Canon

A queering of design education is an opening, an unclosable gap. We must critique our own critiques. We must embrace a multiplicity of perspectives. We must reimagine the past in service of the future. We must cannibalize the canon. We don't know what these structures might look like and they too will change, but we must go into the unknown, together.[11]
nicole killian
How Will We Queer Design Education without Compromise?

8. Paul Soulellis, "What is Queer Typography?," (talk, New York, May 8, 2021), Type Drives Communities, soulellis.com/writing/tdc2021.

9. Toto Lin, "Queer and Trans-formative Game Design," *Color Bloq,* October 2020, www.colorbloq.org/article/queer-and-trans-formative-game-design.

10. Ramon Tejada, "We Must Topple the Tropes, Cripple the Canon," *Walker Reader,* July 26, 2018, walkerart.org/magazine/soundboard-queering-design-education-ramon-tejada.

11. nicole killian, "How Will We Queer Design Education without Compromise?," *Walker Reader,* July 26, 2018, walkerart.org/magazine/soundboard-queering-design-education-nate-pyper

When we talk about this idea of queering design education, it's mainly about elevating voices. It's figuring out how to get students to feel like they have more agency in these systems inside of which we all have to maneuver. I think educators need to be constantly unlearning what our own educational background was and asking ourselves, "What are the actual needs of the bodies in front of us?" […]

Sadly, I think there's a lot of people in education who teach because they like the power they have, and that is something that's really scary to me. We need to remove that power and figure out how we can create a space where people actually feel comfortable and excited to be a designer, rather than being siloed at their laptops and trying to "win" against their peers. So many designers work by themselves, but it's an important time, especially socially and politically, to talk about why it's important to be in a space together. How can we consider community, and not just audience, in our work? [12]

nicole killian
What Does Queering Design Education Actually Look Like In Practice?

When we talk about queering design pedagogy we need to talk about reproduction(s). Design is the rhetorical sleeve by which ideology is expressed in material form. Each time the work we create is published it reproduces not only itself but the beliefs and conditions of the people who produce it. Inevitably, this act of reproduction also reproduces the power relations that yield these conditions. If the purpose of design education is to prepare students for this aim, then in order to queer the discipline we have to first reevaluate the histories, principles, and social dynamics that we reproduce within learning environments. [13]
Nat Pyper
Let's Talk About Body Reproduction

LGBTQ design is about audacity, trying things out, and sometimes failing. Because LGBTQ people have historically been denied positions of political and economic power—or even basic protections from those who would threaten our lives and livelihoods—many of the designs discussed in this book share, by dint of circumstance, similar origin stories: namely, courageous individuals and small groups working together to visualize and imagine new political horizons.[14]
Andy Campbell
Queer × Design

Homosexuality is thus conceived not simply as an identitty possessed by particular subjects but as a site of sexual meaning and symbolic investment under continual negotiation, both by those who name themselves as gay or lesbian and by those who do not. […] Rather than locating same-sex desire as a fixed category or consistent iconographic motif within modern art, [queer art and design] is defined by the push and pull of different historical moments and social contexts, the vehemence of proclamation and suppression, and the shifting possibilities and constraints of sexual identitity.[15]
Richard Meyer
Art & Queer Culture

I feel intense gratitude for everyone who has written about queer visual culture, especially graphic design. For so much of my life, I felt completely isolated in my passions. None of the graphic designers in my life get it — or had the least interest in 'queer design'. The only reason I did not feel hopelessly delusional was the writing of other queer folks. thank you! thank you! thank you! thanks!

(Also the support of Kylie McDermott. appreciate you!)

12. nicole killian, "What Does Queering Design Education Actually Look Like In Practice?," *AIGA Eye on Design,* January 28th, 2019, eyeondesign. aiga.org/what-does-queer-ing-design-education-actual-ly-look-like-in-practice.

13. Nat Pyper, "Let's Talk About Body Reproduction," *Walker Reader,* July 26, 2018, https://walkerart.org/magazine/soundboard-queer-ing-design-education-na-te-pyper

14. Andy Campbell, *Queer × Design,* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2019), xiv–xv.

15. Richard Meyer, "Preface," *Art & Queer Culture,* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2013), 9.

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QUEER

SPACE

ALL EMPTY SPACES ARE SITES OF CONFLICT

QUEER
SPACE
adic
fein

FRAGMENTS FROM
MAKEUP ON EMPTY SPACE
ANNE WALDMAN

I am putting makeup on empty space

pasting eyelashes on empty space

painting the eyebrows of empty space

piling creams on empty space

painting the phenomenal world

I am hanging ornaments on empty space

gold clips, lacquer combs, plastic hairpins on empty space

I pour words over empty space, enthrall the empty space

packing, stuffing jamming empty space

spinning necklaces around empty space

Everything crumbles around empty space

the thin dry weed crumbles, the milkweed is blown into empty space

from nothing to these typing fingers

from nothing to the legs of the elk

from nothing to the fine stand of pine in the forest

INTRODUCTION

Queer Space considers how subjectivity, identitity, and
value are constructed by space. How is a territory delim-
ited? How is place made visible? How does the design
of space enable or disable access? This book considers
space broadly. It addresses the physical environment: the
ownership of land, the parceling of tracts, the adminis-
tration of physical resources. And it addresses the literal
and symbolic spaces of graphic design objects: the white
space of a page, the structure of a document, typography's
ability to open spaces within language.

Of particular importance to this volume is empty space.
What sites are perceived as unoccupied, unproductive, or
barren—*as blank*? *Queer Space* argues that no space is
trivially regarded as empty, but that "blankness" is a locus
of social construction and political dispute.

*The work in this volume approaches the issue of blank space
in multiple ways. One, it seeks to elucidate the forces that
construct "blankness" and blank space. Two, blank space
is recovered as places already full of (overlooked) mean-
ing. Three, blank space is re-imagined as a site of radical
potential, places of entry for plural or marginal voices. Four,
"blankness" is advanced as a strategy of refusing systems of
regulatory power; that is, a form of opacity that rejects but
does not supplant.*

Queer Space ultiamtely represents blank space as complex,
both enabling the exclusion of and offering refuge to
minoritized identities.

empty space

THE POLITICS OF NON-REPRESENT-ATION

Or, How to Accurately Not Depict Someone

ADAM FEIN

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All representation is misrepresentation. Graphic designers are incapable of representing minoritarian positions: the people, attitudes, and ideas at the margins of power. To portray these, the designer must visualize the invisible, re-articulate minoritarian positions in the language of the dominant group. This action, in fact, flattens and obscures the marginal speech that the graphic designer intends to make visible.

In this project, I place the work of postcolonial thinker Gayatri Spivak in conversation with Jan Van Toorn and with Modernist graphic designers. I conclude that not even a critical, self-reflexive graphic design practice can address the issue of misrepresentation. Rather, this project offers non-representation as a solution. Graphic designers should not seek to visualize the invisible but instead to visually represent the absence of minoritarian speech.

Two visual ways of marking absence are explored: the intentionally blank page, refigured as a space reserved for future speech; and the anti-collage, a layered disassemblage of existing visual material that evokes absence.

The full essay text is reproduced on the following pages, and visual documentation concludes this section. This work was made for the On This Day project from Graduate Studio II, which concluded in a collaborative publication. "The Politics of Non-Representation" was only one section of that publication. The other participants were the MFA class of 2022. Their work is not shown here, but their support was important.

Gayatri Spivak is an Indian scholar and a significant postcolonial thinker. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?,"[1] Spivak considers the forces that construct and maintain the identities of colonial subjects—in particular, the category called the subaltern. Originally coined by Antonio Gramsci to describe the oppressed economic classes that are excluded from social institutions by more powerful classes,[2] the term subaltern was taken up by postcolonial thinkers to investigate the exclusion of lower and marginalized social groups in imperial colonial settings. Spivak provides the example of how dominant Indian classes, like Brahmans, were consulted by British colonizers when codifying colonial British law. In this example, dominant Indian cultural groups had political participation—that is, a voice in the construction of law—even while those dominant groups were being oppressed by the colonizer. The lower Indian cultural groups had no participation and so were excluded even from cultural imperialism. The subaltern, then, is a category that is excluded from politics, history, power, and knowledge. Moreover, the subaltern is "irretrievably" heterogeneous, changing in composition from area-to-area, from person-to-person. With regards to this many-times marginalized and irretrievably fractured class, that Spivak asks, "Can the subaltern speak?" Which is to ask, can desperate, marginalized persons with internalized oppression have a political voice? In the 1988 version of the text, Spivak concludes, "The subaltern cannot speak."

However, in a 1999 revision to the essay, Spivak writes that the subaltern "has spoken in some way." Critically, 'subaltern' is not the equivalent to 'oppressed' (and not any oppressed group can claim subalternity). Rather, the subaltern describes a population existing so far at the margins of power as to be entirely unintelligible to power. The unintelligibility of the subaltern is central to Spivak's essay, because the actual question is can the subaltern be heard? There are two issues here: The first is that to be heard the minoritarian subject must articulate itself in the language of the majoritarian. That is, to be intelligible, the subaltern must speak intelligibly. However, whatever is constitutive of the subaltern's otherness is lost in that translation—to be intelligible is to eliminate the very thing that makes it nonintelligible. For example, insofar as it can be contained within marriage, queer erotics are legitimized; but queer love or desire have not become legible

A BRIEF INTERLUDE In my figuration, queerness is subaltern. While it is not necessary for the goals of this essay or project that this position be accepted, it is worth consideration. One might argue that queers have articulated a coherent political position, that they have found unity, and therefore are not subaltern. For example, in the 1980s and 90s, homosexuals engaged in bio-politico-social action around AIDS. In the 2000s, homosexuals sought political representation through the codification of same-sex marriage. I believe, however, that these arguments only further clarify that queerness is subaltern. In the past 40 years, legal "victories" for queers in the United States have only narrowed our understanding of queerness. One's political fulfillment is another's nullified positionality. Christopher Reed writes in *Art & Homosexuality,* "The institutionalization of gay and lesbian identity into organizations seeking the political and social normalization of homosexuality, for instance, was often marked by disavowals of flamboyantly visual manifestations of minority sexual identity."[3] Consider how the codification of same-sex marriage advances

1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can The Subaltern Speak?: Reflections On The History Of An Idea,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2010.)

2. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* eds. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Smith, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.)

3. Christopher Reed, "Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9.
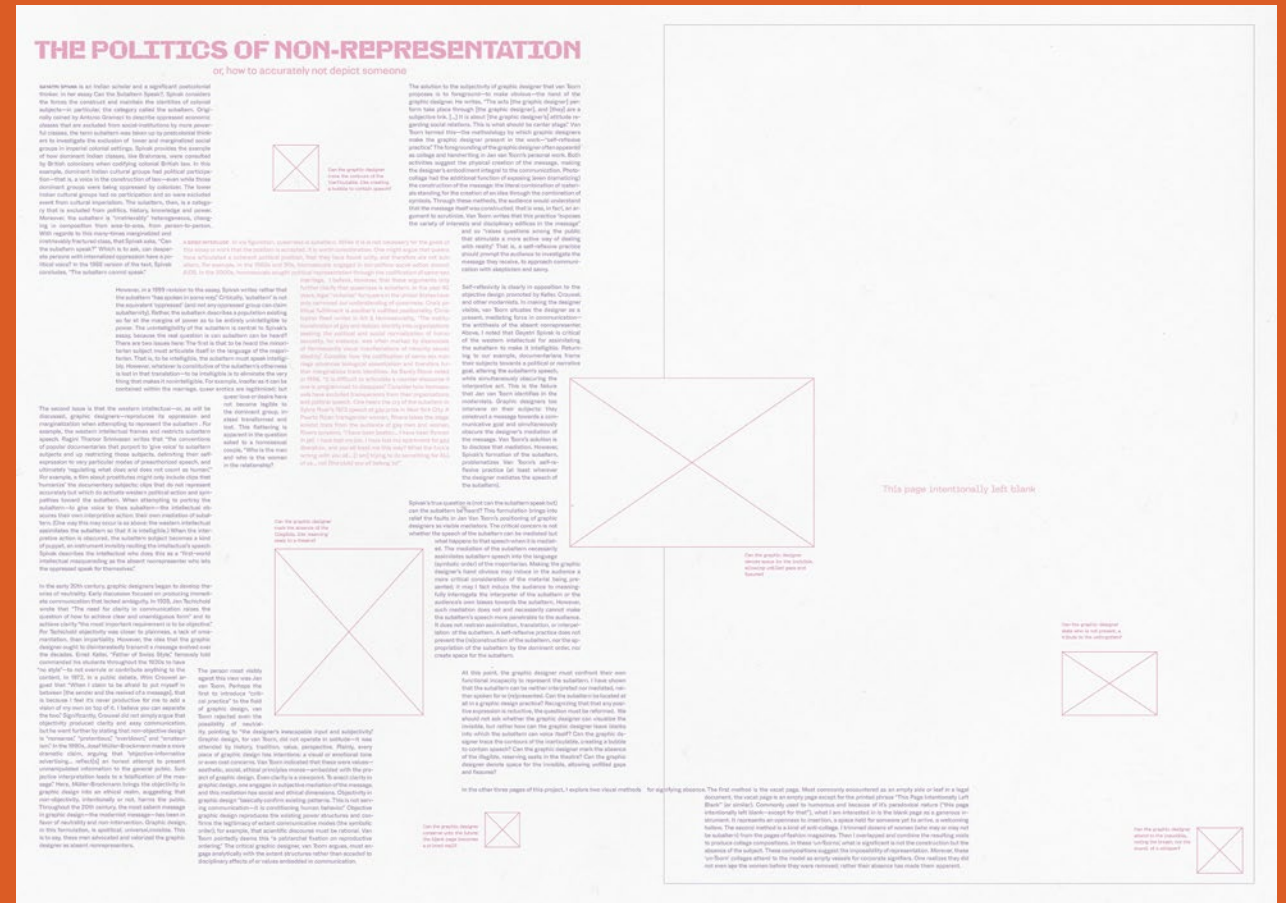
Essay next to page left intentionally blank. Newsprint, 29.5" × 23.5"

to the dominant group, instead transformed and lost. This flattening is apparent in the question asked to a homosexual couple, "Who's the man and who's the woman in the relationship?"

The second issue is that the western intellectual—or, as will be discussed, graphic designers—reproduces its oppression and marginalization when attempting to represent the subaltern. For example, the western intellectual frames and restricts subaltern speech. Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan writes that "the conventions of popular documentaries that purport to 'give voice' to subaltern subjects end up restricting those subjects, delimiting their self-expression to very particular modes of preauthorized speech, and ultimately 'regulating what does and does not count as human.'"[6] For example, a film about prostitutes might only include clips that 'humanize' the documentary subjects; clips that do not represent accurately but which do activate western political action and sympathies toward the subaltern. When attempting to portray the subaltern—to give voice to the subaltern—the intellectual obscures their own interpretive action: their own mediation of the subaltern. (One way this may occur is as above: the western intellectual assimilates the subaltern so that it is intelligible.) When the interpretive action is obscured, the subaltern subject becomes a kind of puppet, an instrument invisibly reciting the intellectual's speech. Spivak describes the intellectual who does this as a "first-world intellectual masquerading as the *absent nonrepresenter* who lets the oppressed speak for themselves."

In the early 20th century, graphic designers began to develop theories of neutrality. Early discussion focused on producing immediate communication that lacked ambiguity. In 1928, Jan Tschichold wrote that "The need for clarity in communication raises the question of how to achieve clear and unambiguous form" and to achieve clarity "the most important requirement is to be objective."[7] For Tschichold objectivity was closer to plainness, a lack of ornamentation, than impartiality. However, theories of objectivity in design evolved over the decades, from aesthetic to affective to normative. The idea that the graphic designer ought to disinterestedly transmit a message evolved over the decades. Ernst Keller, "Father of Swiss Style," famously commanded his students throughout the 1930s to have "no style"—to not overrule or contribute anything to the content, to approach it dispassionately.[8] In 1972, in a public debate, Wim Crouwel

biological essentialism and therefore further marginalizes trans* identities. As Sandy Stone noted in 1996, "It is difficult to articulate a counter-discourse if one is programmed to disappear."[4] Consider how homosexuals have excluded trans persons from their political speech and organizations. One hears the cry of the subaltern in Sylvia Rivera's 1973 speech at the Christopher Street Day Liberation Rally in New York city.[5] A Puerto Rican transgender woman, Rivera takes the stage amidst boos from the homosexual audience. Rivera screams, "I have been beaten… I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation, and you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you all… [I am] trying to do something for ALL of us… not [the club] you all belong to!"
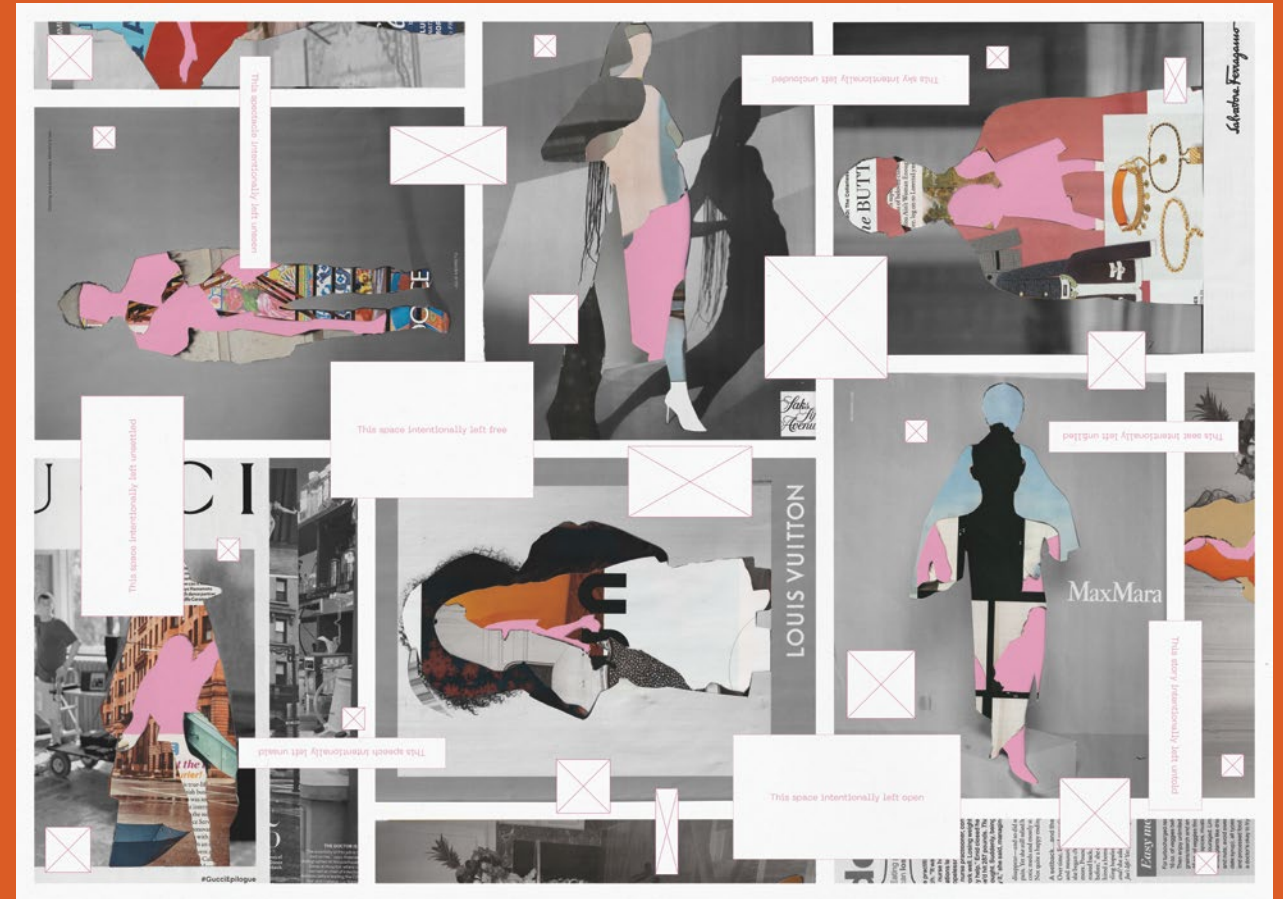
Collage with interspersed text boxes.

4. Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," (New York: Routledge, 1996.)

5. Sylvia Rivera, "Y'all Better Quiet Down," Christopher Street Day Liberation Rally, New York City, 1973.

6. Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, "'Can the Subaltern Speak' to My Students?," *Feminist Formations 32, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 63–64.*

7. Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook For Modern Designers, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.)*

argued, "When I claim to be afraid to put myself in between [the sender and the receiver of a message], that is because I feel it's never productive for me to add a vision of my own on top of it. I believe you can separate the two."[9] Significantly, Crouwel did not simply argue that objectivity produced clarity and easy communication, but he went further by stating that non-objective design is "nonsense," "pretentious," "overblown," and "amateurism." In the 1990s, Josef Müller-Brockmann made an even more dramatic claim, arguing that "objective-informative advertising… reflect[s] an honest attempt to present unmanipulated information to the general public. Subjective interpretation leads to a falsification of the message." Here, Müller-Brockmann brings the objectivity in graphic design into an ethical realm, suggesting that non-objectivity, intentionally or not, harms the public. Throughout the 20th century, the most salient message in graphic design—the Modernist message—has been in favor of neutrality and non-intervention. Graphic design, in this formulation, is apolitical, universal, and invisible. This is to say, these men advocated and valorized the graphic designer as absent nonrepresenters.

One person vocally opposed this viewpoint was Jan van Toorn. Perhaps the first to introduce "critical practice" to the field of graphic design, van Toorn rejected even the possibility of neutrality, pointing to "the designer's inescapable input and subjectivity." Graphic design, for van Toorn, did not operate in solitude—it was attended by history, tradition, value, perspective. Plainly, every piece of graphic design has intentions: a visual or emotional tone or even cost concerns. Van Toorn indicated that these were values—aesthetic, social, ethical principles mores—embedded within the project of graphic design. Even clarity is a viewpoint. To enact clarity in graphic design, one engages in subjective mediation of the message, and this mediation has social and ethical dimensions. Objectivity in graphic design "basically confirms existing patterns. This is not serving communication—it is conditioning human behavior." Objective graphic design reproduces the existing power structures and confirms the legitimacy of extant communicative modes (the symbolic order); for example, that scientific discourse must be rational. Van Toorn pointedly deems this "a patriarchal fixation on reproductive ordering." The critical graphic designer, van Toorn argues, must engage analytically with the extant structures rather than acceded to disciplinary effects of or values embedded in communication.

The solution to the subjectivity of graphic designers that van Toorn proposes is to foreground—to make obvious—the hand of the graphic

The cover of the collective publication made by the 2022 thesis cohort, within which this project exists.

8. Peter Vetter, Katharina Leuenberger, and Meike Eckstein. *No Style: Ernst Keller, 1891–1968 : Teacher And Pioneer Of The Swiss Style.* Gallen: Triest Verlag, 2017.

9. Wim Crouwel, Jan van Toorn, and Rick Poynor, *The Debtate: The Legendary Contest Of Two Giants Of Graphic Design,* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015.)

10. Schwemer-Scheddin, Yvonne, and Josef Müller-Brockmann., "Reputation: Muller-Brockmann," *Eye Magazine,* no. 19. 1995.

designer. He writes, "The acts [the graphic designer] performs take place through [the graphic designer], and [they] are a subjective link. […] It is about [the graphic designer's] attitude regarding social relations. This is what should be center stage."[11] Van Toorn termed this—the methodology by which graphic designers make themselves present in the work—"self-reflexive practice." Foregrounding the graphic designer often appeared as collage and handwriting in Jan van Toorn's personal work. Both activities suggest the physical creation of the message, making the designer's embodiment integral to the communication. Photocollage had the additional function of exposing (even dramatizing) the construction of the message: the literal combination of materials standing for the creation of an idea through the combination of symbols. Through these methods, the audience would understand that the message itself was constructed; that is was, in fact, an argument to scrutinize. Van Toorn writes that this practice "exposes the variety of interests and disciplinary edifices in the message" and so "raises questions among the public that stimulate a more active way of dealing with reality." That is, a self-reflexive practice should prompt the audience to investigate the message they receive, to approach communication with skepticism and savvy.

Self-reflexivity in graphic design is in apparent opposition to the objective design promoted by Keller, Crouwel, and other modernist designers. In making the designer visible, van Toorn is situating the graphic designer as a present, mediating force in communication—the antithesis of the *absent nonrepresenter*. I noted above that Gayatri Spivak is critical of the western intellectual for assimilating the subaltern to make it intelligible. Returning to an above example, documentary filmmakers frame their subjects towards a political or narrative goal, altering the speech of the subaltern, while simultaneously obscuring the act of interpretation. This is the failure that Jan van Toorn identifies in the modernists. Graphic designers too intervene on their subjects: they construct a message towards a communicative goal and simultaneously obscure the graphic designer's mediation of the message. Van Toorn's solution to this problem is to make visible the mediation that graphic designer enacts. Spivak conceptualization of the subaltern, however, problematizes Van Toorn's self-reflexive practice (at least wherever the graphic designer mediates the speech of the subaltern).

Spivak's true question is (not can the subaltern speak but) can the subaltern be heard? This formulation brings into relief the faults in Jan van Toorn's positioning of graphic designers as *visible mediators*. The crit-

11. Van Toorn, Jan. "Design and Reflexivity." 1994.

ical concern is not whether the speech of the subaltern *can* be mediated but what happens to that speech when it *is* mediated. The mediation of the subaltern necessarily assimilates subaltern speech into the language (the symbolic order) of the majoritarian. Making the graphic designer's hand obvious may induce in the audience a more critical consideration of the material being presented; it may in fact induce the audience to meaningfully interrogate the interpreter of the subaltern or the audience's own biases towards the subaltern. However, such mediation does not and *necessarily cannot* make the subaltern's speech more intelligible to the audience. That is, mediation from the designer does not prevent the assimilation, translation, or interpellation of the subaltern. A self-reflexive practice does not prevent the (re)construction of the subaltern nor the appropriation of the subaltern by the dominant order nor create space for the subaltern.

The graphic designer must confront their own functional incapacity to represent the subaltern. I have shown that the subaltern can be neither interpreted nor mediated, neither spoken for nor (re)presented. Can the subaltern be located at all in a graphic design practice? Recognizing that that any positive expression is reductive, the question must be reformed. We should not ask whether the graphic designer can visualize the invisible, but rather how can the graphic designer leave blanks into which the subaltern can voice itself? Can the graphic designer trace the contours of the inarticulable, creating a bubble to contain speech? Can the graphic designer mark the absence of the illegible, reserving seats in the theatre? Can the graphic designer denote space for the invisible, allowing unfilled gaps and fissures?

*   *   *

In the remaining pages, I explore two visual methods for signifying absence. The first method is the 'vacat page.' Most commonly encountered as an empty side or leaf in a legal document, the vacat page is left vacant, except sometimes for the printed text "This Page Intentionally Left Blank" (or similar). Commonly used to humorous end because of it's paradoxical nature ("this page intentionally left blank—except for that"), what I am interested in is the blank page as a generous instrument. It represents an openness to insertion, a space held for someone yet to arrive, a welcoming hollow. The second method is a kind of anti-collage. I trimmed dozens of women (who may or may not be subaltern) from the pages of fashion magazines. Then I overlapped and combine the resulting voids to produce collage compositions. In these 'un-Toorns,' what is significant is not the construction but the absence of the subject. These compositions suggest the impossibility of representation. Morever, these 'un-Toorn' collages attend to the model as empty vessels for corporate signifiers. One realizes they did not even see the women before they were removed; rather their absence has made them apparent.

This conclusion should be troubled. Formal visual strategies for inclusion are not enough. We should do real work to bring people into institutions, into the participatory formation of design briefs and solutions. My conclusions here are clearly structured by the RISD grad curriculum. That is, I had to come up with some solution that worked within a program that emphasizes the individual operating in isolation. That said, I am still proud of this essay. I don't disavow it.

THE POLITICS OF NON-REPRESENTATION

or, how to accurately not depict someone

GAYATRI SPIVAK is an Indian scholar and a significant postcolonial thinker. In her essay Can the Subaltern Speak?, Spivak considers the forces the construct and maintain the identities of colonial subjects—in particular, the category called the subaltern. Originally coined by Antonio Gramsci to describe oppressed economic classes that are excluded from social-institutions by more powerful classes, the term subaltern was taken up by postcolonial thinkers to investigate the exclusion of lower and marginalized social groups in imperial colonial settings. Spivak provides the example of how dominant Indian classes, like Brahmans, were consulted by British colonizers when codifying colonial British law. In this example, dominant Indian cultural groups had political participation—that is, a voice in the construction of law—even while those dominant groups were being oppressed by colonizer. The lower Indian groups had no participation and so were excluded event from cultural imperialism. The subaltern, then, is a category that is excluded from politics, history, knowledge and power. Moreover, the subaltern is "irretrievably" heterogeneous, changing in composition from area-to-area, from person-to-person. With regards to this many-times marginalized and irretrievably fractured class, that Spivak asks, "Can the subaltern speak?" Which is to ask, can desperate persons with internalized oppression have a political voice? In the 1988 version of the text, Spivak concludes, "The subaltern cannot speak."

However, in a 1999 revision to the essay, Spivak writes rather that the subaltern "has spoken in some way." Critically, 'subaltern' is not the equivalent 'oppressed' (and not any oppressed group can claim subalternity). Rather, the subaltern describes a population existing so far at the margins of power as to be entirely unintelligible to power. The unintelligibility of the subaltern is central to Spivak's essay, because the real question is can subaltern can be heard? There are two issues here: The first is that to be heard the minoritarian subject must articulate itself in the language of the majoritarian. That is, to be intelligible, the subaltern must speak intelligibly. However, whatever is constitutive of the subaltern's otherness is lost in that translation—to be intelligible is to eliminate the very thing that makes it nonintelligible. For example, insofar as it can be contained within the marriage, queer erotics are legitimized; but queer love or desire have not become legible to the dominant group, instead transformed and lost. This flattening is apparent in the question asked to a homosexual couple, "Who is the man and who is the woman in the relationship?"

The second issue is that the western intellectual—or, as will be discussed, graphic designers—reproduces its oppression and marginalization when attempting to represent the subaltern . For example, the western intellectual frames and restricts subaltern speech. Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan writes that "the conventions of popular documentaries that purport to 'give voice' to subaltern subjects end up restricting those subjects, delimiting their self-expression to very particular modes of preauthorized speech, and ultimately 'regulating what does and does not count as human.'" For example, a film about prostitutes might only include clips that 'humanize' the documentary subjects; clips that do not represent accurately but do activate western political action and sympathies toward the subaltern. When attempting to portray the subaltern—to give voice to thea subaltern—the intellectual obscures their own interpretive action: their own mediation of subaltern. (One way this may occur is as above: the western intellectual assimilates the subaltern so that it is intelligible.) When the interpretive action is obscured, the subaltern subject becomes a kind of puppet, an instrument reciting the intellectual's speech. Spivak describes the intellectual who does this as a "first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves."

In the early 20th century, graphic designers began to develop theories of neutrality. Early discussion focused on producing immediate communication that lacked ambiguity. In 1928, Jan Tschichold wrote that "The need for clarity in communication raises the question of how to achieve clear and unambiguous form" and to achieve clarity "the most important requirement is to be objective." For Tschichold objectivity was closer to plainness, a lack of ornamentation, than impartiality. However, the idea that the graphic designer ought to disinterestedly transmit a message evolved over the decades. Ernst Keller, "Father of Swiss Style," famously told commanded his students throughout the 1930s to have "no style"—to not overrule or contribute anything to the content. In 1972, in a public debate, Wim Crouwel argued that "When I claim to be afraid to put myself in between [the sender and the received of a message], that is because I feel it's never productive for me to add a vision of my own on top of it. I believe you can separate the two." Significantly, Crouwel did not simply argue that objectivity produced clarity and easy communication, but he went further by stating that non-objective design is "nonsense," "pretentious," "overblown," and "amateurism." In the 1990s, Josef Müller-Brockmann made a more dramatic claim, arguing that "objective-informative advertising... reflect[s] an honest attempt to present unmanipulated information to the general public. Subjective interpretation leads to a falsification of the message." Here, Müller-Brockmann brings the objectivity in graphic design into an ethical realm, suggesting that non-objectivity, or not, harms the public. Throughout the 20th century, the most salient message in graphic design—the modernist message—has been in favor of neutrality and non-intervention. Graphic design, in this formulation, is apolitical, universal,invisible. This is to say, these man advocated and valorized the graphic designer as absent nonrepresenters.
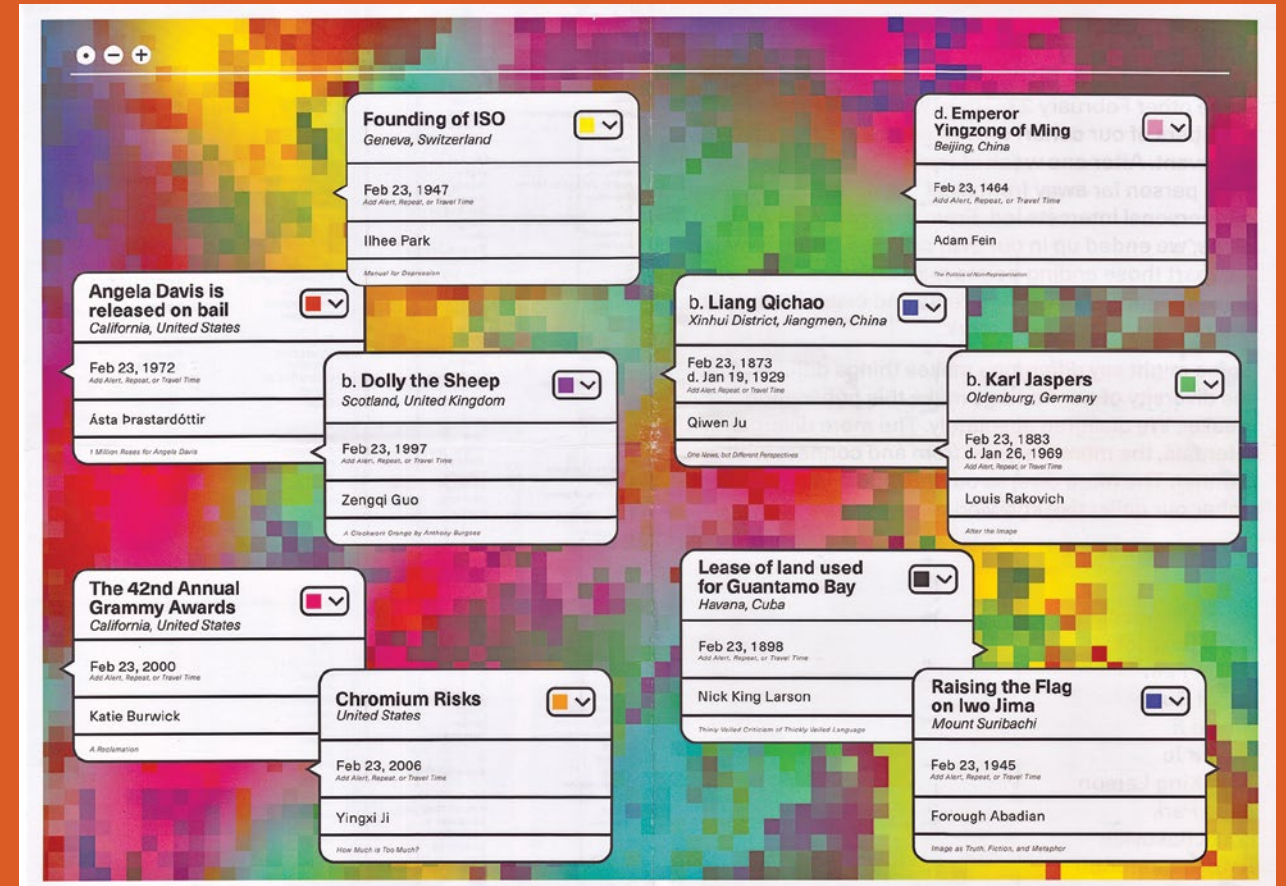
The person most visibly against this view was Jan van Toorn. Perhaps the first to introduce "critical practice" to the field of graphic design, van Toorn rejected even the possibility of neutrality, pointing to "the designer's inescapable input and subjectivity." Graphic design, for van Toorn, did not operate in solitude—it was attended by history, tradition, value, perspective. Plainly, every piece of graphic design has intentions: a visual or emotional tone or even cost concerns. Van Toorn indicated that these were values—aesthetic, social, ethical principles mores—embedded with the project of graphic design. Even clarity is a viewpoint. To enact clarity in graphic design, one engages in subjective mediation of the message, and this mediation has social and ethical dimensions. Objectivity in graphic design "basically confirm existing patterns. This is not serving communication—it is conditioning human behavior." Objective graphic design reproduces the existing power structures and confirms the legitimacy of extant communicative modes (the symbolic order); for example, that scientific discourse must be rational. Van Toorn pointedly deems this "a patriarchal fixation on reproductive ordering." The critical graphic designer, van Toorn argues, must engage analytically with the extant structures rather than acceded to disciplinary effects of or values embedded in communication.

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The solution to the subjectivity of graphic designer that van Toorn proposes is to foreground—to make obvious—the hand of the graphic designer. He writes, "The acts [the graphic designer] perform take place through [the graphic designer], and [they] are a subjective link. [...] It is about [the graphic designer's] attitude regarding social relations. This is what should be center stage." Van Toorn termed this—the methodology by which graphic designers make the graphic message present in the work—"self-reflexive practice." The foregrounding of the graphic designer often appeared as collage and handwriting in Jan van Toorn's personal work. Both activities suggest the physical creation of the message, making the designer's embodiment integral to the communication. Photo-collage had the additional function of exposing (even dramatizing) the construction of the message: the literal combination of materials standing for the creation of an idea through the combination of symbols. Through these methods, the audience would understand that the message itself was constructed; that is was, in fact, an argument to scrutinize. Van Toorn writes that this practice "exposes the variety of interests and disciplinary edifices in the message" and so "raises questions among the public that stimulate a more active way of dealing with reality." That is, a self-reflexive practice should prompt the audience to investigate the message they receive, to approach communication with skepticism and savvy.

Self-reflexivity is clearly in opposition to the objective design promoted by Keller, Crouwel, and other modernists. In making the designer visible, van Toorn situates the designer as a present, mediating force in communication—the antithesis of the absent nonrepresenter. Above, I noted that Gayatri Spivak is critical of the western intellectual for assimilating the subaltern to make it intelligible. Returning to our example, documentarians frame their subjects towards a political or narrative goal, altering the subaltern's speech, while simultaneously obscuring the interpretive act. This is the failure that Jan van Toorn identifies in the modernists. Graphic designers too intervene on their subjects: they construct a message towards a communicative goal and simultaneously obscure the designer's mediation of the message. Van Toorn's solution is to disclose that mediation. However, Spivak's formation of the subaltern, problematizes Van Toorn's self-reflexive practice (at least wherever the designer mediates the speech of the subaltern).

Spivak's true question is (not can the subaltern speak but) can the subaltern be heard? This formulation brings into relief the faults in Jan Van Toorn's positioning of graphic designers as visible mediators. The critical concern is not whether the speech of the subaltern can be mediated but what happens to that speech when it is mediated. The mediation of the subaltern necessarily assimilates subaltern speech into the language (symbolic order) of the majoritarian. Making the graphic designer's hand obvious may induce in the audience a more critical consideration of the material being presented; it may I fact induce the audience to meaningfully interrogate the interpreter of the subaltern or the audience's own biases towards the subaltern. However, such mediation does not and necessarily cannot make the subaltern's speech more penetrable to the audience. It does not restrain assimilation, translation, or interpellation of the subaltern. A self-reflexive practice does not prevent the (re)construction of the subaltern, nor the appropriation of the subaltern by the dominant order, nor create space for the subaltern.

At this point, the graphic designer must confront their own functional incapacity to represent the subaltern. I have shown that the subaltern can be neither interpreted nor mediated, neither spoken for or (re)presented. Can the subaltern be located at all in a graphic design practice? Recognizing that that any positive expression is reductive, the question must be reformed. We should not ask whether the graphic designer can visualize the invisible, but rather how can the graphic designer leave blanks into which the subaltern can voice itself? Can the graphic designer trace the contours of the inarticulable, creating a bubble to contain speech? Can the graphic designer mark the absence of the illegible, reserving seats in the theatre? Can the graphic designer denote space for the invisible, allowing unfilled gaps and fissures?

In the other three pages of this project, I explore two visual methods

for signifying absence. The first method is the vacat page. Most commonly encountered as an empty side or leaf in a legal document, the vacat page is an empty page except for the printed phrase "This Page Intentionally Left Blank" (or similar). Commonly used to humorous end because of it's paradoxical nature ("this page intentionally left blank—except for that"), what I am interested in is the blank page as a generous instrument. It represents an openness to insertion, a space held for someone yet to arrive, a welcoming hollow. The second method is a kind of anti-collage. I trimmed dozens of women (who may or may not be subaltern) from the pages of fashion magazines. Then I overlapped and combine the resulting voids to produce collage compositions. In these 'un-Toorns,' what is significant is not the construction but the absence of the subject. These compositions suggest the impossibility of representation. Moreover, these 'un-Toorn' collages attend to the model as empty vessels for corporate signifiers. One realizes they did not even see the women before they were removed; rather their absence has made them apparent.

Can the graphic designer trace the contours of the inarticulable, like creating a bubble to contain speech?

Can the graphic designer mark the absence of the illegible, like reserving seats in a theatre?

Can the graphic designer conserve unto the future, the blank page becomes a printed wall?

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Can the graphic designer denote space for the invisible, allowing unfilled gaps and fissures?

Can the graphic designer state who is not present, a tribute to the unforgotten?

Can the graphic designer attend to the inaudible, noting the breath, not the sound, of a whisper?

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trace the contours of the
inarticulable, like creating
a bubble to contain speech?*

A BRIEF INTERLUDE In my figuration, queerness is subaltern. While it is is not necessary for the goals
this essay or work that the position is accepted, it is worth consideration. One might argue that quee
have articulated a coherent political position, that they have found unity, and therefore are not su
altern. For example, in the 1980s and 90s, homosexuals engaged in bio-politico-social action arou
AIDS. In the 2000s, homosexuals sought political representation through the codification of same-s
marriage. I believe, however, that these arguments on
further clarify that queerness is subaltern. In the past
years, legal "victories" for queers in the United States ha
only narrowed our understanding of queerness. One's
litical fulfillment is another's nullified positionality. Chr
Homosexuality, "The insti
an identity into organizatio
ocial normalization of hom
often marked by disavowa
festations of minority sexu
codification of same-sex m
sentialism and therefore f
ities. As Sandy Stone not
culate a counter-discourse
ear." Consider how homos
sons from their organizatio
ars the cry of the subaltern
gay pride in New York City.
amidst boos from the audience of gay men and wom
Rivera screams, "I have been beaten... I have been thro

*Can the graphic designer
state who is not present, a
tribute to the unforgotten?*

*Can the graphic designer
mark the absence of the
illegible, like reserving
seats in a theatre?*

sue is that the western
aphic designers—reprod
when attempting to re
western intellectual fram
Tharoor Srinivasan wri

The solution
proposes is
graphic desig
form take pl
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Toorn termed
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as collage and
activities sug
the designer'
collage had t
the construct
als standing f
symbols. Thr
that the mes
gument to sc
the variety of

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*Can the graphic designer
attend to the inaudible,
noting the breath, not the
sound, of a whisper?*

prevent the (re)construction of the subaltern, nor
propriation of the subaltern by the dominant or
create space for the subaltern.

At this point, the graphic designer
functional incapacity to represent the
that the subaltern can be neither inter
ther spoken for or (re)presented. Can th
all in a graphic design practice? Recog
tive expression is reductive, the questi
should not ask whether the graphic d
invisible, but rather how can the grap
into which the subaltern can voice its
signer trace the contours of the inarticulable, creating a bubble
to contain speech? Can the graphic designer mark the absence
of the illegible, reserving seats in the theatre? Can the graphic
designer denote space for the invisible, allowing unfilled gaps
and fissures?

In the other three pages of this project, I explore two visual methods for signifying absence. The firs
documen
Blank" (
intention
strumen
hollow.
be subah
to produ
absence
'un-Toorn
not even

*Can the graphic designer
denote space for the invisible,
allowing unfilled gaps and
fissures?*

*Can the graphic designer
conserve unto the future:
the blank page becomes
a primed wall?*

This spectacle intentionally left unseen

This sky intentionally left unclouded
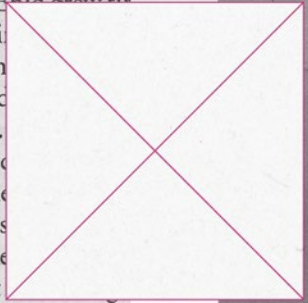
This speech intentionally left unsaid

This space intentionally left unsettled
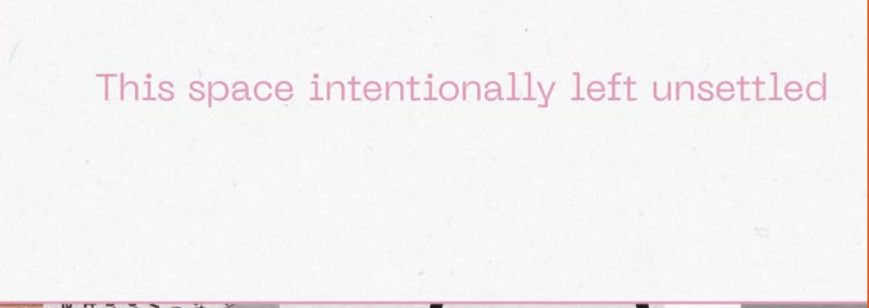
OCCUPIED SPACES

Monumentalizing "Blank" Space

ADAM FEIN

MARCH 2021

Andrew Culps writes that, "Monuments are power slowed enough to stand tall and to be easily seen." Monuments are power made material: Power as the ability to control others behavior, not through violent coercion, but through the production of culture and knowledge. Monuments tell us who and what was important and consequently what are our values. One way that monuments exercise power is by shaping history. Judith Halberstam writes, "Memorialization tidies up disorderly histories. it is a disciplinary mechanism, "a ritual of power:" selecting what is important, creating a continuous narrative out of contradiction." Monuments are history made solid. And monumentalizing, the act of making a monument, is the activity of concretizing history.

"Occupied Spaces" is a monument that is decentralized, destabilized, and denarativized. In collaboration with local organizations, six sites were selected throughout Providence. A circle sixteen-feet in diameter is demarcated, and a 360° camera is placed in that marked circle. Video is recorded for one week; after which time, the demarcated area is enclosed in a concrete dome and the 360° video is projected onto the dome. After one week, when the recording has played through once, the videos will rotate; the six sites swapping videos between them.

"Occupied Spaces" is a truly public monument, in which everyone performs—pedestrians, squirrels,even wind-blown trash. There is no single author and no particular message. The monument is, therefore, impartial to history: not a blind or disinterested but the monument does not pick winners and losers. Instead, the monument exposes the politics of place. Because it lacks narrative, the monument becomes about context, about how the structures surrounding a location shape what occurs in that location, what is possible in a place.

The lack of consent in this project has always fucked me up. Working with local organizations may be one way to make the monument more stomach-able — but honestly there should probably be some kind of sign saying hey you are going to be recorded. But if there is a sign then the project becomes about surveillance, you know? It influences people's behavior. It is important to note that all interventions are interruptions.

1. Culps, Andrew, "A Radical Cartography: Spatializing Power," Accessed May 1, 2022. anarchistwithoutcontent.wordpress.com/2017/08/19/a-radical-cartography-spatializing-power/

2. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 15.

site

ABOVE In order to construct the monument, a site is selected and an area is demarcated.

OPPOSITE A 360° degree camera is installed on the chosen site. The camera will record everything that occurs at that site for one week.
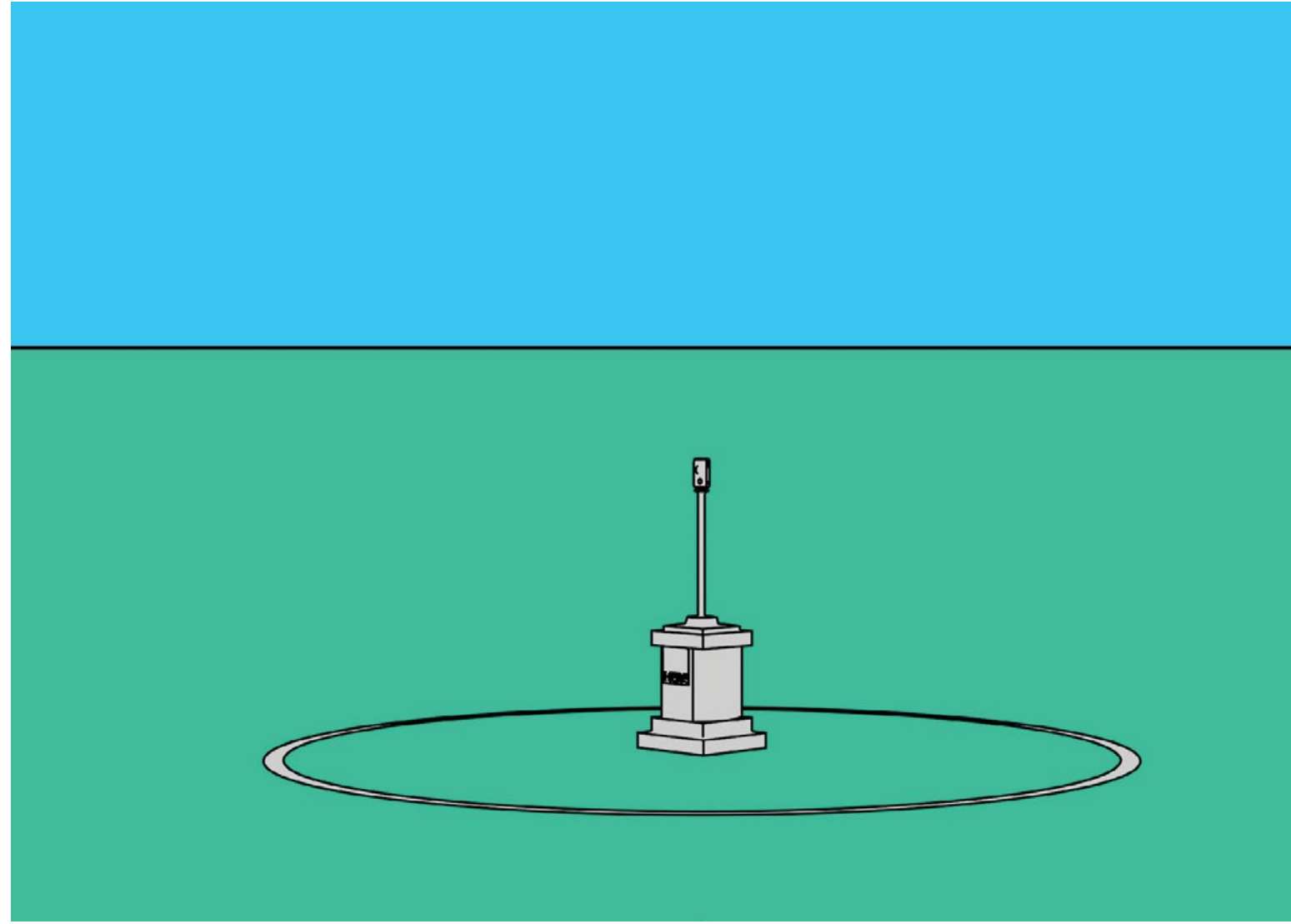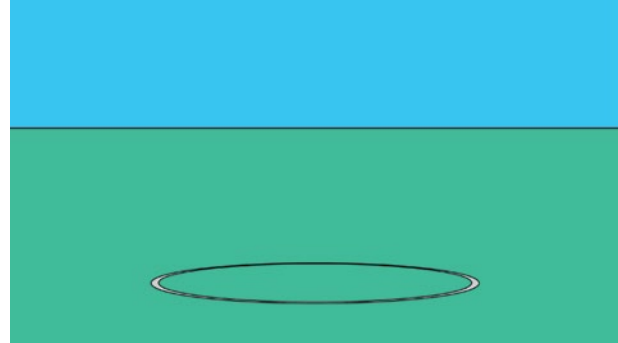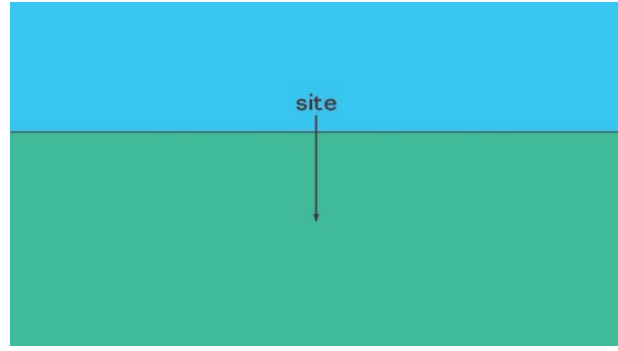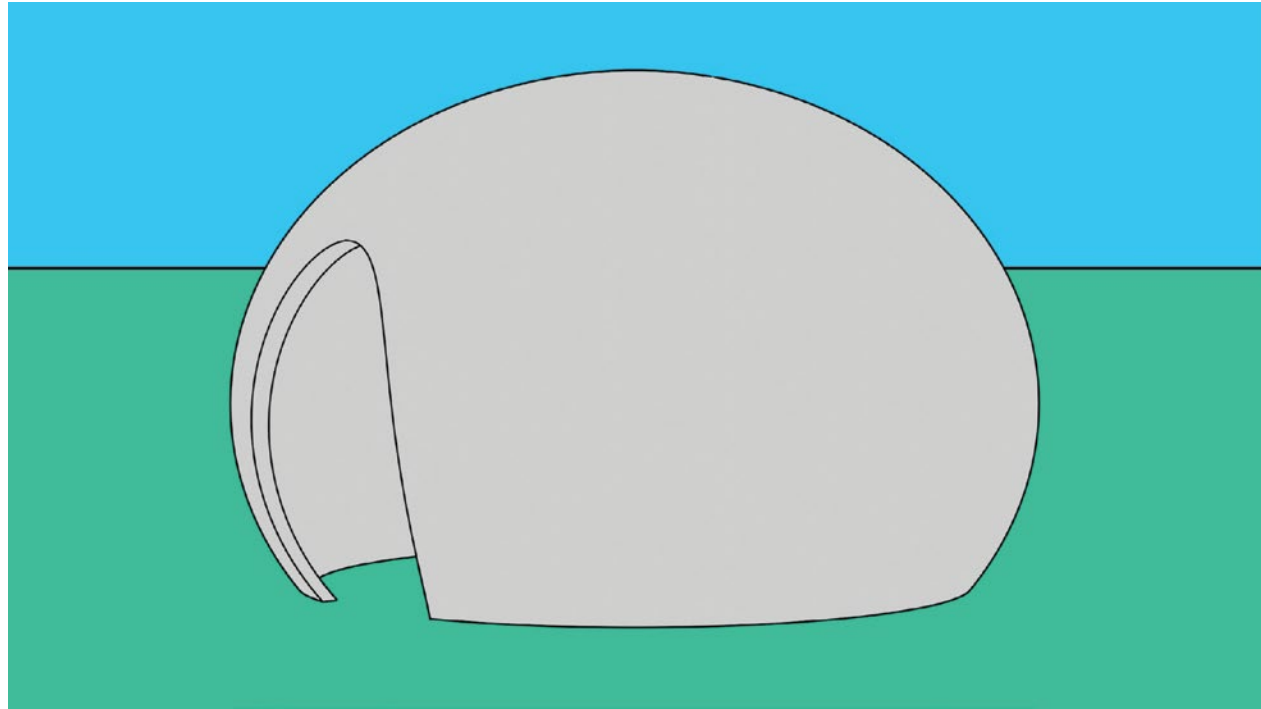
ABOVE After one week, the selected site is enclosed in a dome of concrete. Monuments destroy memory in order to create history. This monument perpetuates the space by occupying that very space. It does literally what all monuments do conceptually. It appropriates the thing in order to symbolize it.

OPPOSITE The 360° camera is replaced by a 360° dome projector. The week-long video is projected onto the dome in real time, the events of the previous week becoming monumentalized.

NEXT PAGE A render of the 360° camera.
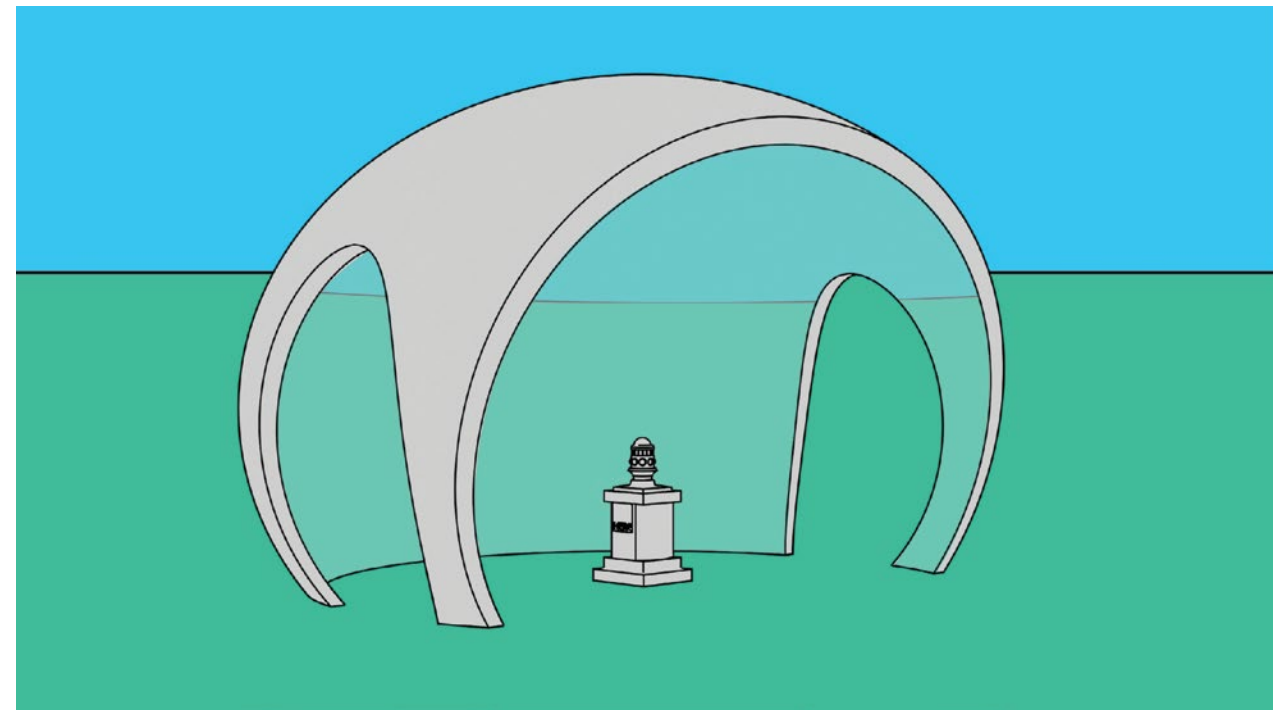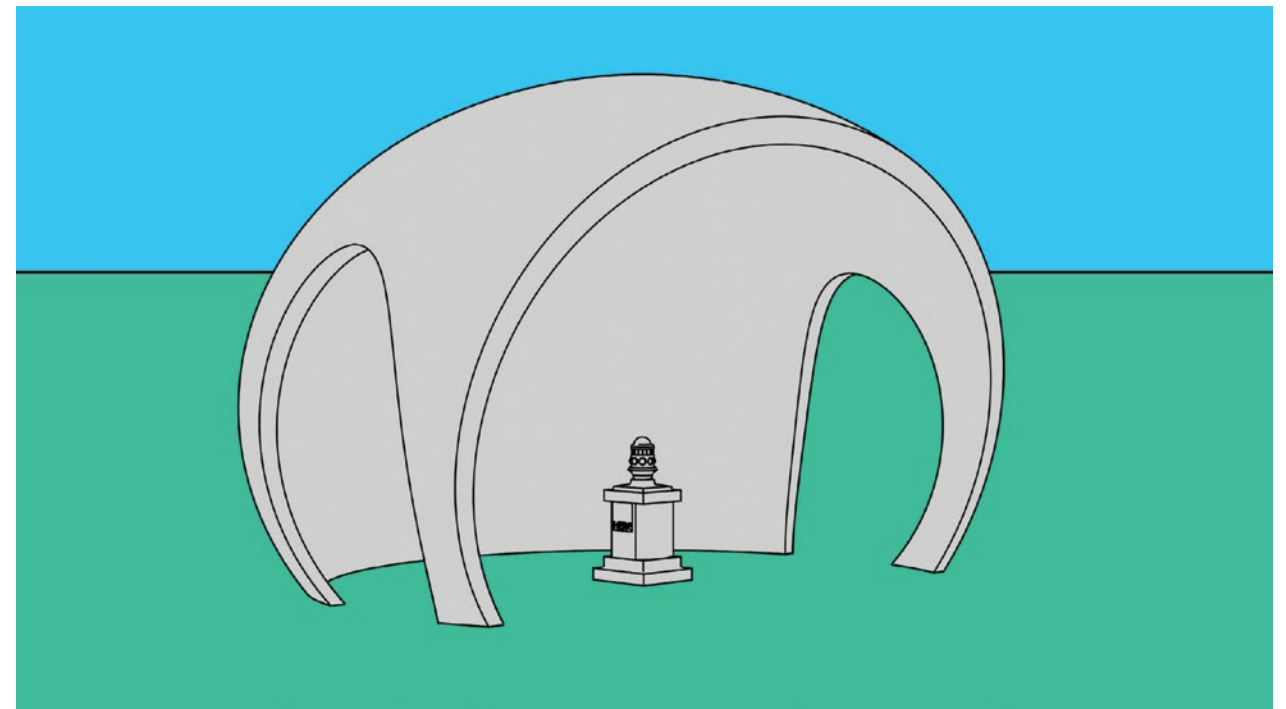
Renders of the 360° dome projector inside the concrete structure.

"Occupied Spaces" is a serial monument, intended to exist in at least five sites. These are renderings of the sites at (clockwise, beginning above) Burnside Park near Kennedy Plaza, Chalkstone Ave in Smith Hill, Hughes Court in Brown University, and Roger Williams Park in South West Providence.

NEXT PAGE site at Friendship Street in upper South West Providence.

When I first arrived in Providence, I scheduled apartment viewings in Smith Hill and Southwest PVD. When I talked to some locals, I was advised to skip those viewings, because the neighborhoods were dangerous. I was literally told to expect fights in the streets and needles on the sidewalks. I went to the viewings anyway, and the neighborhoods were fine — unremarkable. It seems to me that History — that is, the story about a place — had prevented these particular locals from accurately seeing a place.

(This is not to say that all neighborhoods are the same. For e.g. I did not move to SW PVD because it is a food desert — that neighborhood is structurally underserved.)

Examples of video projected inside the dome. The videos rotate between the sites every week, turning this project into a moveable monument. Relocation calls attention to the politics of place. Because the monument, is not about anything—it does not offer a narrative or a history—the monument becomes about context, about how the structures surrounding a location shape what occurs in that location, what is possible in a place.

NEXT PAGE The monument seeks to monumentalize "nothing." As such, vast portions of the video may be considered slow, unremarkable, and not worthy of memory.
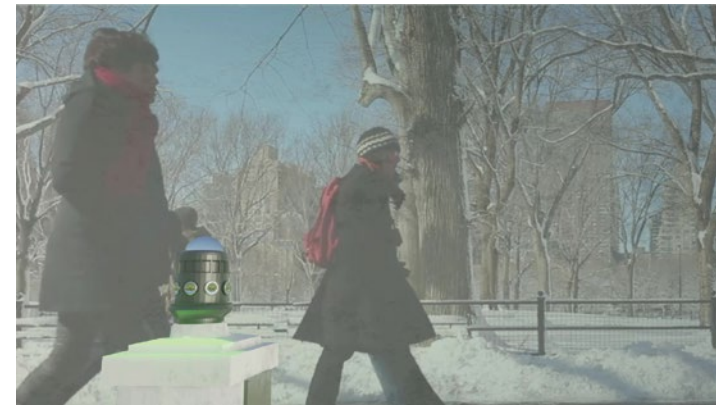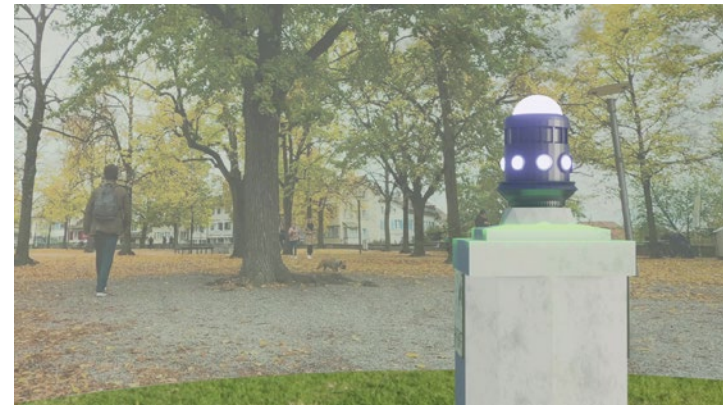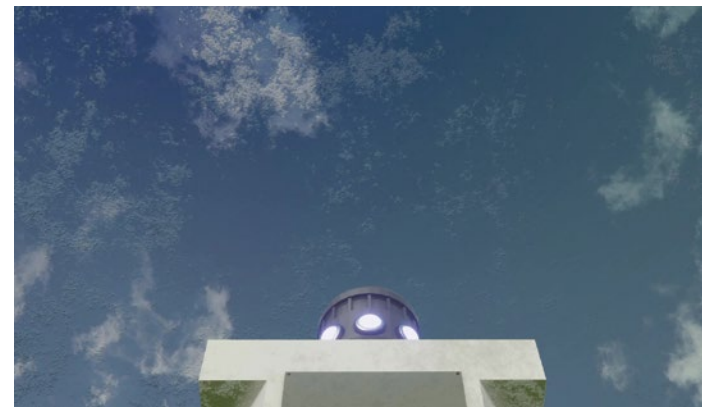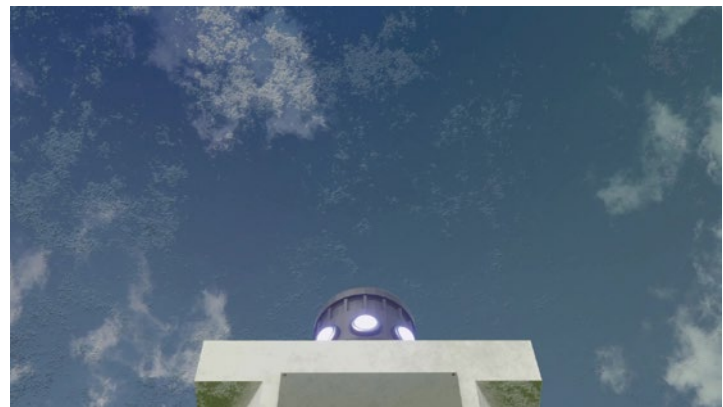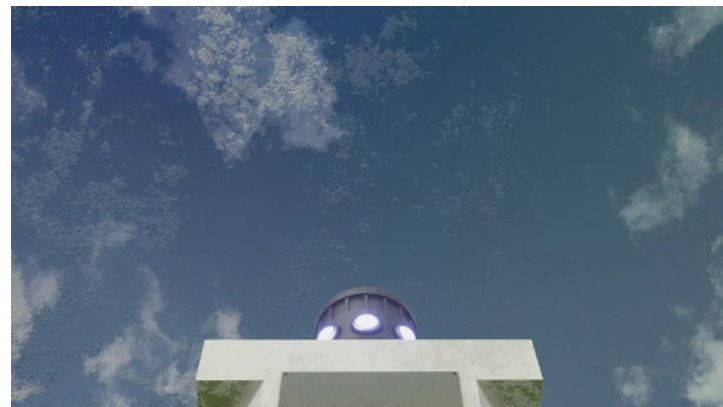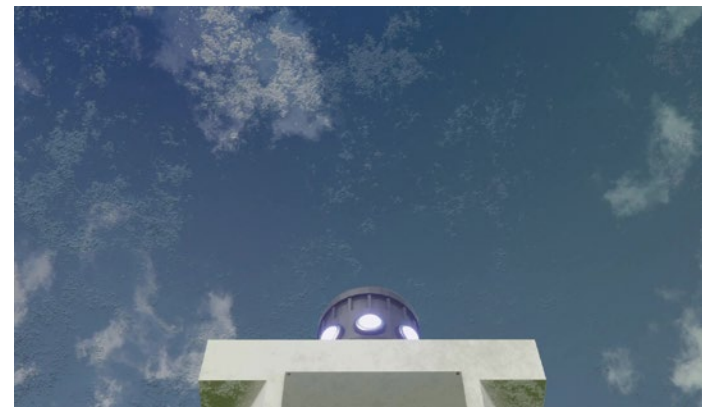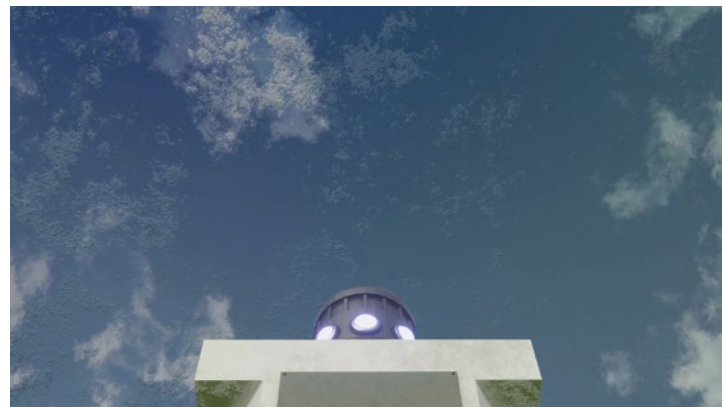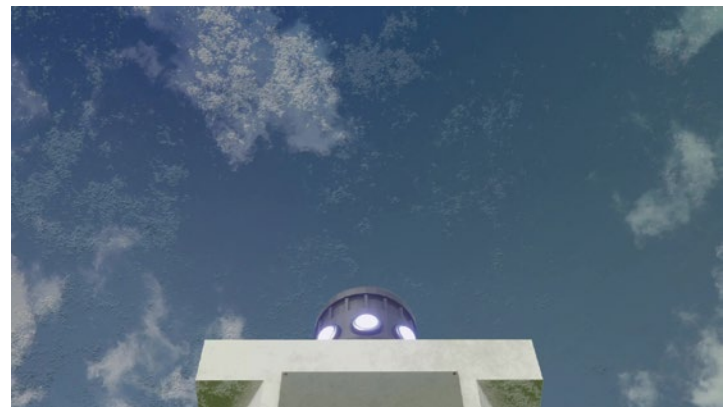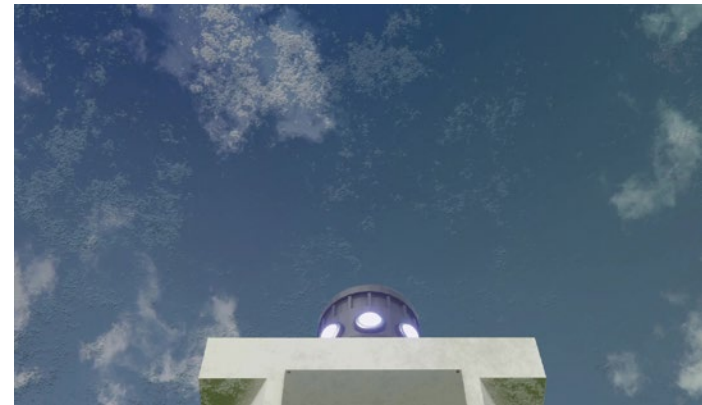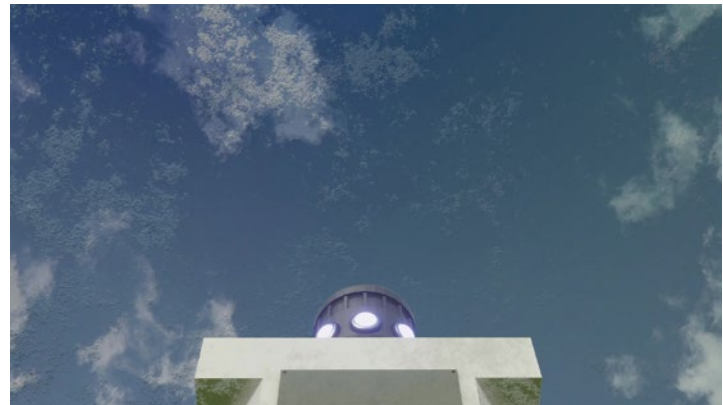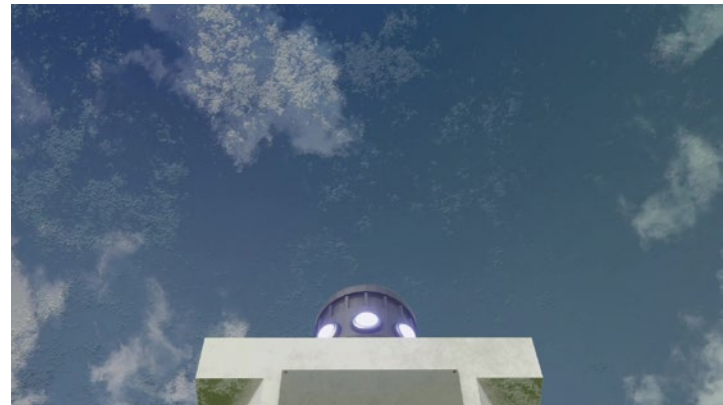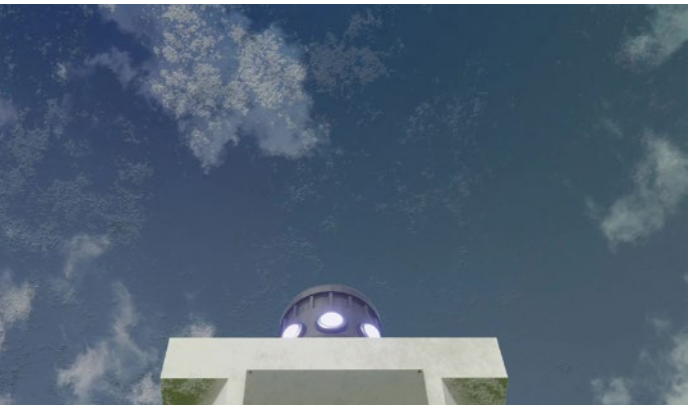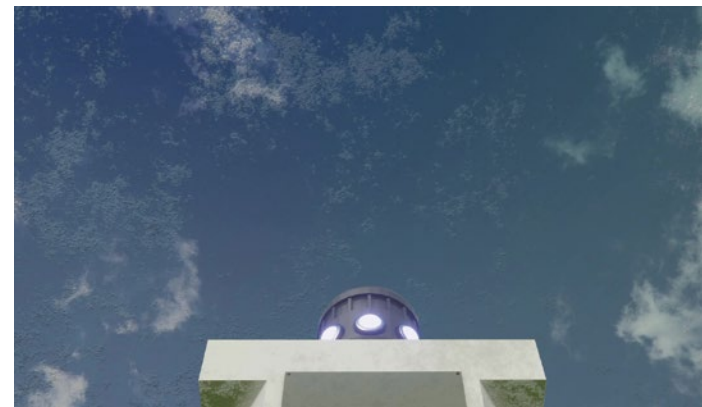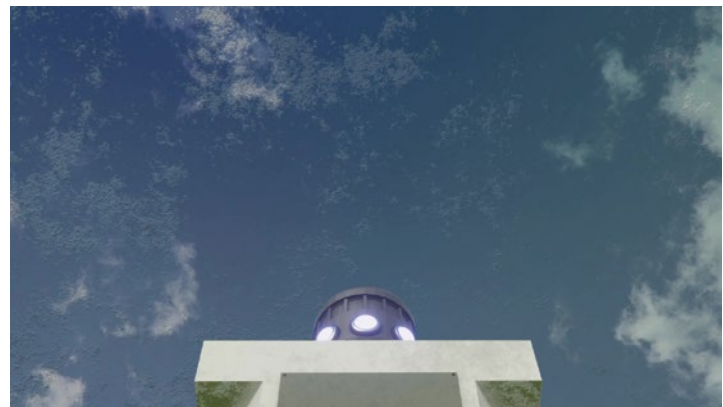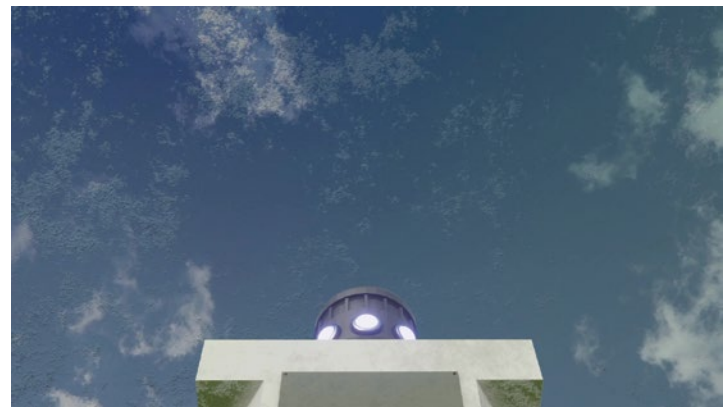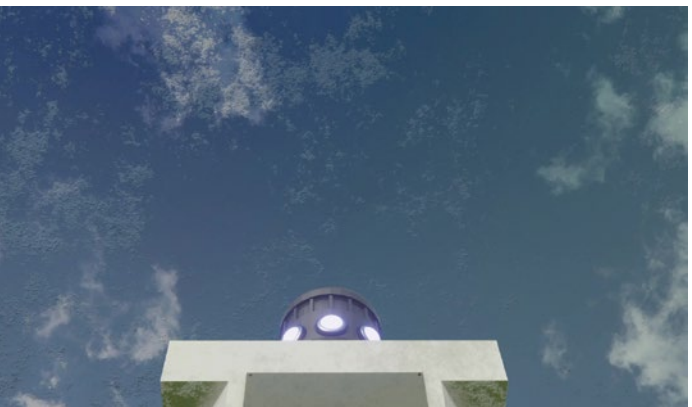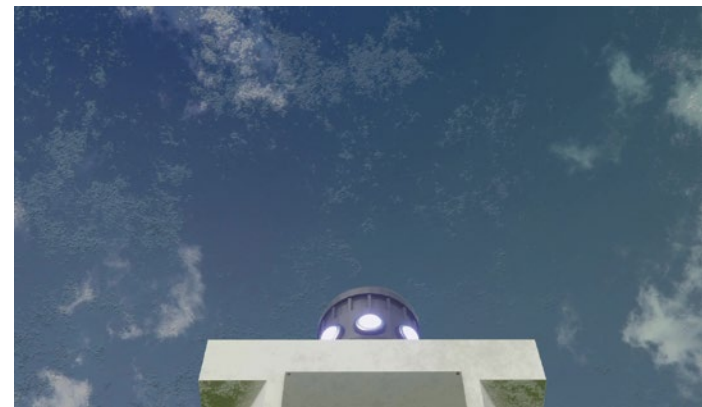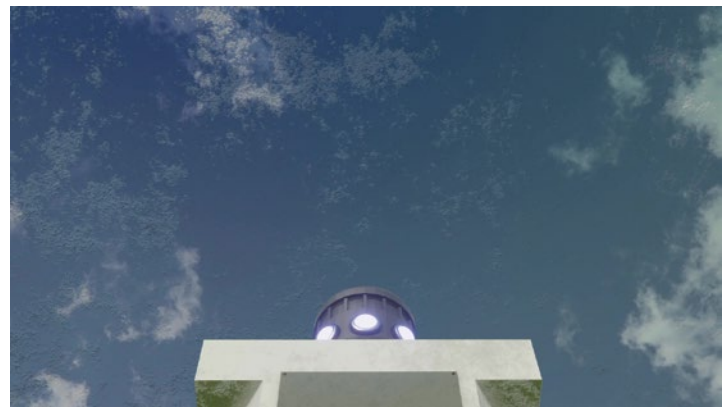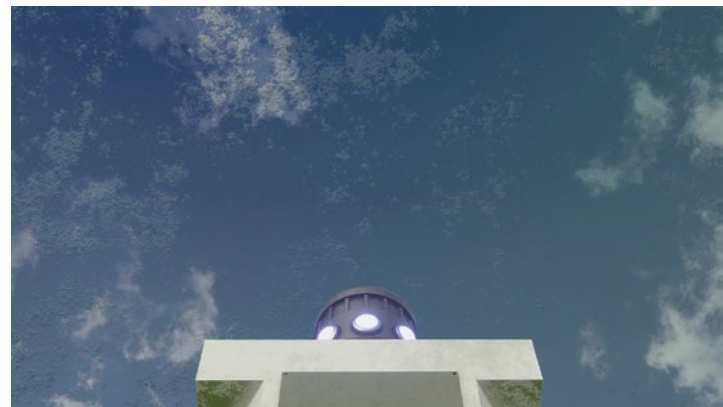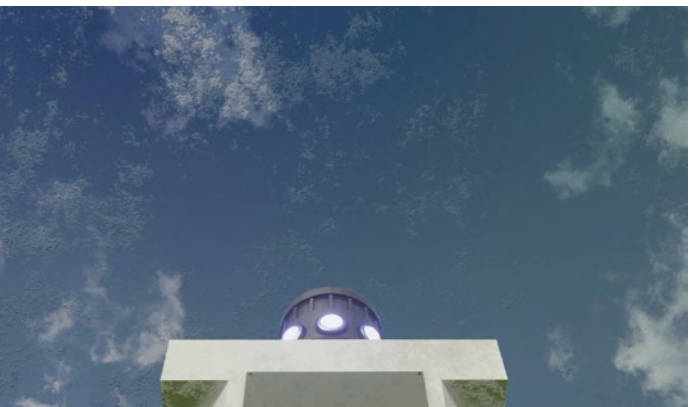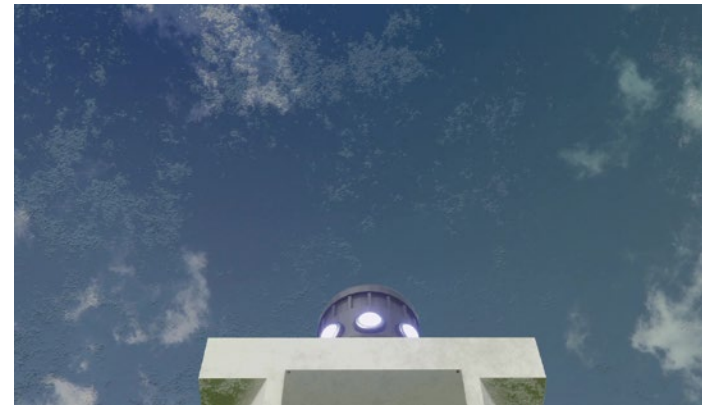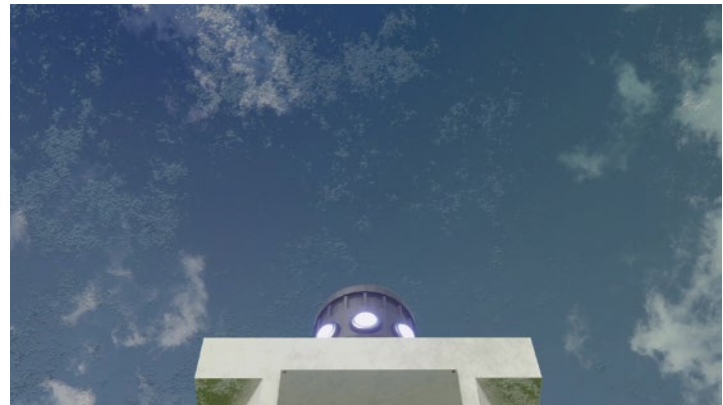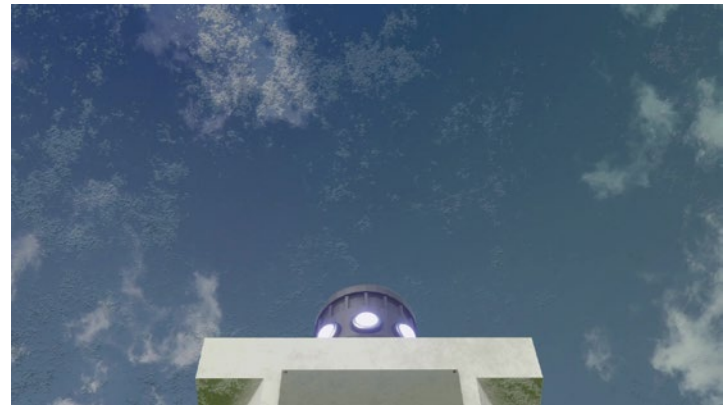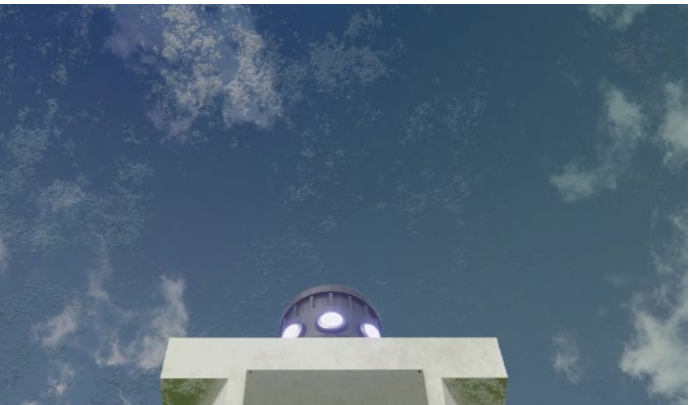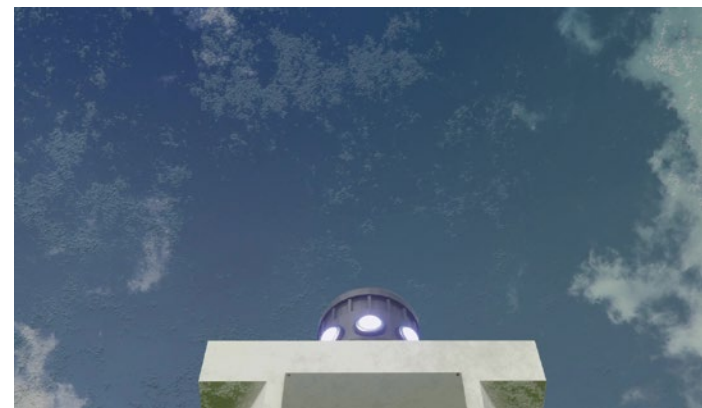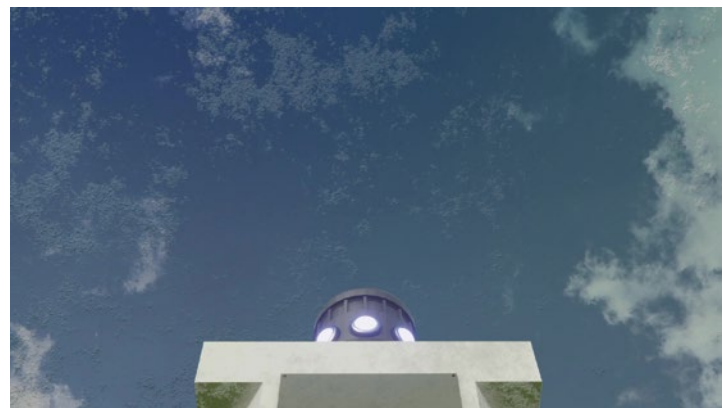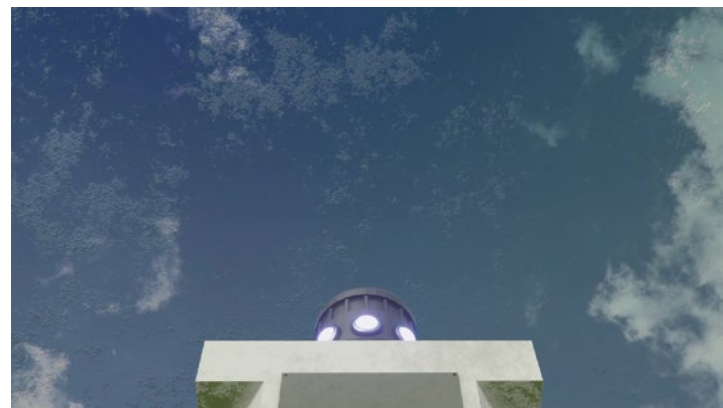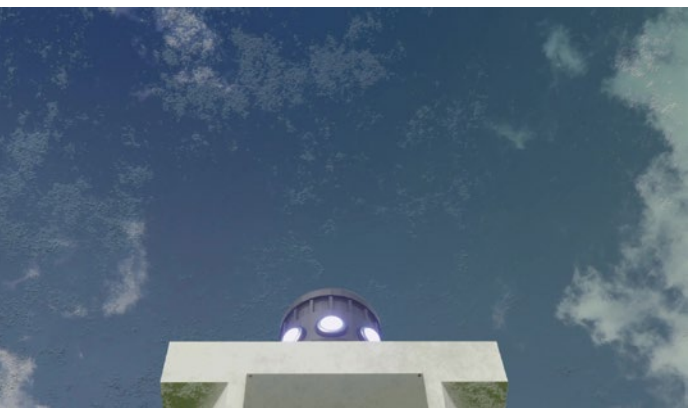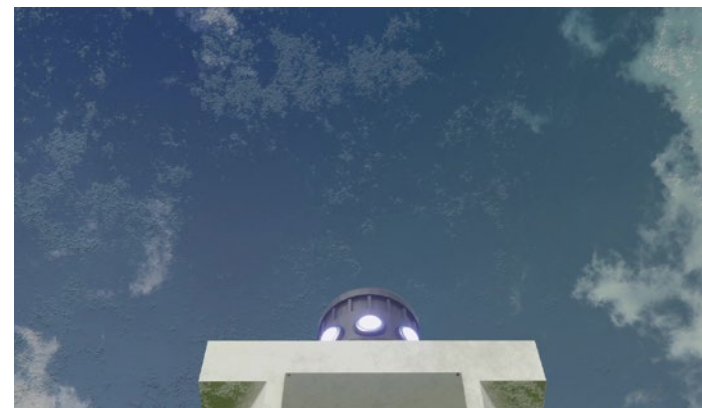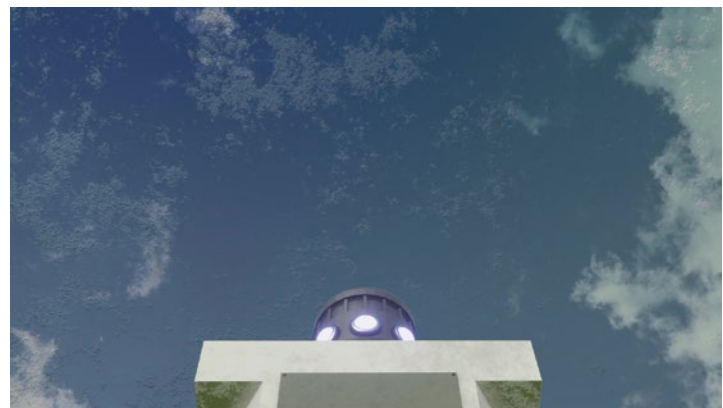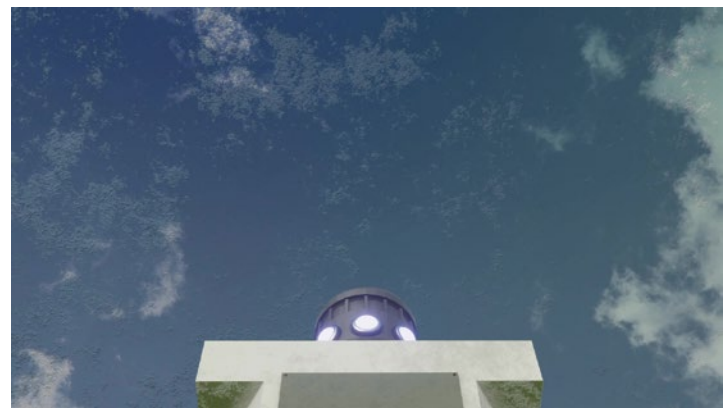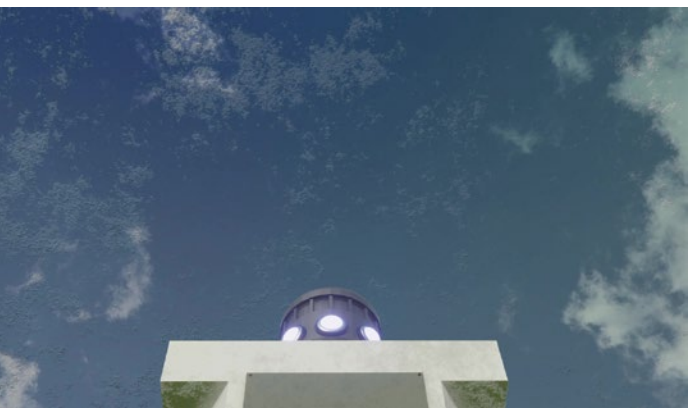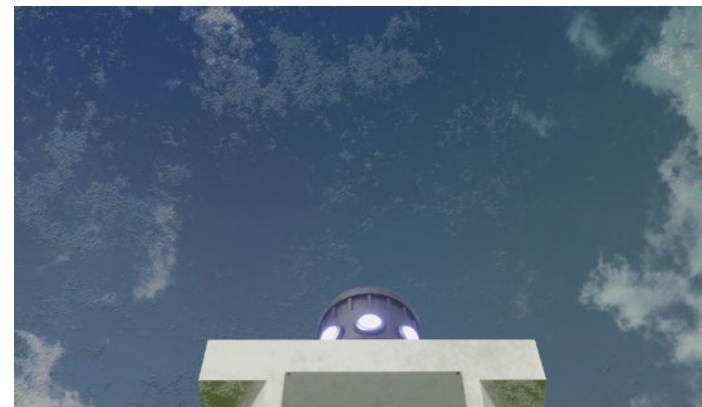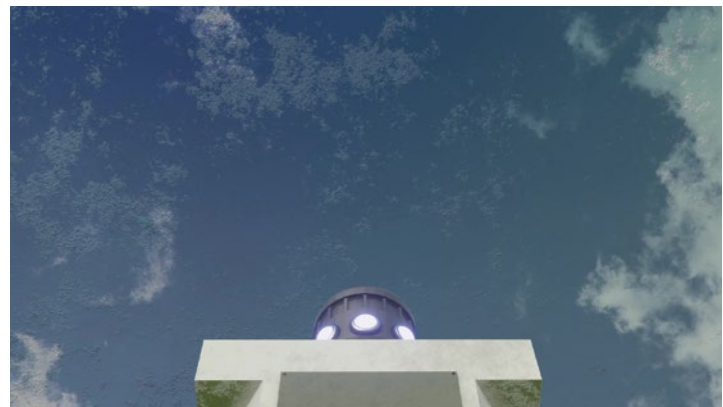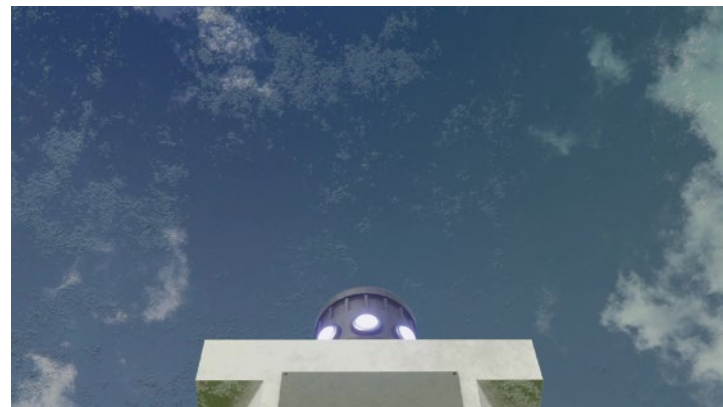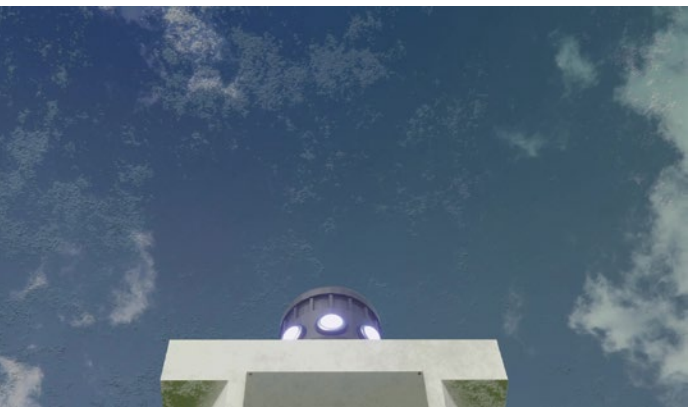
QUIET

"Blankness" as Content

ADIE FEIN

APRIL 2021

"Quiet" is a motion graphics project that explores blank video as a form of empty space, which in reality (like all other empty space) is rich with potential meaning. A totally black video, taken without any light, is manipulated into generating form: black static transitions slowly into prismatic color and effecescent motion. Simultaneously, the sound of white noise grows louder. At the climax, the word "quiet" haltingly comes into existence, and the audio crossfades into the gentle static of ocean noises. Eventually, the video collapses back in on itself, returning to static and blackness.

See the project in motion at ajfein.com/quiet
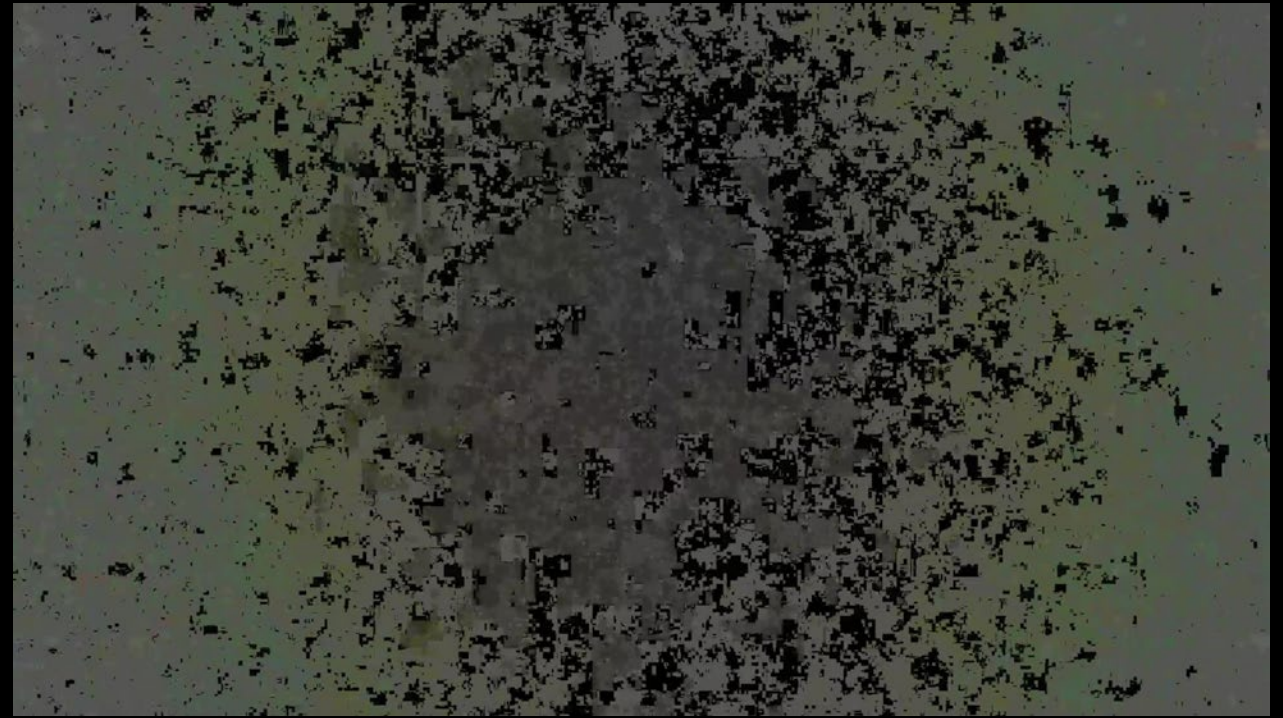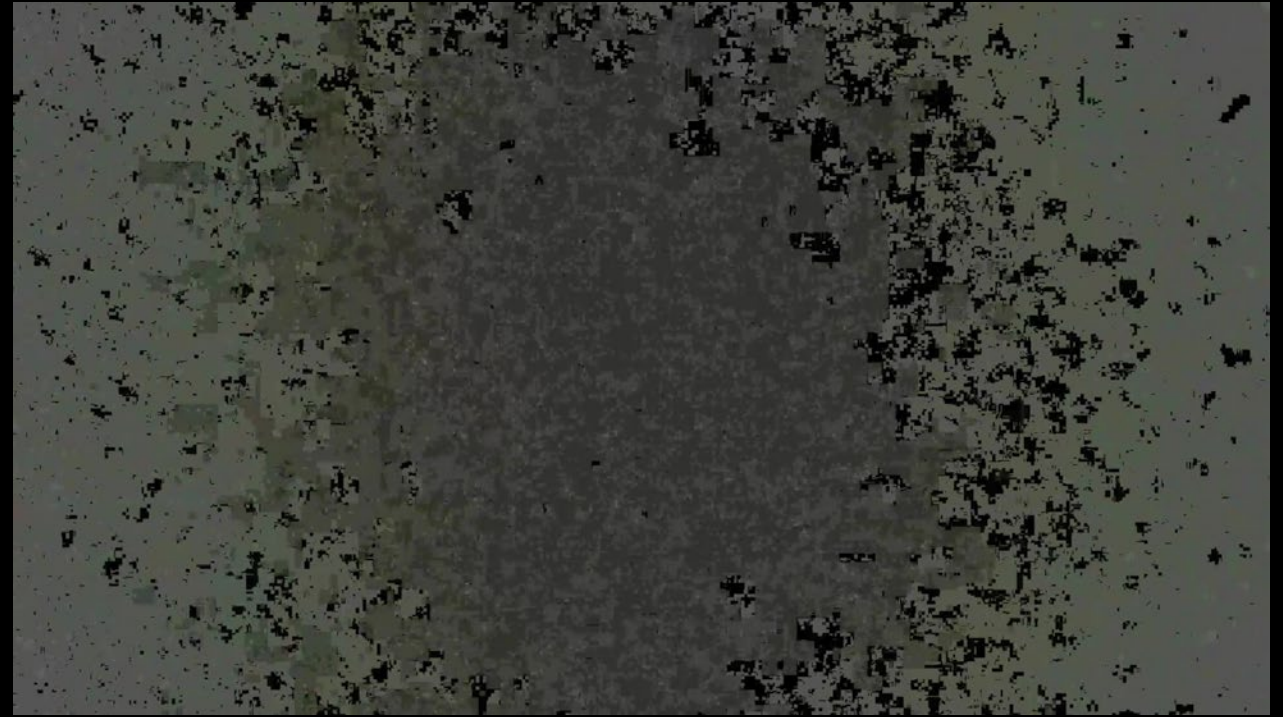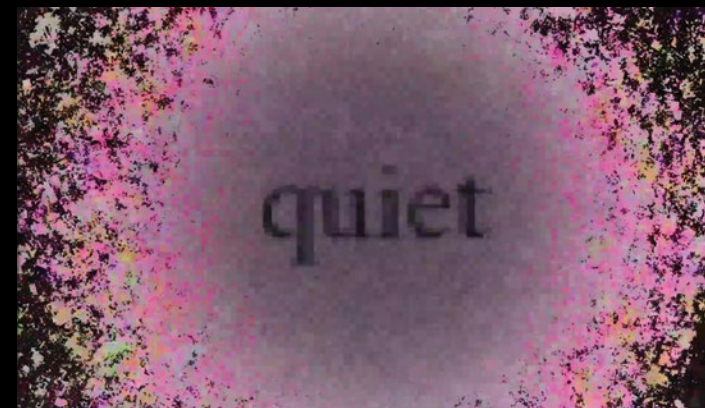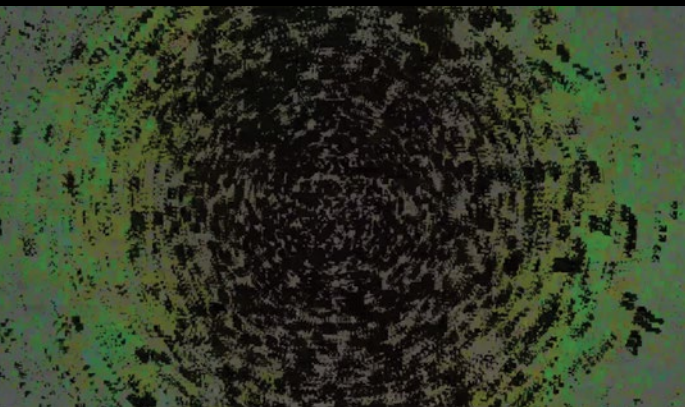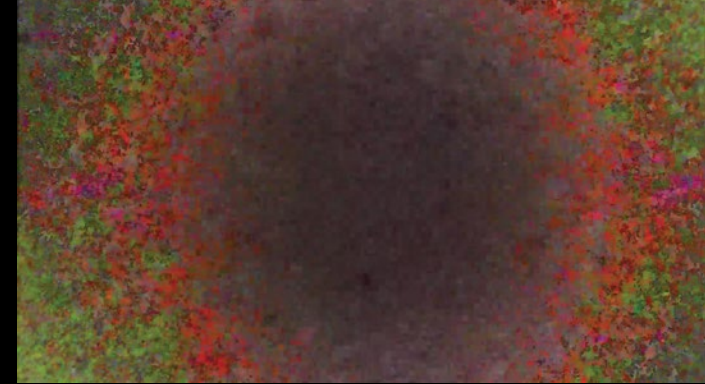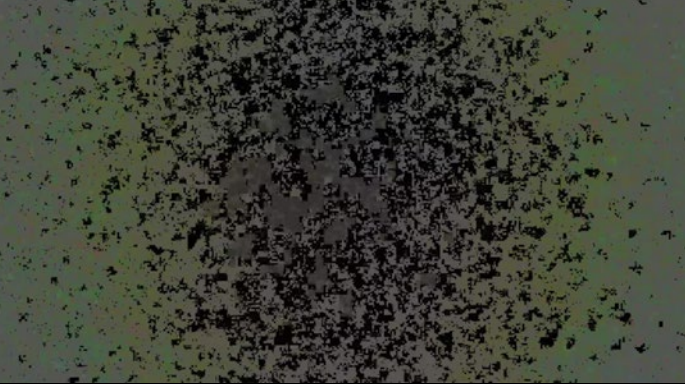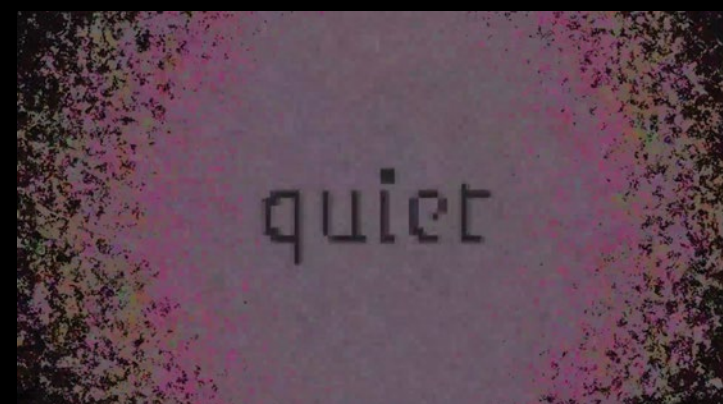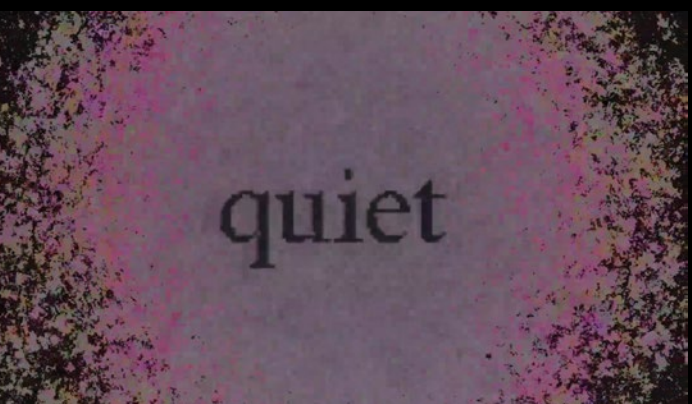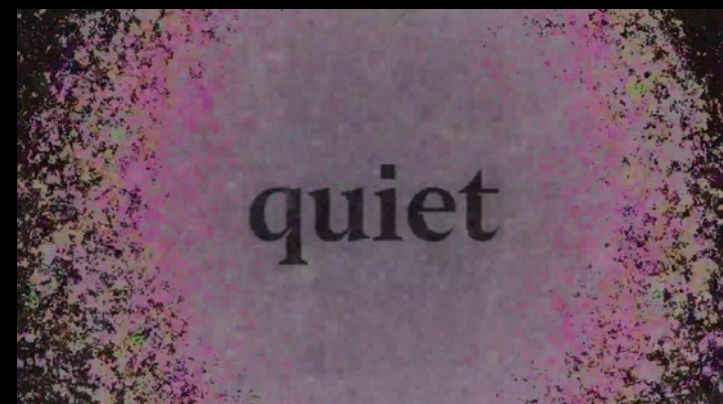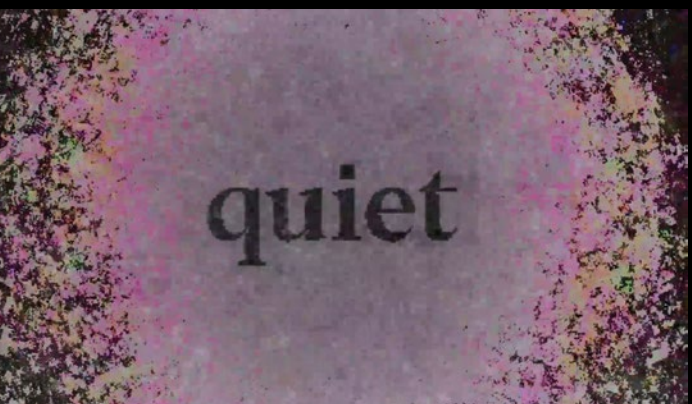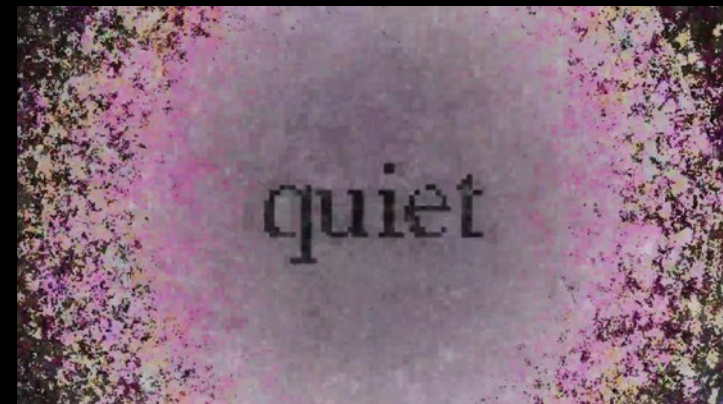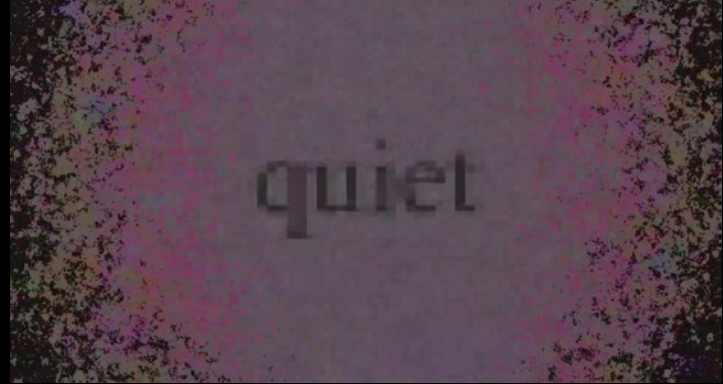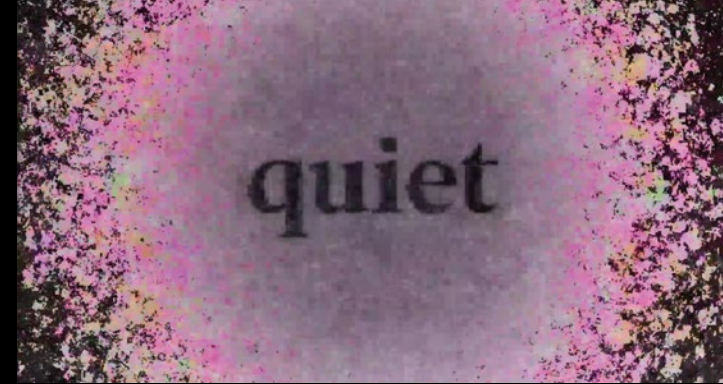
quiet

quiet

quiet
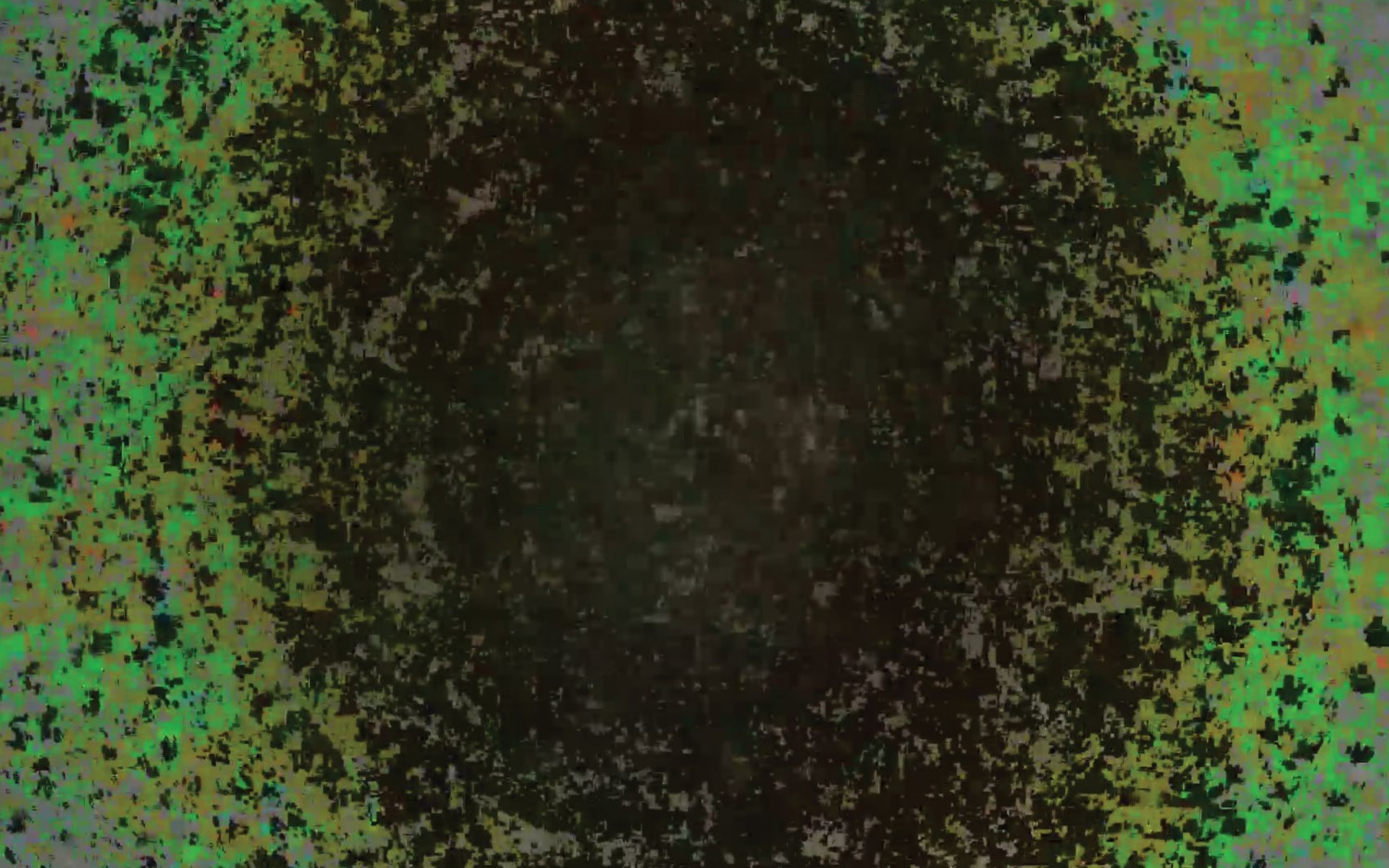
GENDER TOOLS
Fixxer and Times Neutral Roman

ADAM FEIN

MAY 2021
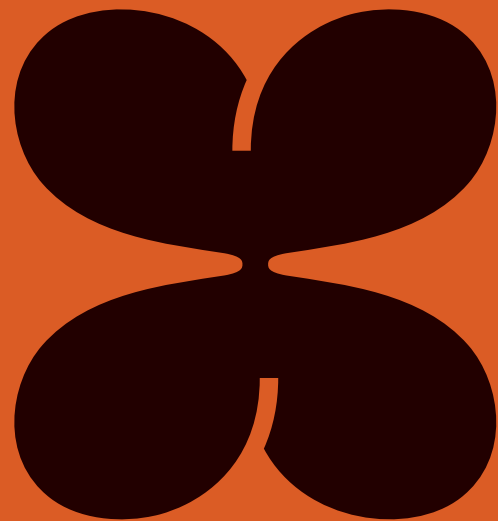
Regulatory frameworks, like gender markers on birth certificates, exist to construct subjects—not only as citizens or legal actors but as knowable bodies, behaviors, and desires. Unspecified markers is a term to describe the X marking placed on legal documents, typically in place of an M or F. Unspecified markers demonstrate one method for subverting without (yet) abolishing these frameworks. They act as empty spaces within a structure, like an unmarked form box or an incomplete cloze test. Unspecified markers are not new genders or even positive theories on gender. They do not indicate any particular thing but hold shifting possibilities. They are sites of refusal situated within systems of identification.

Other work within this thesis[1] is critical of neo-pronouns as reifiers of identity. They are depicted as collapsing possibilities (of behavior, desire, identity) into politically legible markers or tokens. Instead, unspecified markers offer inclusive conceptions of gender. This is one way to understand 'they/them' pronouns. 'They' can hold both cis and trans* identities; preferring neither, uplifting neither. 'They' as an inclusive term corresponds to its historical usage, referencing a person of unknown gender. Lately, 'They' has been used most visibly by nonbinary or genderqueer persons, because it does not character masculinity to the exclusion of femininity. Jack Halberstam theorizes the term "Trans*"[2] along similar lines: "the asterisk forbids any definite meaning [...] Trans* opens endless possibilities for the diacritical mark is resolutely indefinite." Understood this way, trans* becomes expansive, resisting any definite description of a fixed 'transgender body' or a 'transgender way of being'.

Gender Tools is a project that explores how graphic design might subvert gender by refusing gendered language. By introducing unspecified markers into text, the project highlights gendered language and opens up the spaces for the "resolutely indefinite." The project consists of an overarching website that contains two web-based tools: a browser plug-in and a re-programmed typeface.

See the project in motion at ajfein.com/gender-tools

1. See "Legibility is Violence" in *Queer Things,* page 32.

2. Jack Halberstam.,"Trans*: Beyond A Politics Of Recognition," (Lecture, British Library Conference Centre, London, November 1, 2019).
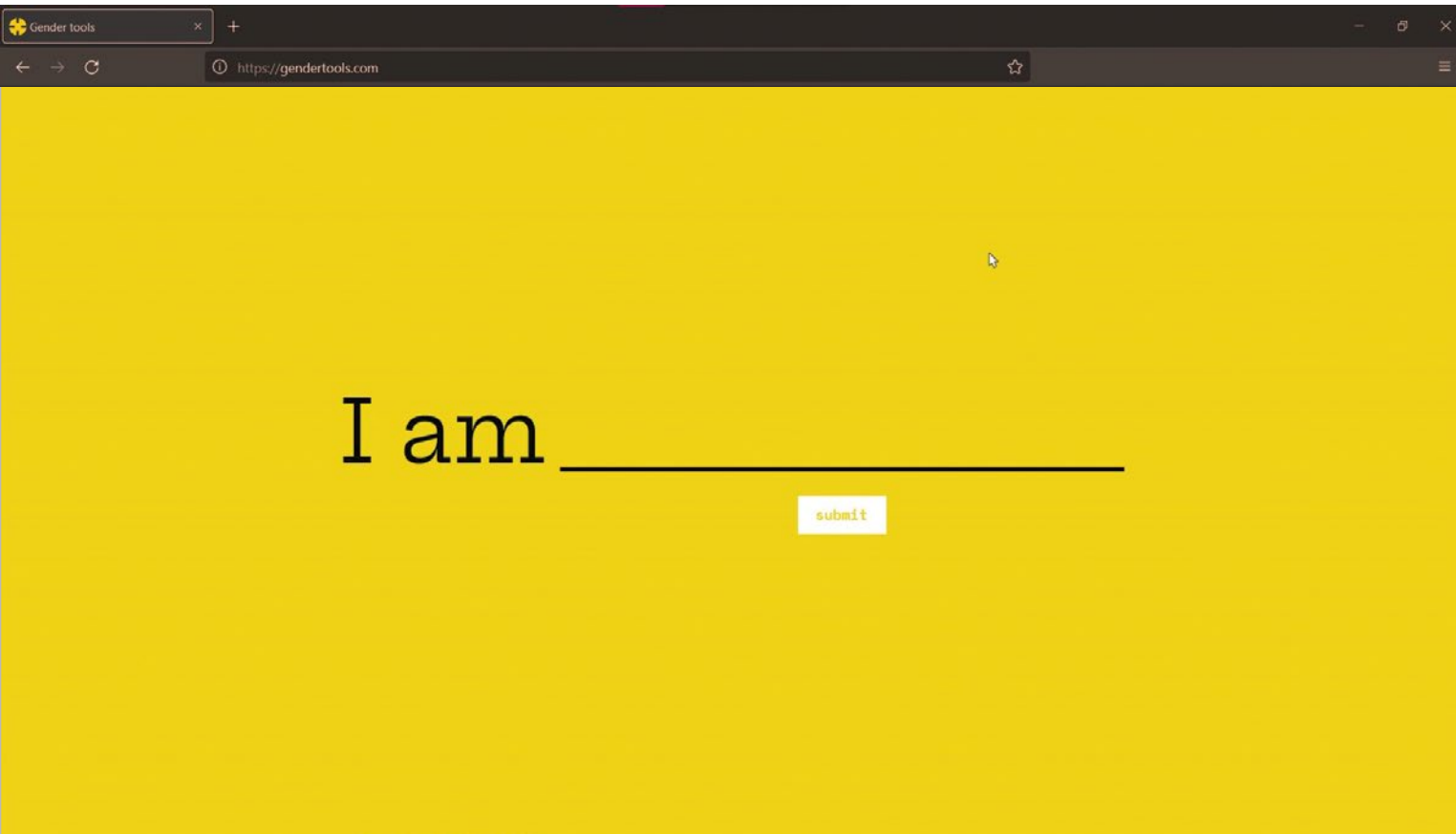
The landing page of the overarching gender tools website. Visitors
are asked to engage in an act of identification prior to entering.
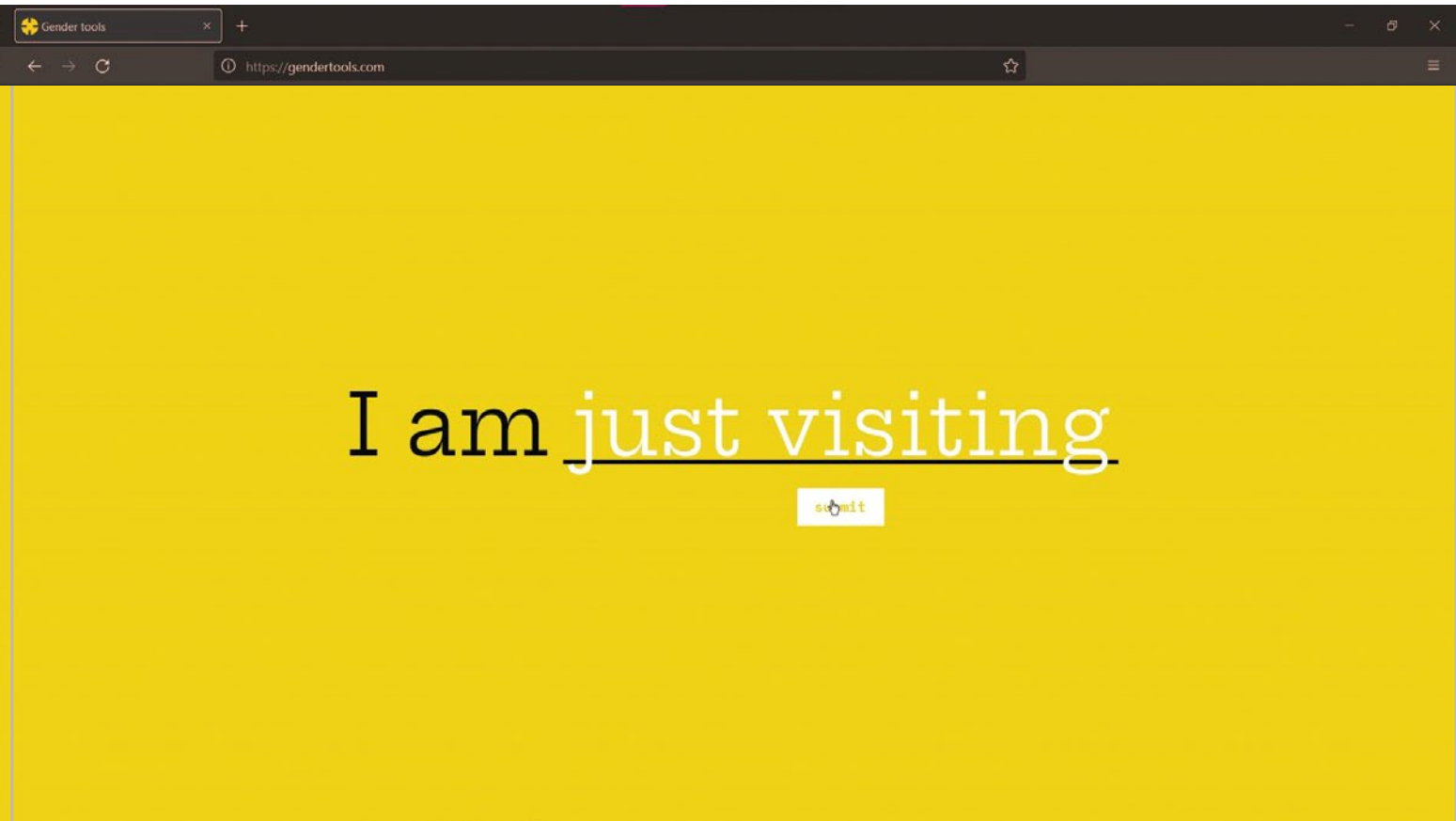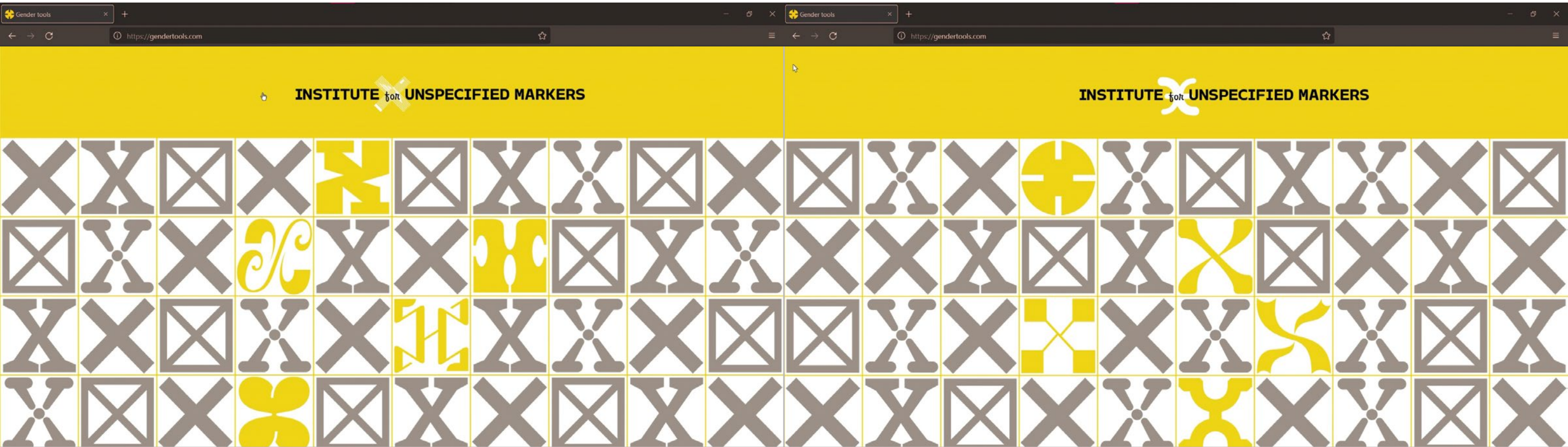
The home page of the overarching "Gender Tools" website. X's (signifying unspecified markers) are randomly placed on a grid. The location of the X's change upon each new page load.

On mouseover, the X's reveal their contents. Grey X's represent historical documentation and visitor responses to the "I am" question on the landing page. Yellow X's represent notable pages, like an about page, contact information page, and the two web-based tools.
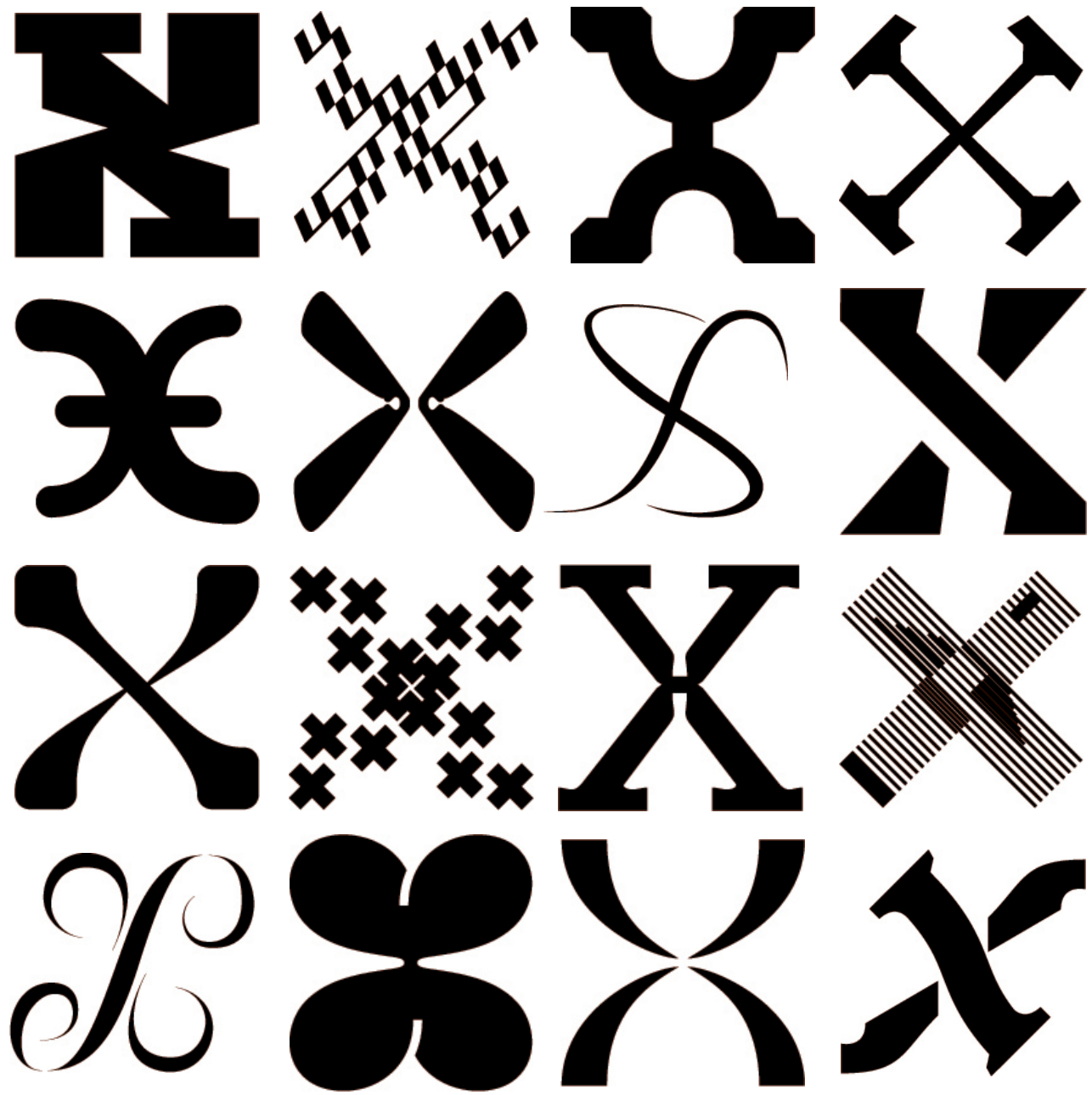
Nearly 40 distinct Xs were designed specifically for this project.
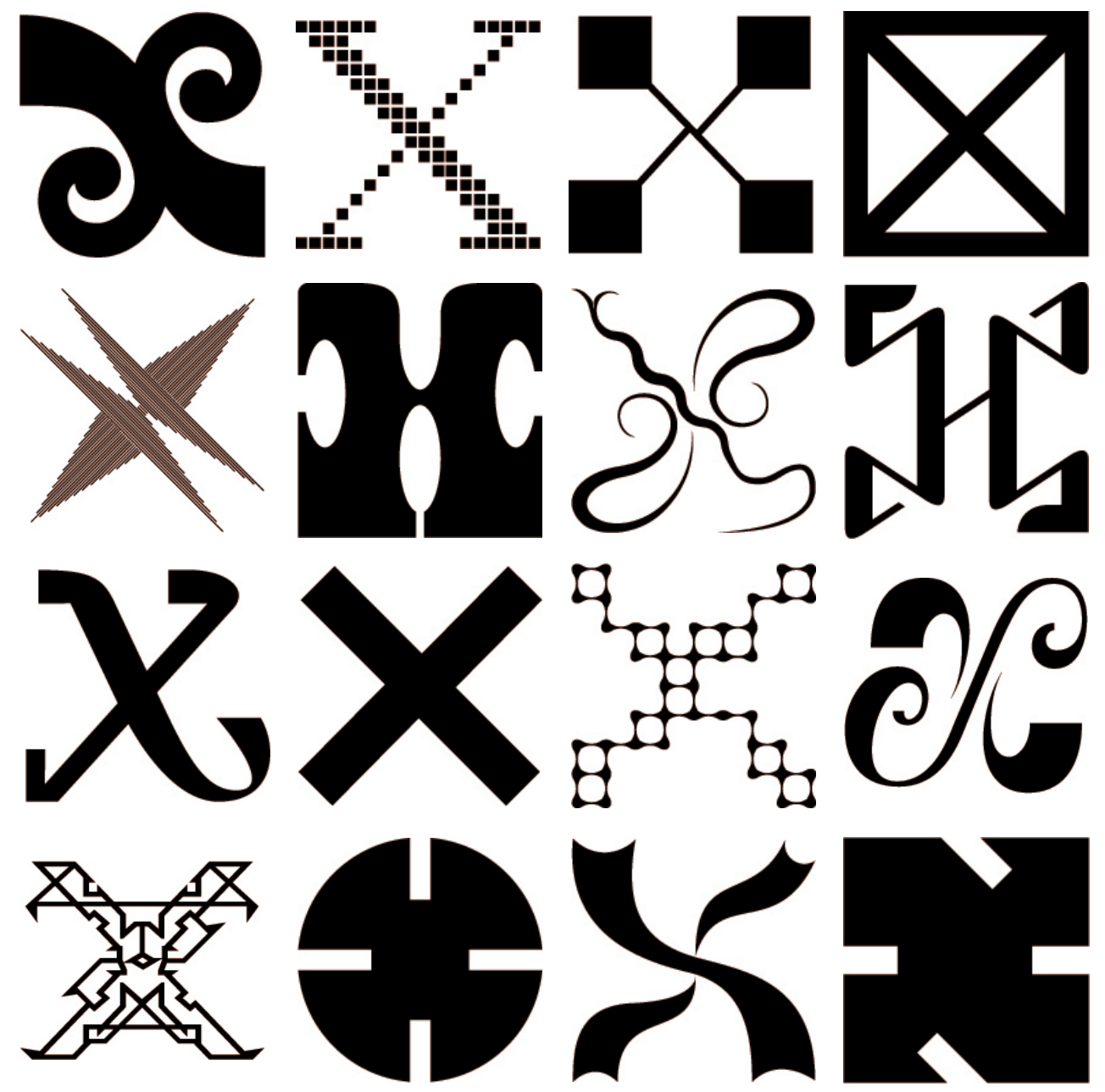
Fixxer

Fixxer is a web-based plugin that obscures gendered language across the internet. Because gendered language is important and necessary in some contexts—as in the description of gender-based oppression—the words are revealed on hover. The necessity or triviality of gender in a text becomes evident.

Fixxer replaces gendered language with X's across *The New York Times* homepage.

A seat-of-the-pants poll among a random sample of working ✕ ✕ , mostly in their 40s and 50s, revealed that many continued to dress as if they were going to the office, even while favoring comfort over smartness.

Dig deeper into the moment.
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One ✕ ✕ said ✕ made a point of getting dressed — knit top and slacks — and going out each morning to a corner cafe to grab a coffee before sitting down at ✕ desk. Another said ✕ dressed as ✕ had in pre-Covid times to set an example for ✕ two teenage children, who (✕ joked) had stopped washing altogether after months of distance learning.

Astrid D'Eredità, a cultural consultant and new ✕ ✕ , said had forgone pajamas "even when I was pregnant" and opted for a casual but put-together style. Pajamas and sweats also got a thumbs down from Simona Capocaccia, a graphic designer who has been working from home since last March. "Dressing for work cheers me up," sh₂ said.

Milena Gammaitoni, a professor at Roma Tre, one of Rome's main universities, can spend entire days at the computer, between Zoom departmental meetings and ✕ lessons with students (whom ✕ asks to not wear pajamas), but ✕ still dresses as ✕ did in pre-Covid days, with a colorful jacket over more casual slacks.

"Recently I've even started wearing perfume," ✕ said, laughing. "I think I'm totally fried."

Editors' Picks

Why Reopening Ceremonies Are So Important in New York Right Now

There's a Name for the Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing

Why the Worst N.B.A. Player Is (Probably) Still Better Than You

PAID POST: THE BEACHES OF FORT MYERS AND SANIBEL
They Came for an Overnight Trip and Stayed 40 Years

Because gendered language is important for describing gender-based oppression, Fixxer does not permanently remove the text. Words are revealed on hover. Therefore the plug-in makes gender visible even as it is obscured.

Times Neutral Roman

Times Neutral Roman is a typeface programmed to replace gender-based language with an unspecified marker (an X'd rectangle). TNR makes the writer aware of the use of gendered language, which may be composed instinctively, without deliberation. If gender is central to the concept of the work, then TNR presents formal opportunity. Could (and should all) gendered language announce itself? Intermixed fonts or written emphasis (**girl**) becomes strategies for maintaining gendered phrases with the text.
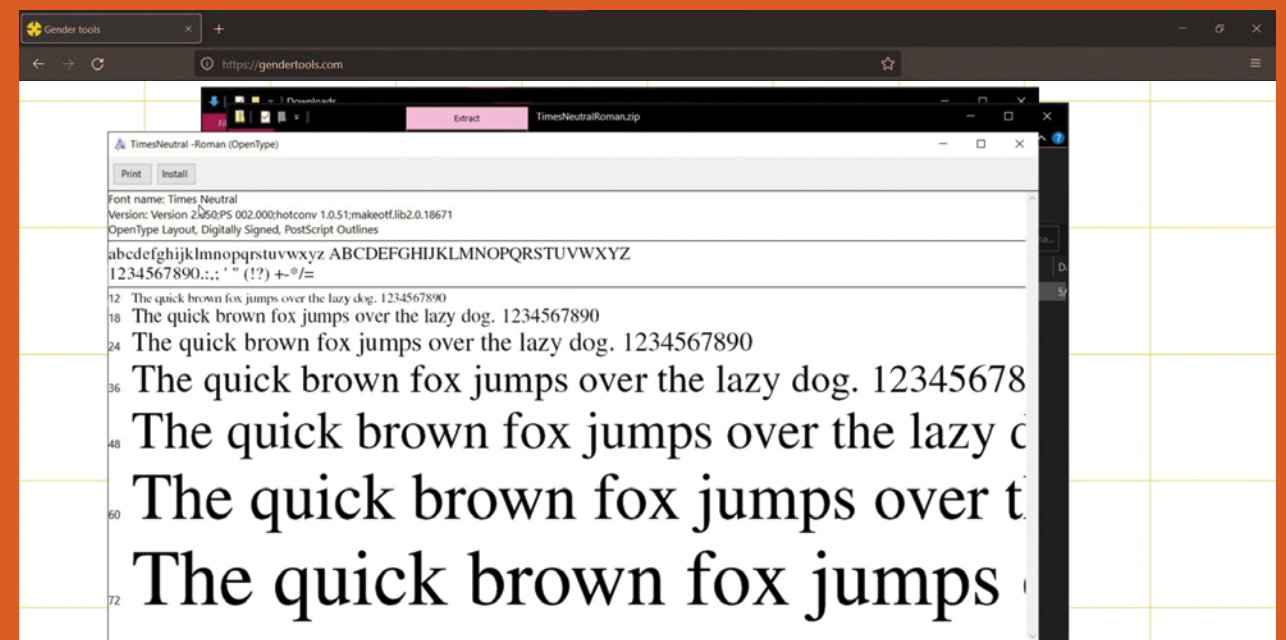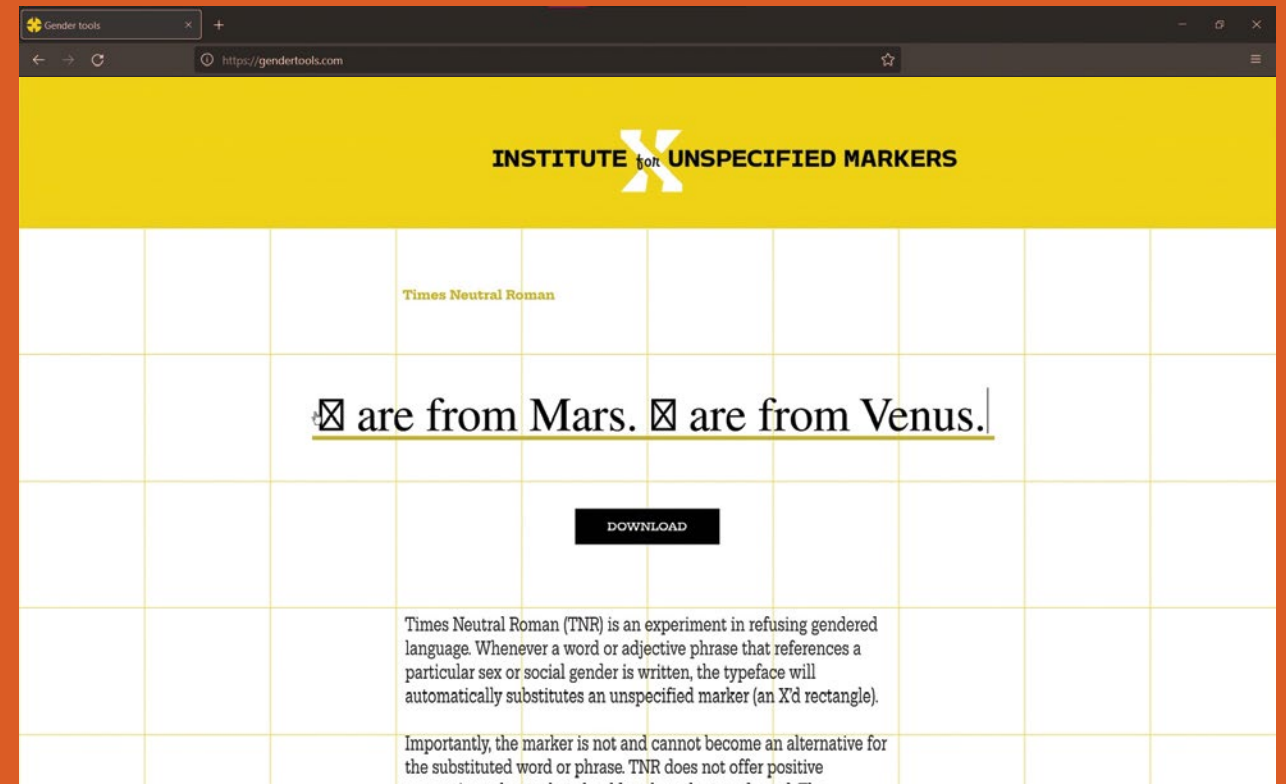
When the user of Times Neutral Roman types a gendered word, like "macho" or "effeminate," the font automatically replaces the word with an unspecified marker (here, a glyph not found symbol.)

INSTITUTE for UNSPECIFIED MARKERS

Times Neutral Roman

DOWNLOAD

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Times Neutral Roman

I feel

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INSTITUTE for UNSPECIFIED MARKERS

Times Neutral Roman

I feel macho

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Times Neutral Roman

I feel ⊠ and effeminat

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Times Neutral Roman (TNR) is an experiment in refusing gendered language. Whenever a word or adjective phrase that references a particular sex or social gender is written, the typeface will automatically substitutes an unspecified marker (an X'd rectangle).

INSTITUTE for UNSPECIFIED MARKERS

Times Neutral Roman

I feel ⊠ and ⊠

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Times Neutral Roman (TNR) is an experiment in refusing gendered language. Whenever a word or adjective phrase that references a particular sex or social gender is written, the typeface will automatically substitutes an unspecified marker (an X'd rectangle).

Gendered phrases like "bachelor," "fireman," "emasculate," and "gentleman" are replaced by unspecified markers when using Times Neutral Roman.

A VERY LONG, LABORIOUS PROCESS THAT YIELDS 100 BLANK PAGES

ADIE FEIN &
WILL MIANECKI

MARCH 2022

Pages "left intentionally blank" are everywhere: in legal documents, bureaucratic forms, school tests. What do they do? Where did they come from? And what do they reveal about the functions of graphic design? In this conversation, Will Mianecki and I discuss an ongoing, collaborative project that interrogates the theoretical and material implications of the "page left intentionally blank," in order to illuminate graphic design's role in systems of domination. The central component of the project is an archive of 100 "intentionally blank" pages gathered from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) documents. This collection uniquely exposes how design exercises administrative authority, whether inside a document or in physical space.

The BLM is a federal agency that administers land, approximately one eighth of the entire landmass of the United States. The BLM also manages the mineral rights (the metal, oil, etc. within the ground) of over 30% of U.S. territory. The government initially took ownership of these areas because they were "lands nobody wanted,"[1] having been passed over by homesteaders. However, if once seen as empty, the land is now regarded as precious. Today, the BLM is tasked with the conservation and restoration of the lands, the oversight of natural resource extraction, and the provision of access for recreation.

The management of this land occurs by way of administrative operations, which produce extensive documentation. The "intentionally blank" pages in our collection originate in these documents. There they enact a kind of designerly control, managing the sequencing, printing, and reading of publications. This project, therefore, implicates graphic design in the government's ownership and control—and by extension the colonial capture—of land in the United States. Through the creation of an essentially empty archive, we highlight and trouble the role of graphic design as an agent of regulatory power.

Will Mianecki graduated from the RISD graduate program in graphic design in 2022. Will is currently a designer on the culture and communications team at The New York Times.

1. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Our Heritage, Our Future: The BLM And America's Public Lands,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 2017), 150.

ADIE FEIN Hi!

WILL MIANECKI Hello!

You just interviewed for the Harvard business review, right? What do you like about the magazine?

I've never opened a Harvard Business Review in my life. I had to call my brother to ask what it was. That was a real phone call that happened. I said that I like the editorial design—which isn't really true. Then there was a numbers conversation. He said, "55 to 70." I said, "I want more money." I don't mean to be glib about numbers. I would be happy to have any job.

NO, I don't think you are glib. It's good to know what you want. I have had similar experiences. My friend sent me a job at the New Yorker. I have always been interested in working there, but I realized I am more senior than the job. This is the first time I have felt that way in my career as a graphic designer.

Yeah, I was just talking to Lai about this. We were saying something similar: that we are weirdly both under-qualified and overqualified for a lot of roles. It puts us in an awkward position. I would take that amount of money, I just don't think I really want to work at Harvard Business Review. I feel like I'm being too transparent, I feel exposed.

Is it because we are recording? I am not going to include this!

I wasn't even thinking about the recording.

You're being too transparent about what you want? You like being more mysterious?

That is a lot of money. But now that I've been offered

Okay, should we start for real now?

Yeah, sure.

I am hoping to have a conversation about the Blank Pages Book's history, process, themes, and collaboration. That is, the specifics of our Blank Pages Book project: how it got started, what it is, our process. I also want to discuss the subjects or ideas in the project that we find compelling. And then, at the end, we could talk about collaboration: why we want to collaborate and how has this collaboration been successful? I should also state at the top that I initially intended to do individual writing about this project. However, a conversation makes you conspicuously, undeniably a partner. This is a collaborative project, and I am not the individual author or owner at all. Plus, I like spending time with you, and this way we get to hang out.

It makes sense too, because talking to one another has been such an important part of the Blank Pages Book project. We have been making sense of things through dialogue.

That's right. Okay, let's start. How did this Blank Pages Book project begin?

I had been working on projects that involved looking at a lot of bureaucratic documents, and I became really interested in the ways that design was functioning within them. I was looking at pages, appendices, and other elements added to documents. I had made four short exploratory books about documents; one was a book made of pages left intentionally blank. You were also interested in placeholders, and we had been talking around that as a theme for maybe years.

In particular, I was thinking about empty space and its political meaning in Graduate Studio in 2021. That evolved into a poetic exploration of the intentionally blank page. You were the TA for the course, saw that project, and explained to me your idea for a book full of intentionally blank pages. You proposed we could work together, and I agreed. We had our first meeting the day before you moved from Providence to New York city. You posed a very important framing question: from what archive would the blank pages come?

Right. We discussed working with documents that concern space—blank space, empty space—which led us to organizations that have a relationship to land. We settled on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

We started meeting weekly on Zoom in the fall. We've never worked on this project in person. Even when, say, I visited NYC, we never talked about the work.

Yeah, it's contained to these Zoom meetings. Though, it is hard to characterize the meetings, and that speaks to our method of collaboration. We talk a lot about design pedagogy, teaching, practice. In these meetings, and in our relationship, I have learned a lot of other topics related to design, not directly related to the project.

more, I can have expectations.

Did you tell them that others have offered me more?

He was really nosy. He was like whom else are you talking to? The interviewer asked what stage I was in with other interviews. Are you interviewing casually? Interviewing seriously? I said, "You don't get to know anything about me. This is our first conversation!" Sometimes I feel a little adversarial going into those calls, especially

Yeah. Have you heard back from the New York Times?

Yeah, they went to another round—

My God!

— three more calls. The people on these calls are unbelievable! Kelly Doe, the Director of Brand Identity, who I googled, has been at The New York Times for 17 years; Cynara Charles-Pierre, the SVP of Corporate Communications. They don't want to talk to me! I'm a little fish. It's just ridiculous. Am I interviewing to run the New York Times?

That is wild! I feel like it is a bigger role than you think. You will arrive on your first day of the job and have to manage all NYT communications.

No, I know for sure I'm not. But imagine what if I was interviewing for a more senior-level job. Would I have to meet the president—

Yeah, will come meet Mr. New York Times.

Am I going to do the crossword puzzles now? Is that why? But, you know, what I'm noticing is that people keep bringing up death in my interviews.

Death!?

That is true. We do much more than just talk about this Blank Pages Book project—or, rather it has been an entryway to other topics.

We came in simply interested in blank pages, but the project has really evolved a lot as we have experienced the archives. That has informed the issues and design choices we are currently thinking about, like placing blank pages on top of images of land or the scale of the pages. That was the history. Where is the project at now?

Beginning the project our goal was to collect a sequence of intentionally blank pages, running from page one to page 100. It was challenging, because of how blank pages operate, but we are almost there. From the activity of collecting—reading and looking closely at BLM documents—we have arrived at a book that is an archive of blank pages and also a collection of visual essays. Those essays will explore certain themes: the visual rhetoric of blank space, grids, parceling. The essays are an exegesis of the archive, of the blank pages, unpacking their relationship to graphic design. The final book will contain a bibliography that presents exactly where those blank pages come from. Recently, because we find the archive endlessly interesting, we have been discussing additional directions, maybe lectures, a website, and a workshop.

Where is it going in the future?

It has been so generative. The writing and thinking has been produced by the experience of building the archive and the conversations that we have had. In addition, that archive of blank pages, we have been building other, more informal collections, like representations of the land. The project is getting to questions that are central to me: how power is being enacted through design as it relates to land, the control and occupation of space, and refusal. We have talked about potential spinoff projects while making this—even though we haven't finished!

Could you say more about why you are interested in documents generally? Why is that a meaningful area of inquiry?
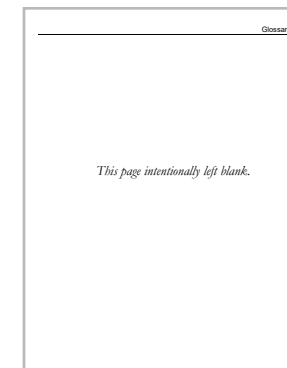
In grad school, I was interested in the technological sides of power: how they were highly designed and how designers were implicated in those systems of power and control, as at Facebook or Amazon where everything is about speed and efficiency. I was really interested in what design as, what Metahaven calls, high resolution censorship. What is outside of the designed frame? As you try to understand those companies beyond the ways in which they represent themselves, what you encounter are sites of power like infrastructure, bureaucratic documents and labor, people working. It should be apparent, but it feels not obvious that power is located at those sites. So, from the perspective of a designer, these documents are really interesting, because they are pieces of design ephemera. The questions are: How is design functioning in these mundane, abundant documents? And what type of intervention could a designer make? What is interesting to you about documents?

Yeah. I think that as an interviewee you are a semi-neutral figure onto which people project their anxieties, and death keeps coming up in my interviews—totally unprompted from me. At The New York Times, all three people I talked to in my last round talked about Ukraine. It is totally irrelevant to my job.

Whoa!

One interviewer had a huge fiddle fig in her background. I told her, "That is such a nice plant." And she responded, "It keeps trying to die"—because they are difficult plants to grow. And the other guy in the interview said, "Yeah one way of thinking about life is the struggle not to die." That's so unnecessary!

I think something is wrong with the people at NYT. Well, you say you are "neutral" but I think you give off vibes that make people reflect on their own mortality.

I was going to say I look youthful and that comforts people with their aging and impending death.

Yes! Your skin is so smooth that others look at you and think, "Everyday 1 inch closer!"

That's all I'm going to say about this. For the transcribed record, I don't always talk this much.

You know, once you reference the record I am forced to include that section in the final transcript. But look, no pressure! If you're not interesting enough, I'll scrap this whole thing.

That's what I'm talking about. Cut it.

I had an interview the other day, and it was the first time someone in an interview said "Your work is beautiful." And

I am interested for similar reasons. Generally, my interests are how graphic design operates within culture, in particular to reproduce and enforce dominant, normative cultural ideas. I am also interested in the ways that graphic designers may or may not be capable of subverting that reproduction and enforcement. I became interested in the blank page as a space that may be available for capture, as an opportunity for subversion built into the document itself—blank space as the seeds of the document's own destruction. As our Blank Pages Book project progressed (and alongside other work I was doing), I began to think about how graphic design operates as a kind of infrastructure for power. Design is not the originating authority of—may not even be the actor of—domination, but it enables the transmission of power. Design as infrastructure[1] might be characterized as a network, as interconnected channels or lines of power that can be tracked to low-level, material human life. So, I became interested in documents because they expose a connection between design and people. One of the goals of the this project is to address design's material effects on humans. In part, we chose the Bureau of Land Management because it connected graphic design to the control of space in the United States. The BLM allows us to discuss how graphic design may be involved in the partition of a space, the sale of a space, the exclusion of bodies from a space.
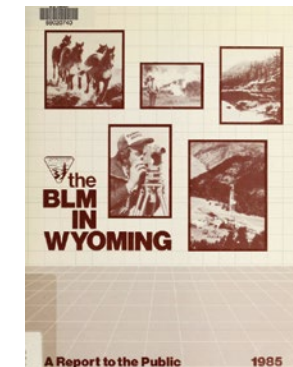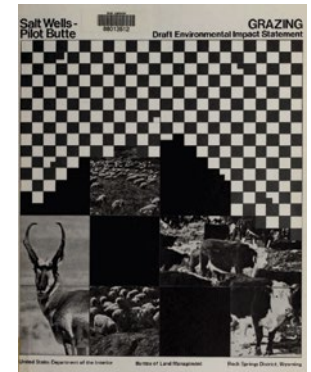
That's what is exciting to me, too. In grad school, shifting from brands allowed me to follow threads of power. When I talked to Cameron La Follette, an environmental lawyer from Tierra Del Mar, she did not understand why I was interested in her practice, because I am a graphic designer. But it really does make sense, because documents implicate design in the control of space—or, in the case of Facebook, the appropriation of space. It should be obvious, but it is very rare to begin a critique of design in documents, for documents to motivate criticism. That is an exciting thing about our Blank Pages Book project: we start with something as exact as a blank page taken from a specific archive. I am reminded of when Familiars Strangers[2] said to listen to the noise instead of the signal. It is a way of seeing systems beyond the way they are intended to be experienced.

That is a good quote. This project is centered on intentionally blank pages taken from Bureau of Land Management documents. It has always been focused on that. However, our extensive, lengthy looking at and thinking about blank pages (and the documents from which originate) allowed us to see how the BLM expresses values by way of graphic design. We have talked about the visual representation of land in BLM documents: how it is photographed, the visual rhetoric of the land. We have talked about the

1. See "Graphic Design as Infrastructure," in *Queer Power,* page 4.

2. Familliars Strangers Press. "Transdisciplinarity, Collaboration & Computation." (Panel discussion, Multiple Formats: Contemporary Art Book Symposium, Boston University, Boston, February 26, 2022.)

I responded, "I will work for you. Done."

That's funny. Where was that.

That was at Ithaca, the company that owns JSTOR. The question there is how do you feel about pay-walled knowledge production?

First thing, Wow, so many interviews right now. That is really great. It is a big change from a few months ago.

It is momentum. Whenever I have applied for jobs, it's always happened like this. Dating too!

Second thing, I like that you have an ethical dilemma for every single job.

I fucking do.

I can see it being a neurosis. But also you as a person really want to be critical and thoughtful about what you engage in. It is one thing that I like about you. Naturally, that entails hand wringing.

Pivot. I mentioned dating. How is it going for you?

Oh, good. Weird. I am in a place where, every week, I am either going on zero dates or four dates.

People are so flaky. You have to hedge.

Right, It's a lot of scheduling. Dating is a ton of administrative labor.

It's really similar to interviewing: a huge logistical cost that may not work out for anyone!

Okay. Is there anything else you want to talk about before we do serious stuff.

There are other things, but, for time, we should move on.

---

graphical representation of BLM's operations: the use of grids, maps, survey lines, or even clip art to symbolize the control of and activity on the land. We have also discussed that these design objects reveal how the BLM positions itself in relationship to the land over time. Historically, the Bureau of Land Management was enabled to claim the land because it was perceived as blank—vacant, valueless. It was perceived as blank because settlers did not choose to take up residence in these spaces as they colonized the west. BLM now controls about one eighth of the United States landmass. Of course, in the nearly 200 year history of the organization,[3] the perception of the land's value has changed. The land the BLM controls is now considered extremely valuable: for their mineral rights, for their grazing rights, as well as for their value as sites of recreation and natural beauty. That shift in value is extremely important. It helps us to understand that what we regard as blank—empty, worthless—is never an idle political question.
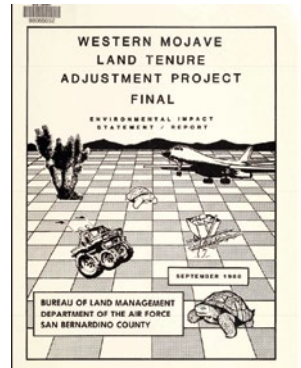
Yes, exactly. Our experience was unique as a graphic design process. We encountered BLM archives through a search for a collection of blank pages. Our searches were constructed specifically to locate pages that are intentionally left blank in documents, and what we found, while searching, were all of these representations of land. The way these documents work, which is what you're describing, suggests blankness as metaphor. The imagination of space as blank is a powerful and fraught political project. Blankness enables the appropriation of land, the right to take land from other people, and it enables the larger cultural-political belief in Manifest Destiny.

The blank imaginary is entirely inseparable from settler colonialism, at least as it relates to land.
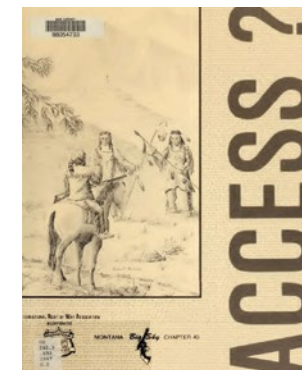
Yes, you are talking about the visual metaphors that construct power as it relates to land: mapping land, breaking land into plots. You don't have to be a genius to understand it when you're looking at these images! The cover of the document is literally a white man with surveying tools, alone with a backdrop of nature, framed by maps. It is very literal! Bureaucratic documents signify a specific Western authority. The documents represent evidence and authority, signatures and seals, and the visual design that produces that authority, which was critical to enabling a certain relationship to the land. We are interested in blank pages, in part, because they do not carry that authority. They are documents that do not mean anything, and so defy that way of seeing, defy that system of control.

Right, within Western history, deeds and contracts underlie claims to land. Historically, people have been denied land because of their lack of access

3. James Muhn and Hanson R. Stuart, "Opportunity and Challenge: The Story of BLM," 1988.

Technically, the Bureau of Land Management is 76 years old. The BLM was created in 1946 when the General Land Office was merged with the U.S. Grazing Service. The GLO was created in 1812 to manage public land. The 200 year number given here references that lineage. One could also locate the origin of the BLM in the Land Ordinance of 1785, which established the Public Land Survey System and systematized the sale of land west of the Appalachian Mountains.

to reading, writing, and physical documentation or their alternative cultural traditions of residence or possession. The intentionally blank page as a document exposes how all documents operate within these systems and challenges the idea of documentation.

But it is a complicated issue as well. Blankness functions in many different ways for the Bureau of Land Management. It enables the appropriation of land, but the BLM also constructs this image of land as blank in order to conserve it—nature as preserved, as protected therefore empty. We have also talked about the potential of the blank page as a site of refusal—the refusal to be mapped. That may be another complex form of blankness. Within these documents, these pages are held empty, preserved, in the face of all the other bureaucratic stuff.

For me, at least, the intentionally blank page has always been a synecdoche for the control graphic design enacts within documents, or in other publications and physical space. The most straightforward way to get at this is to ask, "What is the intentionally blank page doing in a document at all?" It has two obvious functions. The first is epistemic. It clarifies for the audience that the page is intentionally blank. (That is so obvious it is almost dumb to say aloud.) It informs us that a page from the document is not missing. The second is the maintenance of the structure of the publication, ensuring that certain pages always appear recto, for example. That is a little weird and more interesting when we realize that these documents became, at some point in time, primarily electronic. Why are there intentionally blank pages in documents meant to be PDFs? What does that tell us about the purpose of design?

Art from *California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendments Decision Record,* 1989/1990.

That the page has to be designated as a blank page so that it is not mistaken as a blank page reminds me "How to Map Nothing."[4] There, Shannon Mattern says that representing a space on a map as blank designated that space as something to be taken, which enabled a settler-colonial action. Whereas in representations of the sea on maps, the blank space was considered scary and so those spaces were filled with sea monsters. It reduced the anxiety around the blankness of the ocean. So, blank pages are funny to me, because there is an anxiety around them.

That is true, and that anxiety is not trivial. It is true for maps, and it is true for white space in graphic design. White space is meant to exert another type of control; otherwise it is misused, bad. White space must form a negative shape, or white space must frame the text block. White space is "good" when it has a formal, controlling presence on the page. This is all about not

allowing the document to run away from itself—the document cannot be idle or unknown or wild!

Yes, and that is exciting to me. Beyond the paradox of a page marked "This Page Intentionally Left Blank"—which, you know, is funny—we find a really intense desire for control. In documents, it is the control of space in the page and publication. And, when put in conversation with the Bureau of Land Management, the intentionally blank page gains new meaning. I don't want to go off on a tangent—

Please go off!

I have been thinking about psychoanalysis lately. Freud thought the therapists should be a blank slate onto which clients project their issues.

That is interesting. We haven't yet thought about this project in relation to the tabula rasa ever. What does it mean to imagine humans as blank slates? That idea is most strongly associated with John Locke,[5] who uses the tabula rasa to argue for universal natural rights. He defined those rights at "life, liberty, and estate," (which inspired some well-known American principles.) It is also relevant to our project to note that, for John Locke, legitimate government emerges from the need to enforce property rights. We can connect the idea of a blank state, then, to the control of land. The tabula rasa seems so unfamiliar to contemporary thought. Today, we resist the idea of a "natural state," of a "pre-discursive"[6] human as Judith Butler would say. We cannot imagine humans as a blank slate anymore. Sorry! Psychoanalysis!
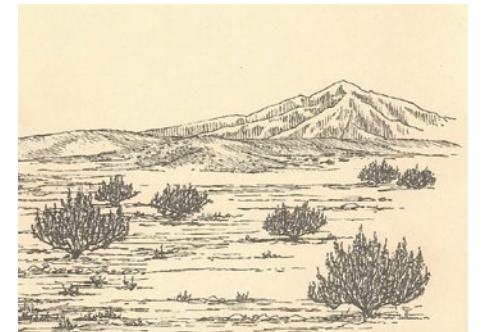
Art from *Wilderness,* May 1979.

I am also interested in the ways in which our anxiety can extend into a fear of blank space and desire to control space. An intentionally blank page is such an anxious act of design. It is the graphic designer announcing, "This is not a mistake."

We see this idea is psychoanalysis. For example, Lacan thinks a lot about anxiety and its relationship to mapping and to the control of space. Louise Bourgeois had a recent show at the Jewish Museum, titled "Freud's Daughter." For that, Jameson Webster, a practicing psychologist and cultural critic at the New School, talked about Bourgeois's anxiety about controlling space.

Graphic design is a difficult thing to define. That anxiety could reveal, at least somewhat, what design foundationally is—that design is always about creating systems of control. When do graphic designers ever actually give up control? It is wild to me that the best example in our field is Conditional

4. Shannon Mattern, "How to Map Nothing," Places Journal, March 2021.

5. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government,* (London: 1823), 141.

6. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), X,

Design, where we're building systems with fluid but expected outcomes, where perhaps an item is at a surprising angle. When has there been a case in graphic design where the emergent result destroys the system? Where the result is rebellious or disobedient? Generally, it is considered a failure of design when we lose control.

It makes me think of Unimark designers wearing lab coats. There is this desire for surgical control and objectivity, to be scientists.

Even as we moved away from Modernist frameworks for graphic design, we are still so invested in the idea of building permanent systems.

What we are talking about is so tiny: a piece of ephemera that is produced as a byproduct of a design document, but it reveals a lot about the field.

Yes, that is why the project is interesting. Where does the blank page get us in thinking about graphic design? Where does the blank page get us in thinking about the visual rhetoric of space? Sure, we like it as an aesthetic artifact, as a design object. But the driving question of the project is "Can the intentionally blank pages speak to us about these invisible systems of control?"

There is a parallel there to the representations of land. Depicting nature as nature is about separating humans from nature, and therefore, in a position of control over it. The design is always imagined to be in a similar position to the material that we're working with. That is, the designer is separated from the material. We are controlling the actual document, of course, but that separation produces a relationship between the designer and the document that reinforces our position of power.

That is really interesting. One traditional framing in our field is that graphic designers are supposed to respond to the content—not make content. We don't do writing, right? We do design. That framing maintains that separation from the content in order to insist on control over it. It makes me wonder what happens when we remove that separation.

Is it stepping into subjectivity? I saw a posting recently for a job called "Content Designer." I almost had a meltdown! It fried my brain! I couldn't understand what the role was, because those are almost not two words in my mind: you cannot disconnect "content" from "designer." Inherent in the role of the designer is a distance from the content. Crossing or flattening that distance troubles what it means to be a designer, not just professionally but in terms of the authority and allure that attends being a designer.

The presumed neutral position of the designer or the top-down position or the removed position.

To return to the image of the guy climbing the hill, he is a graphic designer. Do you know what I mean? That is actually a perfect metaphor for the designer, climbing up to get perspective over the land in order to map a grid onto it—to design onto it.

Land surveying being not so far removed from designing feels right. That survey shapes the land, it's not simply a descriptive process. Survey creates parcels or boundaries. It makes determinations about value—what is empty or not empty. Much like the land surveyor, we have covered a lot of ground, so let us transition to a new topic.

I want to talk about the intentionally blank page as an aesthetic object. It is visually compelling as a design artifact in and of itself. At the time of speaking, we have collected more than 700 intentionally blank pages. Both of us have individually reviewed hundreds of Bureau of Land Management documents. We have become extremely familiar with the visual design of BLM, including stylistic evolutions over time. That is why we can say their visual tropes, like the representations of land, have been very consistent across time. The visual shift is only ever the method of illustrating empty land: clipart, or film or digital photography. We have also become very familiar with the varied forms of intentionally blank pages in these documents. We both had prior enthusiasm for document aesthetics—that is a motivation for this project, for sure—but I think we both developed a real fondness for intentionally blank pages. At least, I have come to love the intentionally blank page. They are a study in an extreme minimalism: infinitesimal details affect a page's character; microscopic design choices almost radiate. It is atomic design.

Silhouette of surveyor in front of land plots, from Surveying Our Public Lands, 1988.

I agree completely. The feeling of building this archive is so central to the ideas that we've discussed. So much is experienced in searching through a full 500-page document seeking one blank page.

Going through 500 pages of content to locate the one page that's reserved for no content is an interesting experience. It is strange that, in gathering blank pages, we are building a collection of nothing. What does it mean to have an archive of nothing? What does that tell us about the role of graphic design or the role of archives? But, also, there is the joy in locating the blank page. In the final outcome for this project, the final book, we intend to assemble 100 blank pages in page order—blank pages numbered one to one-hundred. There is special joy, then, in locating a rare folio. There is joy too in being surprised formally: type set at a large point size; type set vertically; a page with a watermark. It is a thrilling experience! Each is a discovery! There is so much visual variety in these minimal, quotidian—and some would say boring—document pages.

Burea of Land Management emblem showing a focus on land survey and extractive industry. It was adopted in 1946 and used into the 1970s.

Yeah. When I was in school, people would ask, "Why do you spend so much time with documents in archives? That's boring!" But it is really exciting. There are interesting design decisions being made within these bureaucratic forms. It is funny; I have pages that I love, that I remember loving when I found them. But as we've been placing them in the book, testing layouts—in particular the layouts in which the blank page is framed by images of the BLM land they reference—I find I prefer the pages that have the least, that are the most minimal. There is something compelling about the page actually being very blank, of giving very little away.

We created a Slack workspace just for the Blank Pages Book project. We will often post newly discovered pages or documents—and we will both just get so excited!
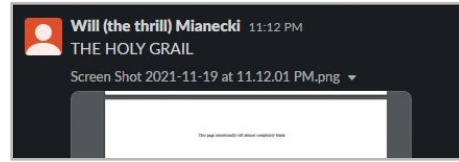
Our Slack is so good. I don't want to brag. I get excited when I find a blank page where the phrasing is different. In this post, I write, "THIS IS THE HOLY GRAIL," and it is a page with nothing but the number two and "This page intentionally left almost completely blank." I might have yelled out loud when I found that. So good. What a crazy conceit.

Let's conclude by talking about process and collaboration. What is the usual graphic design process, and how has our process differed? Is that an interesting question?

Mhmm. Yeah. Yes, it is interesting—you talk about it first!

I do not have a response ready either!
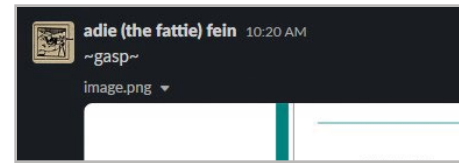
Okay! The fantasy of the designer is a very specific process, but ours has been very exploratory. It has involved doing many incorrect things: You are not supposed to build an archive of empty objects. You are not supposed to move through documents, with pages of photography, illustrations, and text, and then select the pages that are blank. In that way, the process feels subversive to me.

We are gathering items that are considered not valuable and not important. Without digitized archives, without optical character recognition, without computer-aided searches, this project would have been much slower, more tedious, and perhaps impossible. We would have had to go through Bureau of Land Management documents blindly, and so many do not include blank pages. There is no extant reference system. These blank pages are not typically considered worthy of citation.

That is a tension of this project: blank pages are an antiquated product of printing and reading physical documents, and yet we are only able to collect through these digital searching strategies.

Even then, our process is best described as a very slow engagement with an archive. I believe that the project has been so generative because it is slow. We are searching for any blank page, collecting it, and organizing them by page number. Our process does not track historical developments in the intentionally blank page. (In fact, these artifacts are ahistorical; any particular page could be located in most decades.[7]) Our process does not produce a specific formal outcome, and our process is not product oriented.

7. Of course, one could approximately date a page by the fonts. A page set in Helvetica could not be dated earlier than 1957, for example.

I would describe it as a meditative research process. It is quite literally sitting with nothing.[8] And that slow, attentive nothingness seems subversive. It seems anti-design.

In school, when I did work like this, people would get angry. There's pressure for designers to be producing—preferably visual work, preferably quickly. That is a commercial pressure, which speaks to the speed of graphic design production. I feel conflicted about whether working quickly or slowly is inherently interesting or uninteresting.

It is more of a traditional academic research process. Nevertheless, we all ultimately are hoping to generate a book. We are still ultimately producing blank pages. That is the formal outcome. A graphic design process that results in a blank page is funny and interesting and weird.

A very long, laborious process that yields 100 blank pages.

That will be the title of the conversation: a very long, laborious process that yields 100 blank pages.

If we finish! For God's sake!

Sure, that is a question. Do you feel the project is reaching a conclusion?

I was joking! I feel great. Actually, how this collaboration has unfolded has felt radical to me. It has been a long inquiry, and we are very considerate of each other. We are allowed to show up to a meeting and say, "I was exhausted this week. I didn't find any blank pages." And that is okay.

We have only been able to sustain that inquiry—especially since it has never been the central focus of either of our lives, and it has definitely never been funded—by extending so much understanding if someone was unable to meet or to achieve much. That has been really nice, and it has not felt like my usual experience in graduate school. We have allowed ourselves to care deeply about the project, yet not made it our polestar. We have also frequently reassured one another that those slow weeks are okay. For me, the collaboration has been successful because we have done a good job of communicating expectations and concerns. This is all to say, for me, good collaborations are good relationships. How has our collaboration worked?
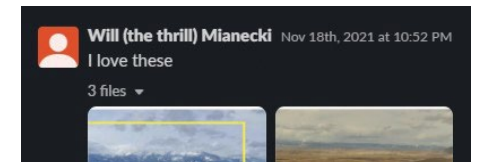
We meet weekly. Typically, I work a couple hours in the time immediately before we meet. We meet over Zoom, and we discuss what we are thinking about, show design sketches, show research, look at the archives, look at pages—or we talk about dating, mental health, teaching.

8. For more on idling, see "Sorrow Note," in *Queer Study,* page 4.

Right. We have been meeting almost every week for six months now (with breaks during holidays.) We have actually spent a lot of time with one another. One reason that it has been bearable, that it has not started to sour, is because there is so much space for topics outside of the project. During this period, you were a guest lecturer at The New School, and I was TA for a section of History of Graphic Design and an instructor for a wintersession course. So, this was an invaluable space for thinking about teaching. Every week we would talk about activities, leading conversations, pedagogical references, student wellbeing, and so on. I do not see crossover between the project and my teaching. They did not inform one another. But this project and teaching do feel inseparable.

How would you describe the collaboration?

We worked together often in shared documents. Google Sheets, Google Docs, and Are.na have all been important to making this work. For the first three months of this project, we were mainly collecting pages, showing off pages, talking about documents, and working through the question "What is a blank page?" It was always making sense of the archive through dialogue. That led to a book outline for an archive of blank pages, essays, and other visual matter. I think each component is rich and powerful, and I do not believe either of us would have gotten to these components on our own. The act of collaboration has been very valuable to me intellectually and emotionally, in developing ideas and maintaining motivation.

Right, this conversation does not feel very different at all from our normal meetings.

Yes. Just recently, we were revisiting our book outline to ensure it still felt appropriate. That conversation worked very similar to this one: discussing the history of the project and where the ideas came from. Even checking-in about the collaboration—how does it function? is it working?—is a routine part of our working relationship.

We have done this project over Zoom. It was built through dialogue, and so naturally it is completely dependent on that relationship.

I have never been unenthusiastic for our meetings, even if sometimes I did not have time for them. I have never thought, "Oh no, I have to spend time with Will again."

For a project about locating pages in a boring archive, it has actually been extremely exciting.

If this was an individual venture, I could imagine becoming disinterested or doubtful. I can imagine saying to myself, "I just collected 700 blank pages. What the fuck am I doing?" and walk away from the project. But I have personally found encouragement in your continual intellectual interest in the project. There has been push back from critics; to which I simply respond, "Will thinks it's cool, so pretty sure you're wrong."

I want to bring two ideas from this discussion together. Our emphasis on collaboration seems to defy normal design process or practice. We are making space for our personal subjectivities. Perhaps this project does not meet the standards for being "cool," but our mutual interest moves the measure of value beyond "will this project traffic well on social media" and toward "is this generating meaningful conversation between us."

I have two responses. One, it may be that other graphic designers are not interested in this project, which means the audience is not "Graphic Designers." This project is compelling to us because of similar intellectual and research interests, and so the project is for others who share our interests. That should be trivial to say—except "Graphic Design" has latent values with which this project does not align.

I like that this project doesn't play well. We realized that if it was titled "This Page Left Intentionally Blank" then it would be difficult to search for on the internet. I cannot imagine the book playing well on Instagram. It does not visually conform to social media aesthetics. I think that's interesting. It was not the goal. Lately, I've been thinking about what it means to make work intended to circulate in a certain way. This project is hard to circulate—all the pages look the same! How do you document the book?

Yeah, it is funny. The documents that contain the blank pages are intended to circulate widely, between offices, between government and public. One reason intentionally blank pages are inserted into these documents is to enable their frictionless reproduction and therefore to make circulation of the document easy.

It would be funny to interview the printer or the designer or anyone involved in the production of these documents.

Actually, we should. I always prefer including more voices.

Let's do it right now.

Yeah, this should become a meta-conversation, a meta-interview.

That is good typesetting practice. The interview can split on the page

Returning to the question of is this project "generating meaningful conversation between us?" My second response is I wonder if long-term projects, research, or inquiry is only sustainable when one makes space for things beyond the investment of labor in a project. That is, if we use our collaboration as a model, perhaps design education should incorporate talking about one's life—dating, mental health, teaching—in structured ways. Could that make the workload feel more achievable? Reduce the pressure?
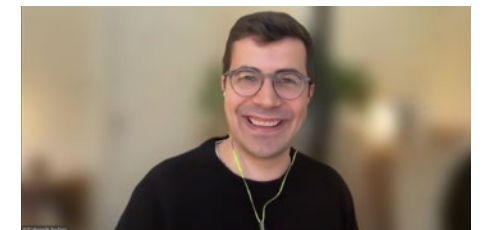
Right, a different design practice seeking different outcomes requires a different model. This collaborative relationship has felt as much a part of the project as the design or research tasks.

One thing that has made this practice or research model functional is confidence in one another. If one person was busy, we frequently skipped or moved meetings. If the other person was unable to do work one week, we did not interpret that as disrespect or neglect. One, we had good faith in one another's investment in the project. Two, we had good communication; we might ask, "How do you feel that I was not able to accomplish any work this week?"

As a teacher, you encounter students who do not attend a class or who do complete work for a week. Every circumstance is different, of course, and you must often decide whether or not to accept student explanations. Our collaboration has been successful because we accept explanations like a rough mental health week. How often do instructors extend that good faith and good communication to students? Perhaps our model suggests a pedagogy grounded in good faith and good communication.

That has been a background conversation for this project. What would it mean to extend what we value about this relationship to a design process or a design pedagogy? We are both currently applying for jobs. What would it mean to shift a job search from work that promises sexy work for sexy brands to work that promises the values of a good relationship?

Yes, right.

Yeah. So, you should say something really good and clever now to end the interview.

ADIE FEIN Thanks Will! That was good. We talked for two hours, and an hour and half just on the project.

You are never going to be able to transcribe this.

I know. Thank you for talking through this with me. I appreciate it. I hope there was value in it for you.

It's always valuable talking with you. I'm sorry if I was boring.

No, you were great. Perfect. I will edit out all of your answers, though, and it will be me responding to myself.
I see Gender Trouble on the table. Are you reading it?

No, but I fucking love Judith Butler.

Yes, I have been asking people in the studio, "Who do you think is the hottest philosopher?" and—

I was just going to say that
Judith Butler is hot!

Yes, so hot!

I was just watching a lecture
and thought, "they are hot,
Say the word, and I'm down
for whatever." I was really
thinking this, and then thought
this is not how most people
are experiencing this lecture.
I feel very validated.

I am trying to find a picture of
Judith Butler with their partner,
Wendy Brown.

Let me see. This is who
I imagined Judith Butler
being with. Who is Wendy
Brown?

I haven't read any of her work,
but Wendy Brown is a political
theorist, who I believe has been an
influential thinker on neoliberalism.

I like people who do that
type of work, but my eyes
just glaze over when people
start talking about neo-
liberalism.

Oh, me too! I don't know what
the fuck neoliberalism is!

Wendy Brown does. Here is
young Judith Butler.

Young Judith Butler, hot.
Current Judith Butler, hot. They
always had it going on. I am
definitely including this convo.

You can include this, because
I stand by Judith Butler
being really hot. The way they
talk is really attractive.

Great hair.

Their haircut never changed.

It didn't need to. It was iconic.

Judith Butler is at the New
School this semester.

Oh yeah, a resident?

I tried to get my students excited about it. I said, "The residents at your school are Judith Butler and Cornel West. That is exciting! And they were like we don't care.

You are a grumpy old man. The kids don't care about the right theorists.
Thank you for having this conversation with me, and thank you for having these conversations with me every week.

Yes, thank you. They are great. You are great.

You are great.

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100 BLANK PAGES

COLLECTED BY
ADIE FEIN &
WILL MIANECKI

AUGUST 2021–JANUARY 2022

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Page

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C. Should this Agreement be terminated the BLM may execute a new Memorandum of Agreement pursuant to 36 CFR 800.6 or Programmatic Agreement pursuant to 36 CFR 800.14(b); or request, take into account, and respond to the comments of the ACHP pursuant to 36 CFR 800.7. The BLM shall notify the Consulting Parties to this Agreement as to the course of action it will pursue.

XII. DURATION OF THE AGREEMENT

A. Unless this Agreement is terminated pursuant to Stipulation XI, this Agreement will remain in full force and effect for twenty (20) years from the date of its execution.

B. This Agreement will expire if the LUPA or the stipulations of this Agreement have not been initiated within five (5) years from the date of its execution. Prior to such time, the BLM will consult with the Consulting Parties on whether to extend this Agreement or reconsider the terms of this Agreement and amend it in accordance with Stipulation IX. The BLM shall notify the Consulting Parties as to the course of action it will pursue 90 days before the 5-year anniversary of the execution of this Agreement.

XIII. EFFECTIVE DATE

This Agreement will take effect on the date that it has been executed by the Signatories. This Agreement and any amendments thereto shall be executed in the following order: (1) BLM, (2) SHPO, and (3) ACHP.

Execution of this Agreement by the BLM, the SHPO, and the ACHP, and subsequent implementation of its terms, shall evidence that the BLM has taken into account the effects of the Undertaking on historic properties and that BLM has afforded the ACHP an opportunity to comment on the Undertaking and its effects on historic properties.

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1. The idea of ethical practice within the restraints of an unethical system actually sustains the unethical system.

2. Design discourse behaves parasitically towards all other forces.

INTRODUCTION

Queer Power considers how graphic design produces and polices identity. How does it authenticate dominant systems of knowledge and marginalize outside perspectives? How does it perpetuate stereotypes about gender, sexuality, or bodies? How does it facilitate the regulation of human life? And what—if anything—can graphic designers do to subvert these activities?

This volume proposes a theoretical framework in which graphic design acts as the infrastructure for networks of regulatory power. Graphic design is imagined as a site—a conduit—through which power operates to regulate material lives. Graphic design transmits normative values of behavior and desire, credentials legal operations, validates current social systems. While design is not the originating authority of regulatory power, it serves as the pathway for its transmission.

This work herein is concerned with the possibility of a progressive graphic design. Can visual communication subvert, trouble, or challenge the operation of regulatory power? Is it able to transmit radical concepts? Or does graphic design (in its role as infrastructure) inexorably reproduce and reinforce the dominant culture in which it operates?

Queer Power is ultimately pessimistic about the potential for graphic design to enact change in isolation. The work and analysis in this book instead suggests that graphic design must adopt extrinsic methods—activism, organizing, community outreach—in order to effect change.

GRAPHIC DESIGN AS INFRA-STRUCTURE

ADIE FEIN

DECEMBER 2021

Graphic design does more than transmit messages. It is a site of performance, a place where things happens. And these performances are enacted through ritual activity.

A ritual, very broadly, is an action that produces an effect through repetition. A sports team might repeat the same chant prior to a game to ensure success. Diet might be restricted during certain time periods to ensure bodily purity. Particular phrases are repeated when greeting others to maintain positive social relations. Rituals can also involve visual and design objects: mezuzahs affixed to doorways; tattoos marking significant life events; documents conferring ownership.

The ritual activity is a kind of performance. Contemporary analysis of "performance" comes from John L. Austin, who was interested in the ways that language can perform an act.[1] That is, how language can effect change. "The court is now in session" is a phrase that begins a legal proceeding, during which special behavioral rules, like silence or dress codes, are instantiated. Another example, saying "I resign" is all that you need to do to quit a job. The performance constitutes the act.

Perhaps the most conspicuous modern use of "performance" is in the theory of gender performance. Judith Butler extended Austin's idea, arguing that "gender" is enacted through performance.[2] Gender is identity constructed through repeated activity. The acts of wearing feminine clothing, cutting one's hair in a feminine way, speaking in a feminine manner—these constitute "woman." The performance constitutes the gender.

Many rituals familiar to present-day Americans are rooted in the ceremonial performance of language or repeated action. For example, "I now pronounce you man and wife" is a phrase that performs marriage; language enacts matrimony. However, within contemporary American society, many such rituals have been transposed from the sphere of bodily deeds (speech, physical actions) to the sphere of graphic design.

While in one sense a marriage ceremony enacts matrimony, in another sense the marriage certificate is what truly establishes a social union. That is, the application of writing to a physical document is the ritual performance. In another example, at the conclusion of their education, students attend a graduation ceremony and ritually shake hands with the university president. Ostensibly, this physical act signifies the completion of a person's education, and yet the institution may withhold the diploma until fines are repaid. This demonstrates that the designed object, the diploma, holds greater social significance. Graphic design not only transmits messages but also engages in performance. The graphic design object operates

1. J. L. Austin, How to do things with words, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.)

2. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (New York: Routledge, 1999.)

at a site through which marriage or graduation is enacted. Graphic design is a site of ritual performance.

Rituals are performances that effect change. They transform social reality. In the above example, graphic design objects enact such ritual effects, conferring status or constructing identity. Catherine Bell, a historian of ritual, writes, "It is through ritual practice that culture molds consciousness in terms of underlying structures and patterns. […] Ritual is a means to regulate and stabilize the life of this [social] system."[3] Therefore, we can understand graphic design to mold consciousness to reflect extant social structures. It regulates human life through ritual operations. Graphic design is an agent of regulatory power.

Ritual is both the expression and propagation of its social context. A culture produces a certain ritual because that ritual correlates with its beliefs. The continued execution of the ritual preserves and reinforces those beliefs. For example, in the United States, a person must typically sign a receipt when purchasing an item. The signature is an established ritual act that established a commitment or authenticates a transaction. The belief in the authority of the signatures is so strong, that is has been extended to modern, non-material uses, like electronic forms. In other words, belief in the ritual perpetuates it. The key concept here is that social belief both precedes and succeeds the ritual. The ritual is not the originator of the belief, but ritual does enact and sustain the cultural values that generated it.

This is true of graphic design, as well. The designed object is the expression and propagation of its social context, is preceded and succeeded by its social content. As such, graphic design (and ritual) operates as an infrastructure for power. Design does not originate the normative values that inform it, but graphic design does enact and sustain those values. Graphic design is the pathway by which power is transmitted. The designed object is the media by which matrimony is enacted or educational achievement is conferred. And graphic design is the contemporary mechanism for monetary transaction, for the commencement of violence, for gender confirmation, and more.

These are receipts, legal declarations of war, identification documents.

It may be tempting to believe that if graphic design is operative in the regulation of human life that, therefore, graphic designers are uniquely empowered to improve their communities. However, the intermediacy of the design object must be emphasized. The design object is generated in response to prior social conditions and received by those whose consciousness is already shaped in those "terms of underlying structures." The visual message is always operating within this complex

context. It is always in the middle but never centered. As such, the possibility of graphic design alone enacting radical change—subverting regulatory power—seems impossible.

Nevertheless, graphic designers can act toward change, and they all have an ethical responsibility to think about the representations, the metaphors, and the structures they perpetuate through design. Because ritual and graphic design is so deeply embedded into social contexts, it naturally follows that social relations are foundational to design's ability to influence. Therefore graphic designers should focus more on understanding, responding to, and shaping local communities in order to create meaningful change.

Visual communication can be progressive, but to make progress it must occur alongside community building, education, and activism.

3. Catherine Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79.

MONUMENTAL MARKERS

ADAM FEIN

OCTOBER 2020
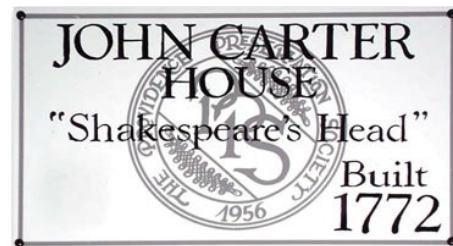
The Providence Preservation Society (PPS) operates a historic marker program, which affixes plaques to qualifying buildings.[1] To be eligible, buildings must be "at least 50 years old," conserve "the integrity of the original design", and be "well maintained."[2,3] The application is free, but the historic marker costs $325 after approval. The marker identifies the construction date and the building's original owner (after whom the building is typically identified, e.g. "Riley Brown House.") The historic marker is an "honorary recognition" for a building that "contributes in a positive way," according to the PPS.

The labeled mailbox stands as a visible contrast to the historic marker. In areas where historic homes are numerous, many of the residential buildings have been sub-divided into apartments. The buildings now host several mailboxes at street level. Typically, these mailboxes will feature the current residents' names, written on a slip of paper, a strip of masking tape, a post-it note. The notes are always hand-written, hastily applied, low-cost and impermanent.

These are two ways of labeling a building: the historic marker and the tenant marker; the plaque and the paper slip. The two indicate different identities: the tenant and owner; the present and the past; the living and the dead. And the two are materially very different: one is nearly free and the other is several days' wages; one is disposable and the other is enduring; one signifies dispossession and the other signifies inheritance. Both markers are drawn by hand—their only evident similarity—but even this reveals different values. The plaque is elaborate, decorative, and artisanal. The paper slip is plain, humble, and common. The hand drawing here demonstrates the values gap between block letters and calligraphy—a contrast in beauty, worth, and importance—which also reveals the power of graphic design to enforce political and social boundaries.

This comparison of the historic marker and the tenant marker reveals the political power of graphic design. Who and what does society value? Ornamentation and materiality reveal worth, not only material wealth but social esteem. The plaque and paper slip embody differing amounts of respect. But graphic design does more than signify and reflect social value, graphic design determines how and what one is capable of valuing.

The PPS states that the markers indicate "our unique architectural, historical, and cultural heritage." If true, then the markers also define the boundaries of our history and culture. The historic plaques date to the mid-

"Integrity" includes period-appropriate shutters, trim, and wall materials. Vinyl or aluminum siding will not be considered under any circumstances. Maintenance includes well-cared-for landscaping. Note that integrity and maintenance, according to PPS's guidelines, moves beyond conservatory and into aesthetic consideration.

The cost of the marker includes historical research fees and a PPS membership fee—one becomes a member of PPS by way of obtaining the historic marker.

It is important to not overemphasize the responsibility of graphic design. I do not believe that the historic markers interpellate people, that graphic design constructs subjects, that it enforces identity. However, it is clear here that the PPS is to blame, not the designer. And honestly what is the graphic designer supposed to do in this context? How can we subvert the historicizing activity?

JOHN CARTER HOUSE
"Shakespeare's Head"
Built 1772

1. "Historic Marker Program," Providence Preservation Society, ppsri.org, accessed April 16, 2022, ppsri.org/resources/markerprogram.

2. "Historic Marker Program: Guidelines & FAQ," Providence Preservation Society, ppsri.org, accessed April 16, 2022, ppsri.org/resources/markerprogram/markerguidelines.

3. Providence Preservation Society, "PPS Historic Property Marker Program: General Guidelines. Revision 2," (2013), 1.

1700s, and consequently the plaques authorize that time as the beginning of history. They define historic, make history public. A historic marker designates to the passerby that this house began on this date and obscure what came before. The plaques create limits on Providence, on Rhode Island, on an area of the Atlantic Ocean. They circumscribe the imaginary of space.

While the paper slips reflect the value of tenants, the plaques exclude those who existed before history from society entirely. Marc Augé writes in *Non-Places,* "Roads and crossroads in France thus tend to become 'monuments' (in the sense of testimonies and reminders) when the names they have been given immerse them in history."[4] The historic markers are a way of 'monumentizing' buildings, of concretizing them in history. In that way, the historic markers give voice *ex post facto* to the original buildings' owners; that is, they ratify the structure as an original owners' testimony. The historic markers preserve not buildings but legacies: they historicize people. Consequently, the historic markers obscure the testimonies of the pre-historical residents and present tenants.

Setting the boundaries of history is not an accidental function but the intentional activity of the historic markers. Christopher Reed writes, "Many histories presume identification with the culture under observation: continuities with the past are presented as tradition that explain, and often justify, the chroniclers present."[5] The historic markers, by exclusion, delineate the far-reaching "our" in "our unique architectural, historical, and cultural heritage." The markers exclude and obscures pre-historical residents because they do not align with values—and attendant power structures—of "our" heritage. Prehistory does not deserve remembrance, preservation, testimony because it does not justify the present.

But the historical markers go even further. The plaques also preserve the past-to-present chronology—our justified and established understanding of how the present came to be—in order to perpetuate the present and justify it into the future. The paper slip, the disposable marker adhered to mailboxes, is designed to exclude present residents from "our" future heritage. Who is the present for? Only for whomever will be remembered. Who cannot be remembered cannot offer testimony. And crucially this means that the owners, the landlords, the historical homes, all materialize the ephemera that established continuity between present and future. The historical markers make monuments for the future as a means to forget the lived present.

4. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction To An Anthropology Of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 2008), 69–70.

5. Christopher Reed, *Art And Homosexuality : A History Of Ideas* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

Maisy Meyer
162 Transit St.
Providence , RI
02906 unit 1F

Akhil Saxena
162 Transit St.
Providence, RI
02906 unit 1F

Joseph Vayalumkal
162 Transit St.
Providence, RI
02906 unit 1F

LUTHER PEARSON
HOUSE
1825

THE PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY
1956

LUIGI BUTERA
ARCHITECTUS
FECIT 1983-1987

MANIN CRESPIN
JANELLE CASTILLO
AMY WANG

3F

Built by
WILLIAM
CHURCH
1826

DE GROFF
TOHAN
COADY
STASSEN

1

THE PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY
1956
RILEY BROWN
HOUSE
1829-36

Yuvi Taylor
Kusarah English
Yengi Wang

RETURN TO SENDER

2

JOHN WARNER
HOUSE

Built
1798

1

3

CORNELIUS & ELLEN
DEASY
HOUSE

Built
1901

T. Morjah

Kyle Keli Gitam

JOHN
TRUMAN
HOUSE

C.   1802

1956

2

cece stewart

sally maeda

Built for
DANIEL PIERCE
1781

Converted 1850 as Lightning Splitter House

Matthew Pfeffer

2F

ALBERT STILLWELL
HOUSE

1847

B. CLIFFORD
SAM'L ALLIN
1811 — 1814

REBUILT 1836 BY EBEN WADE

2F

Built 1853

HIRAM S. READ
THOS G NORTHUP (REAR)

1837

LEBOT
NORMAND

2

J. K. SOLOMON

Built by
EDWARD
CARRINGTON
c.1830
Late 19th century additions

MELMOTH
Typeface as Archive of Regulatory Power

ADIE FEIN

DECEMBER 2021

Typefaces are archives. Other[1] designers[2] have preserved history by digitizing and contextualizing artifacts within the font file. "Melmoth"[3] iterates on this idea: It collects varied documents from the life of Oscar Wilde into a single design object in order to visualize a network of regulatory power—and to subvert it.

Oscar Wilde was a significant English author from the end of the 20th century, who was imprisoned for gross indecency—that is, homosexual acts. The capitals of "Melmoth" assemble letters from the documents that regulated Oscar Wilde's life. The W, for example, derives from the Labouchere Amendment, *which is the law that made gross indecency illegal in Britain.* Together, the capitals bring together all of the moments in which the state exercised control over homosexuals—they visualize that network of power that ultimately killed Wilde. The forms taken directly from the graphic design objects that facilitated that exercise of power. If we saw these documents as material objects, perhaps in an exhibition, they would remain individual. As a typeface we see these documents and the power they represent operate together, as an assemblage.

The lowercase letters are taken from Wilde's private correspondence. Where the capitals illustrate public control, the lowercase embodies Wilde's private life. This creates two registers within the font. And to reclaim Wilde from the law, we can use OpenType features to set words in one or another register. "Bosie," the pet name for Wilde's lover, "queer" or "desire" can be restricted to the personal, private register.

The typeface is presented via a microsite, where users encounter love letters from Wilde, are prompted to write their own love letters, and can navigatie around the site to see other letters that people have written.

See the project in motion at ajfein.com/melmoth

1. Nat Pyper, *Queer Year of Love Letters,* Fonts, 2018, (Library Stack), librarystack.org/queer-year-of-love-letters.

2. Be Oakley, *Protest Fonts,* Fonts, *2017–2021 ,(Gender-Fail),* genderfailpress.com/protest-fonts.html.

3. Melmoth is the alias that Oscar Wilde used after serving his prison sentence for gross indecency.

Font & Documents

Melmoth is derived from the documents that exercised control over Oscar Wilde's public life and the correspondence that represented his private life, desires, and thinking. The following pages display some of those documents alongside the letters that make up Melmoth.

THE
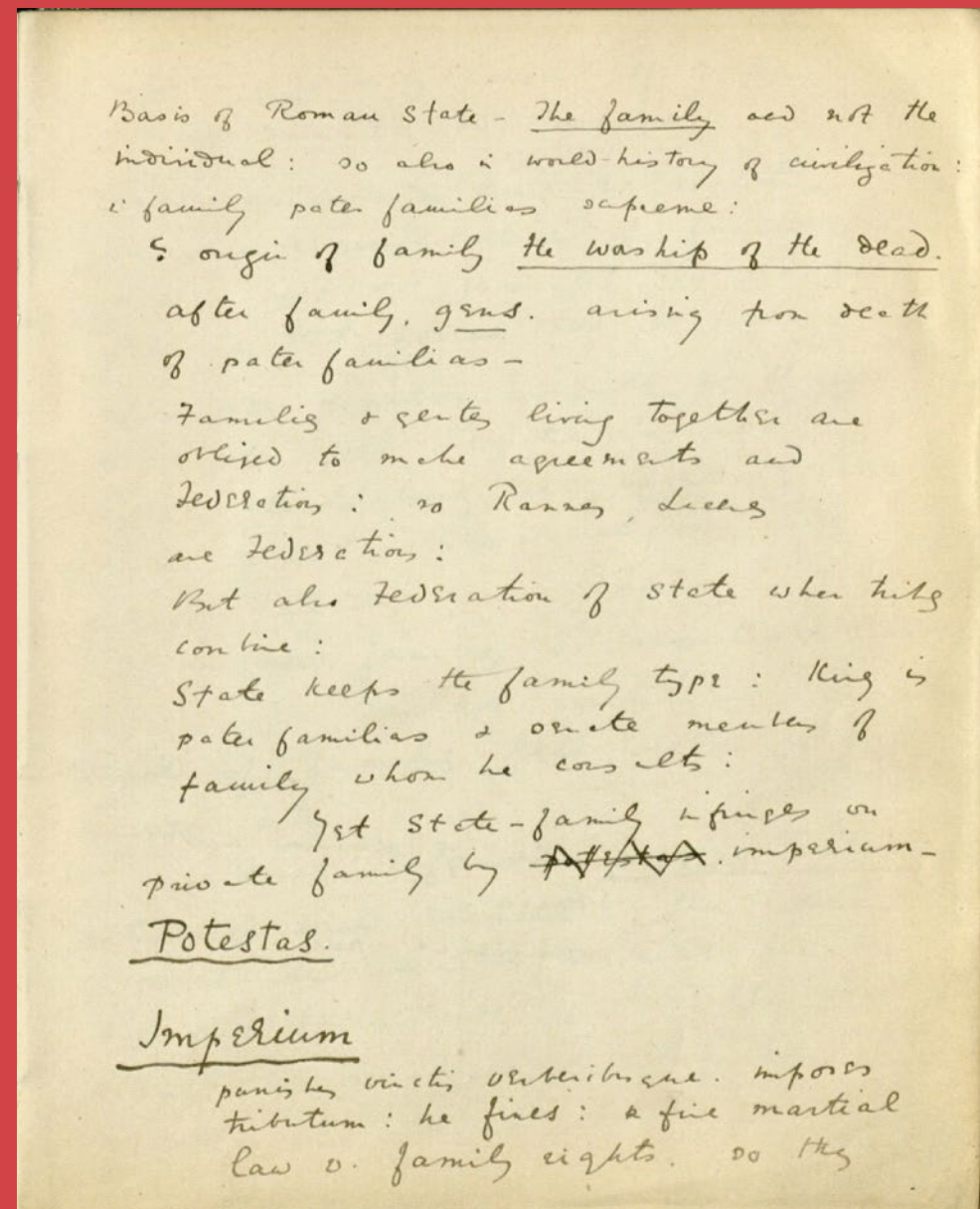
CRIMINAL LAW AMENDMENT ACT,

1885:

WITH INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY AND
FORMS OF INDICTMENTS,

BY

R. W. BURNIE,

OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE, BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

2/6

LONDON:
WATERLOW & SONS LIMITED, LONDON WALL.
1886.
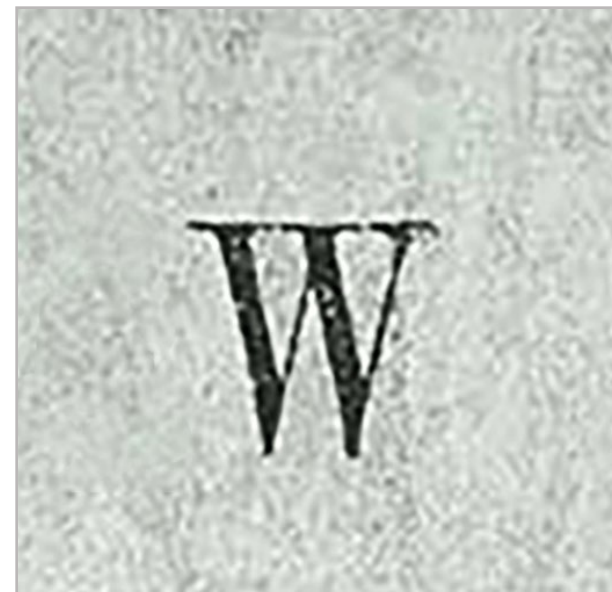
ABOVE The uppercase W of Melmoth is taken from the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, commonly known as the Labouchere Amendment. Section 11 of the act made "gross indecency" a crime in the United Kingdom. Oscar Wilde was convicted under Section 11 and sentenced to two years' hard labor.

NEXT PAGE Items clockwise from top left: Oscar Wilde's final bill for the hotel in which he died; an envelope containing evidence used against Wilde in his trial for gross indecency; receipt for flowers; Wilde's death certificate.

ABOVE Wilde had a very distinctive lowercase f. This example is taken from a page of Wilde's notebook, where he ponders the role of the political state.

NEXT PAGE Items clockwise from top left: a poem fragment; correspondence on stationary for *The Woman's World*, an early women's publication that Wilde edited; a personality quiz complete by Wilde while he was an undergraduate; a poem fragment.

IMPROPER

DEVIANT

SODOMITE

UNNATURAL

INDECENT

DESIRE

OSCAR

ROSIE

heart

grief

Microsite

The type specimen for Melmoth took the form of a micro website. There, users could read Wilde's love letters, write their own, and view the letters other users had composed.
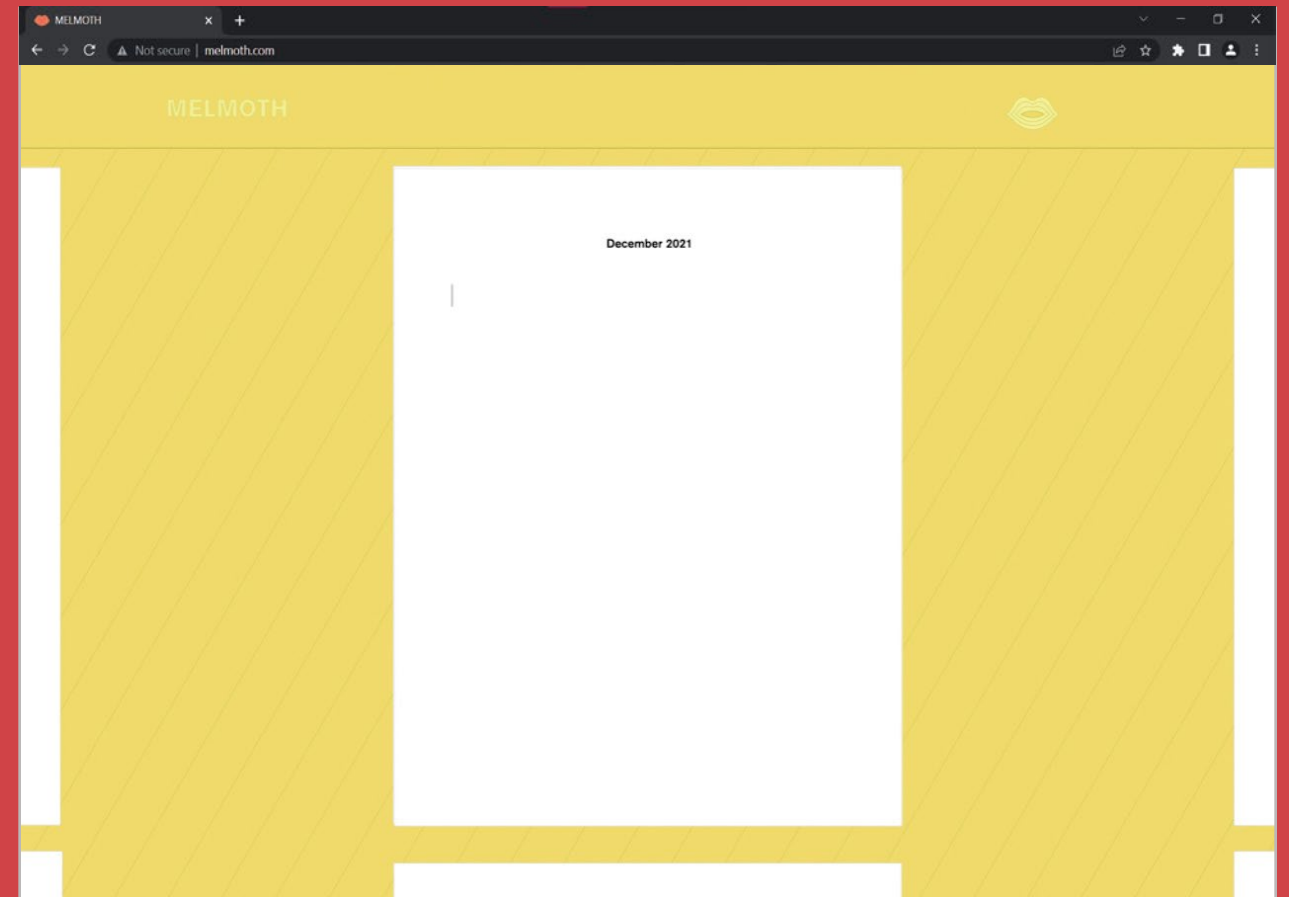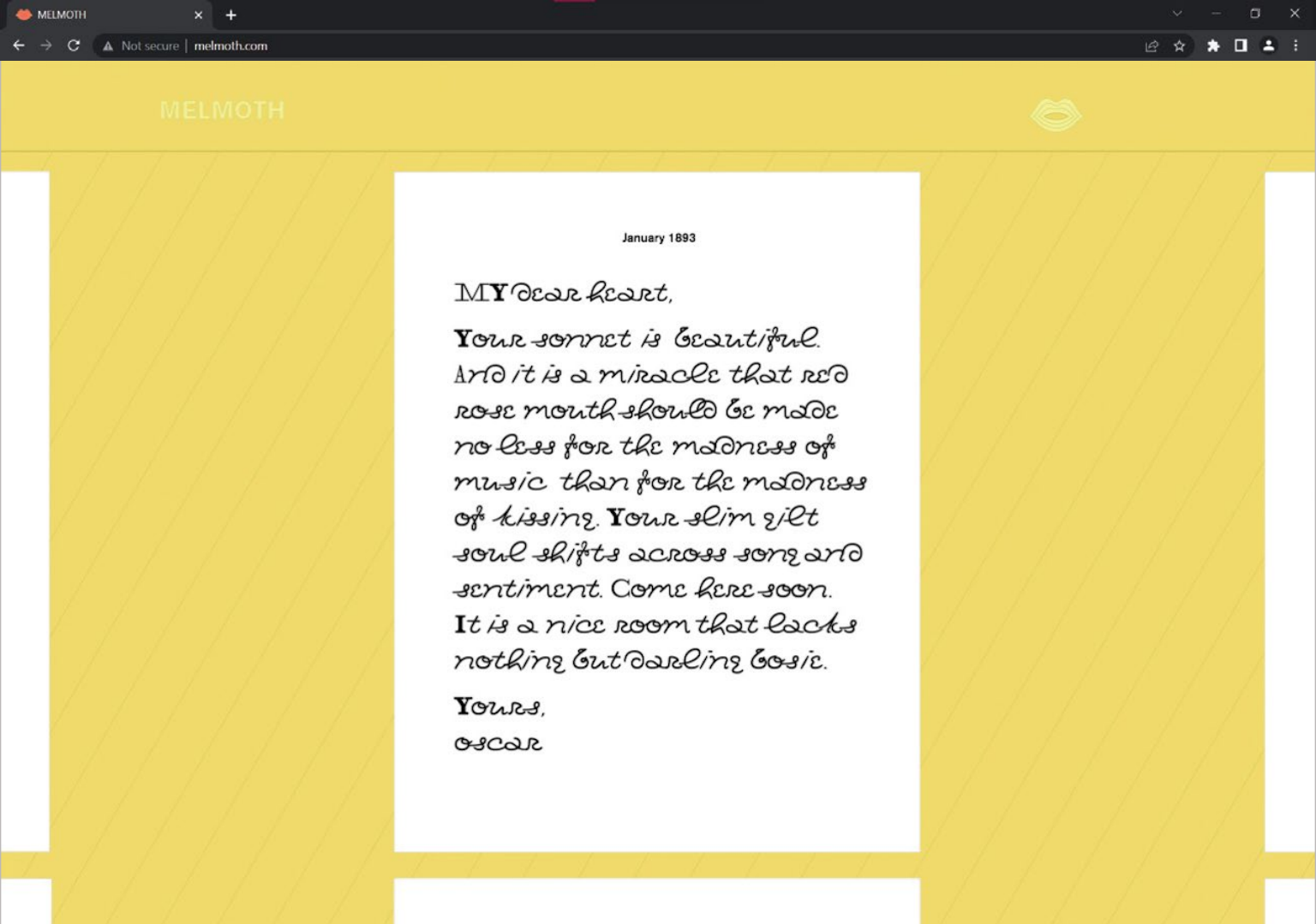
ABOVE The landing page for the "Melmoth" specimen microsite.
Visitors encounter a letter from Oscar Wilde upon site load, one
that was used in evidence at his trial.

OPPOSITE Wilde's letter moves off screen, a fresh page is provided,
and visitors are then prompted to complete their own love letter.
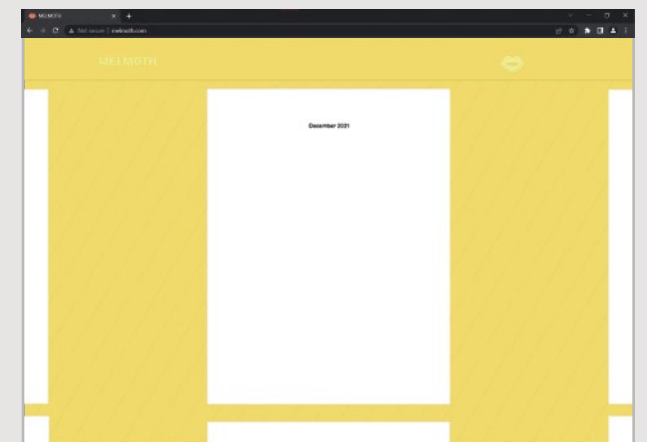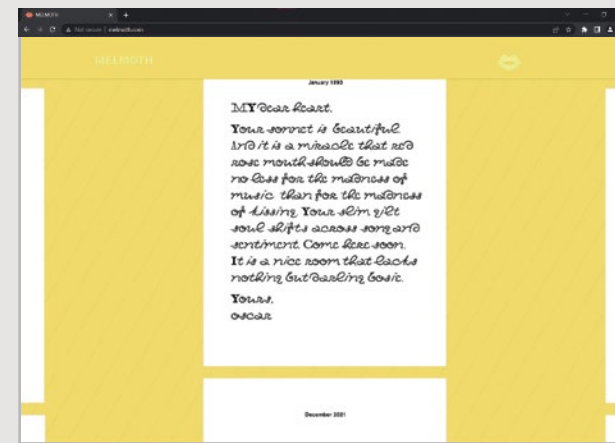
A completed letter is 'mailed,' archived on the website for future visitors to read. Then a new blank letter is supplied for the visitor.
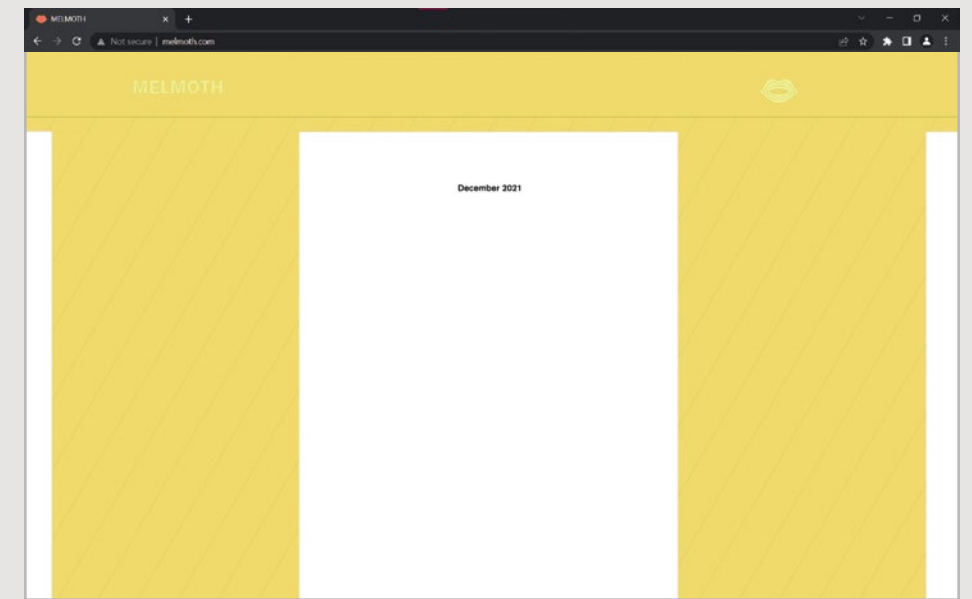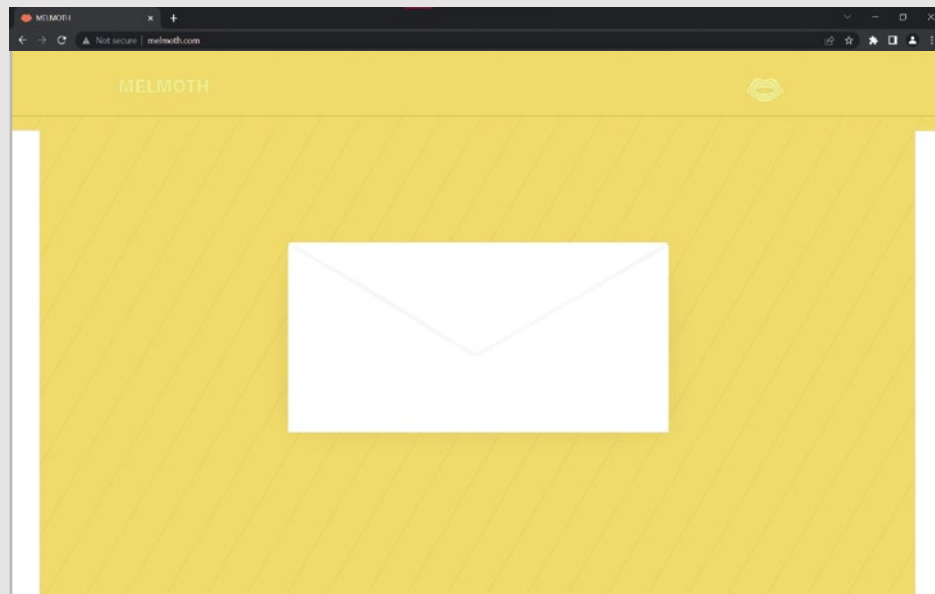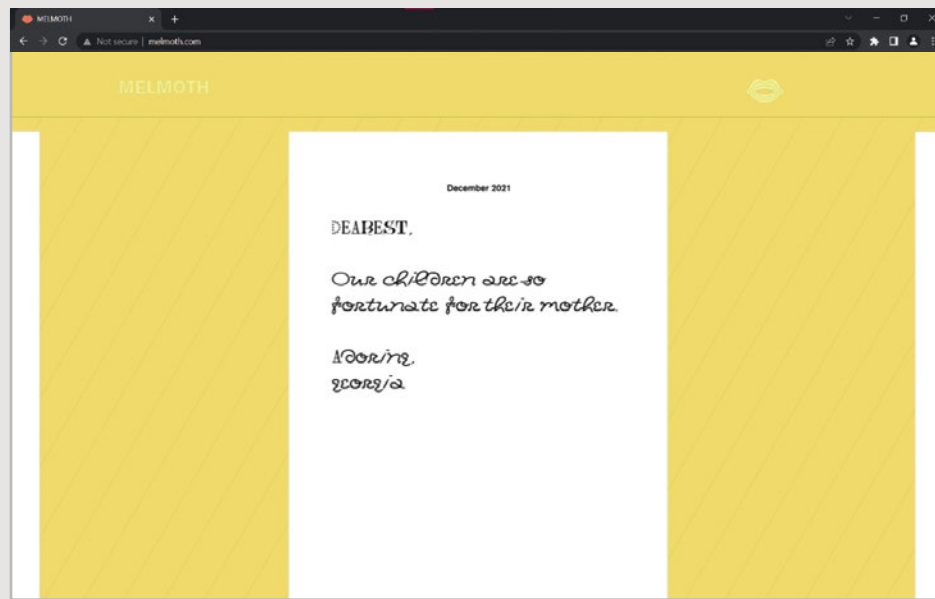
Visitors can scroll horizontally, across columns, to reveal letters previously 'sent' by other visitors.
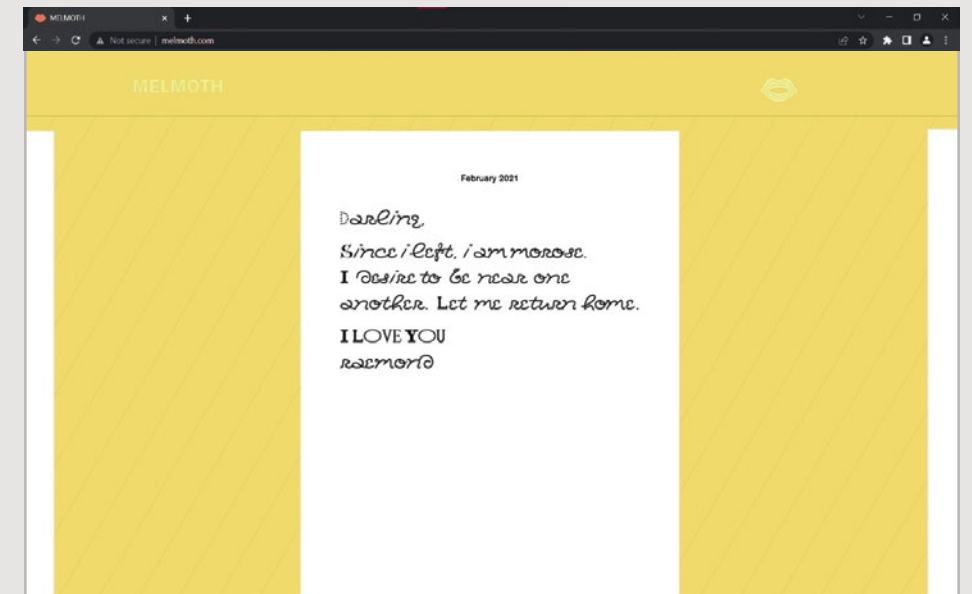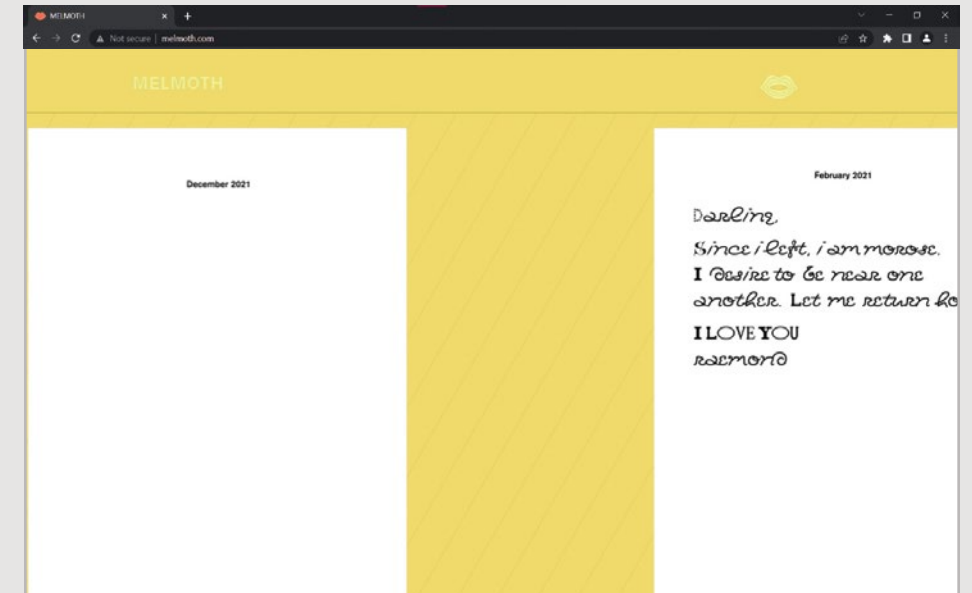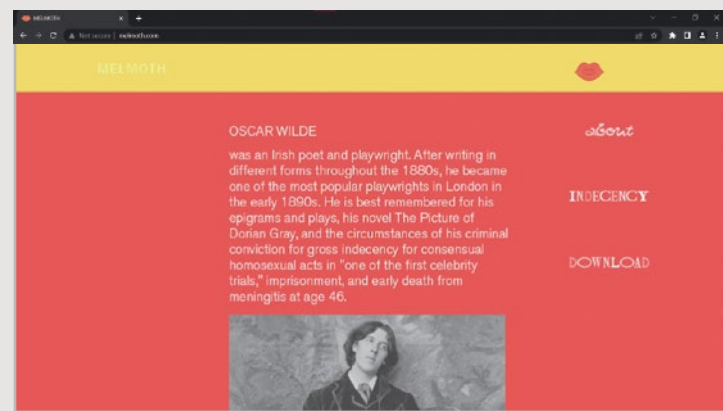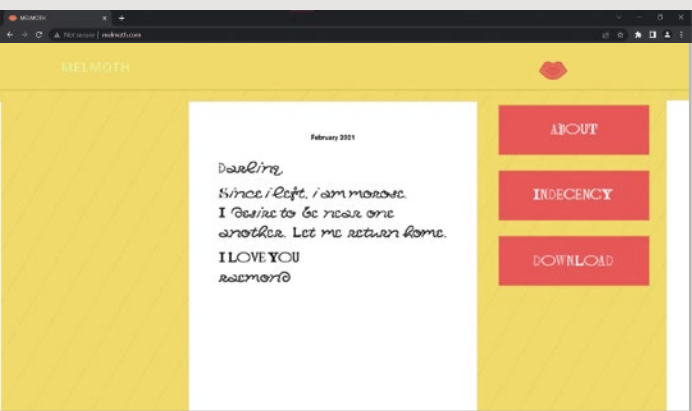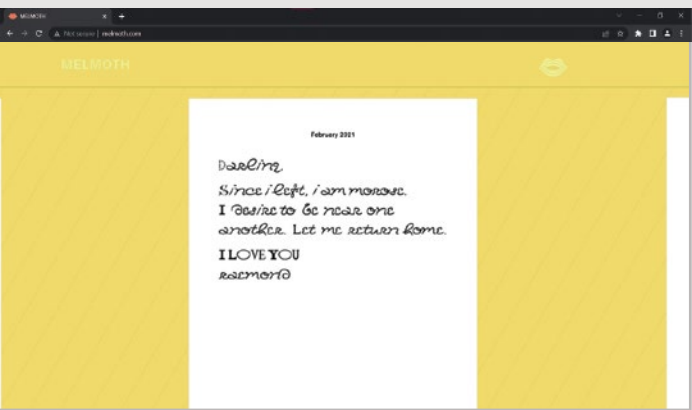
The menu is accessed through the lips icons.
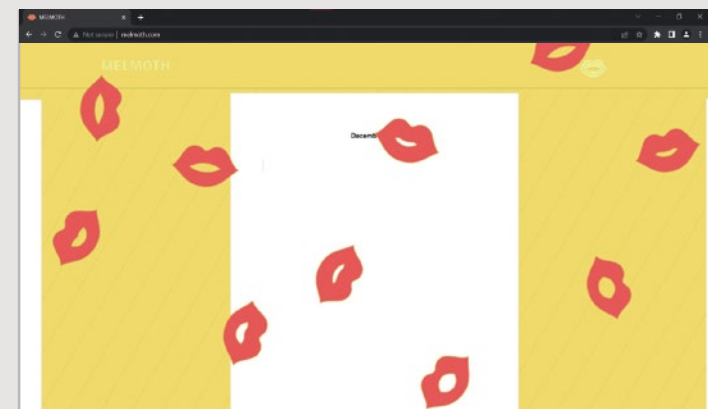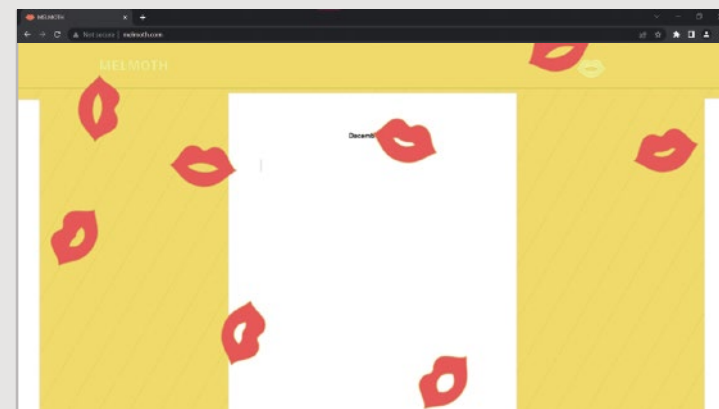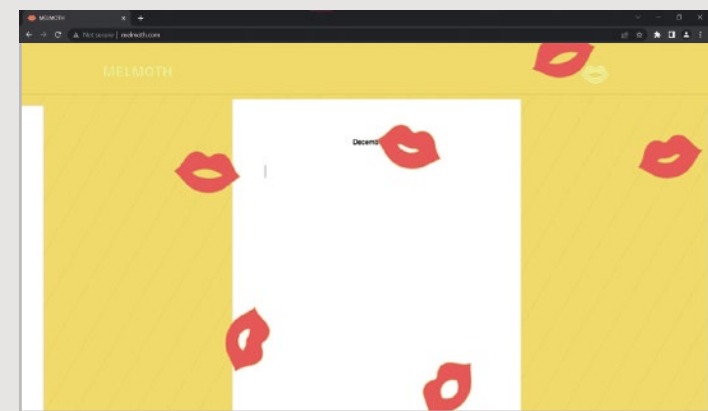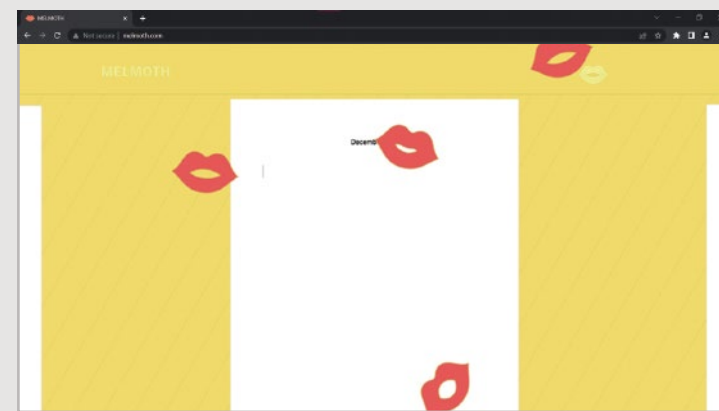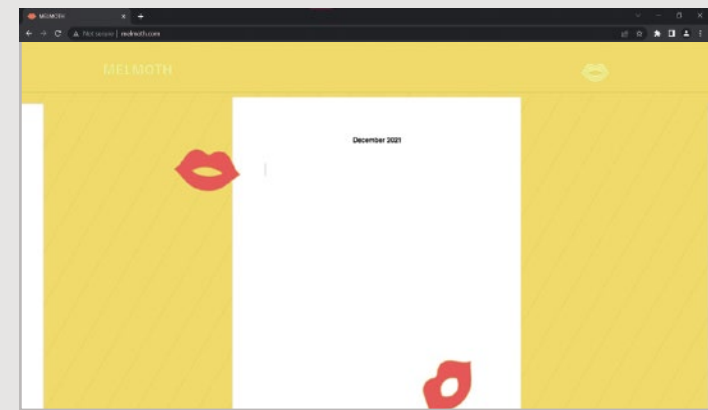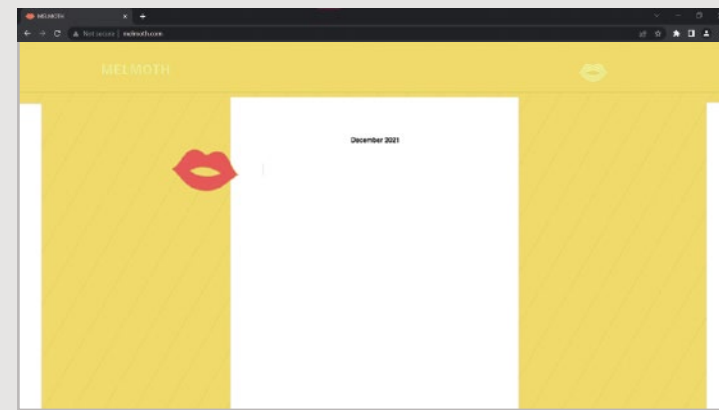
The website fills with kisses on idle, a reference to the lipstick kisses that visitors would leave on Oscar Wilde's tomb.

BETWEEN LIGHTS

Graphic Design as Enforced Vision

ADAM FEIN

MAY 2021

Views make together. I see not alone.

Your eyes are made of sensitive geometries: cones and rods and lines that spark up when struck by certain lights. Different geometries respond to different wavelengths of lights, to the different speeds at which light travels. Short-wavelengths (fast lights) are generally perceived as cool colors, violets and blues, while long-wavelengths (slow lights) are generally perceived as warm colors, oranges and red.

The long-wavelength cones of my eyes are misshapen. They are too alike the other cones; my geomettries are too similar. Technically, this means my vision is less sensitive to long-wavelengths. But I'll tell you my eyes slow light. You likely know this as red-green color blindness. Medical literature has termed this color defective or color deficient. I have come to regard my state, instead, as visual solitude.

I see color. I see as many colors as you. My relationship with color is not one of absence but of confusion. At times blue and pink are indistinguishable, and sometimes red and brown. The colors are there, wherever, in me, perceived—but often perceived as one another. The borders between hues are diffuse; juxtaposed, they loose amid themselves. Colors slip across categories, being illegible and then legible, while nevertheless always being watched.

This is no lack. It is not that I do not see light, but that I cannot see between lights. If anything, I am too receptive. Light overflows and haunts my vision, a spectral jouissance superseding the boundaries of hues. It is confusion as sensuous anarchy and as transitory unseeing. Medicine calls this poor hue-discrimination.

Whenever my vision gets messy—orange and green interfuse—I ask someone, what color is this? I point to the shade of nail polish, is this orange or green? I always see what I am seeing; I know when I cannot discriminate between these hues. When someone provides an answer, it is orange, my vision snaps into order. Immediately, like a camera racking focus, the nail polish is orange, was always orange.

My color blindness solely occurs in solitude. Only alone, without another to name the hue, only as an individual, I am defective. But with a confederate nearby, I can always see what other see, what I am meant to see. The spectral hues dissipate when the color is named. The effect is a material reconstruction of my body: my eyes, my cones, my brains enter into alignment with the affirmed color. It is a violent enforcement of a specific view.

I have even seen "victims of colorblindness" in some academic articles.

This is my disclaimer that this is a personal essay. It is about how I see, how sight is constructed, and how even phenomenal experiences are not natural. I cannot speak for all color blind people. And I certainly cannot not speak for folks with low-vision or blindness. These peoples' lived experiences may differ from my own.

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* This text was originally published in "Marginalia." See *Queer Things,* page 40.

1. *Merriam-Webster* defines misshapen as follows "One, having an ugly or deformed shape. Two, morally or intellectually deformed or distorted." One cannot separate beauty from ideas of the 'natural.' My sight is corrupted; my eyes monstrous. See the cards: Monster, Nature, Beauty.

This footnote references the structure of Marginalia, which included card alongside the book. I did not reprint the cards or their text here.

It occurs to me now—after so many cycles of confusion, naming, and seeing—that this is how all vision operates, how each person sees. All colors are light collectively interpreted. All seeing is social.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Today it is commonly accepted that beauty is constructed: not only fashion but the body's desirable weight, complexion, and proportionality change across cultures and epochs. Such genealogies illustrate that the appraisal of perceived objects is not analytical but socially constructed. You do not arrive at preferences through intellectual analysis: evaluation precedes deliberation.

However, color blindness reveals that cultural influence occurs prior even to the appraisal of the perceived objects—reveals that the act of perceiving, vision itself, is socially constructed. Not only what we see but how we see is social. Whether or not I can see orange or green depends on others' vision and on social enforcement. The cultural understanding of color precedes the perception of the color.

My experiences of seeing with color blindness are atypical, but they disclose a universal truth about sight: there are alternative readings of factical objects. Orange may be green. Purple can simultaneously be pink. In colorblind vision, there is a different truth in each eye. Binaries compound. Truth is duplex. Objects become ambiguous, simultaneous, transitory, oscillatory.

Graphic design is a methodology of controlling seeing. It orders messy visions. Hierarchy, legibility, sequence and other foundational concerns of graphic design are about controlling the movement of the eye: how the textual page is read; how the website is navigated; how mapped locations are found. And further, beyond movement, graphic design controls and edits seeing: how is a photograph understood; what meanings are apposed; what is visually perceptible; what is outside the frame of the page.[3]

Art is the means by which we visual contest the values. Graphic design as a field is concerned with the visual enactment of those values. Readability is partially influenced by familiarity, using an unusual font means the text is read slowly. Navigation of web pages depends on social agreement on the meaning of iconography, replacing a hamburger button with an

At least among academics.

Of course, I am overstating. Reflective deliberation can change one's judgments. You can change your behavior through effort and exposure, including your seemingly innate tastes and preferences.

Misshapen L-cones is physical. Red-green color blindness is social.

Using modernist terms to make postmodern points. Know, dear reader, I use this term unhappily.

I am construing art broadly here. Further, I do not limit art to this function. Art can be understood also as, say, decoration or as research into optics.

emoji means the user cannot locate navigation menus. Further still, we see graphic design materialize, naturalize, and make public categories of identity—through the U.S. census, driver's licenses, restroom signage, blue and pink wage infographics.

Everywhere, graphic designers are engaged in the banal maintenance of society. The functioning of graphic design depends upon the conservation of historical meanings and behavior. As such, graphic design is invested in the reproduction of existing social conditions. To dispute those conditions, the graphic designer must produce 'bad' graphic design (or, unthinkably worse, become an artist.)

Enforcement and disputation are not the only options. These actions suggest graphic designers have too much power and that they act individually. Every account must be aware of the material and social conditions that capture us: the economic demands, the social entanglements, the cultural expectations. Any individual cannot change a culture, and any individual may not be capable of surviving disputation. Furthermore, graphic designers, as social enactor of vision, cannot operate outside of society. Every person is constituted by others and acts through, by, alongside, and with others.

Rather than support or substitute totalizing categories, Graphic design ought to embrace the art of color blindness. In my experience, color blindness is the ability to admit polarized extremities into shared space, the ability to envision multiplicity simultaneously. Graphic designers can practice color blindness through the cultivation of ambiguity. I have explored the unspecified gender marker in my work as one such site of ambiguity.[4] The 'X' marker on legal documentation does not represent anything but instead hosts multiple and contradictory meanings. Cis and trans*, men and women, and those outside, between, and within these binaries are received the same by the 'X' markers. Unspecified markers and color blindness offers a way of unseeing, of refusing a final naming.

The art of color blindness prompts critical and social reengagement with categories. The graphic designer refuses to enforce the category, and so local communities—the users of an airport bathroom, new friends navigating to an

Other fields are involved in the enforcement of values. Graphic design is entangled in a vast system of containerization: quantification, reduction, marginalization. Policy and economics do the same. Graphic design uniquely is concerned with visual enforcement and the disciplining of vision. Other creative practices are complementary, like industrial design with the regulation of the body (read: the aggregate body as a system including its extensions).

I do want to be careful with my use of "banal." I am making a reference to Hannah Arendt famous term "the banality of evil" from *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* Arendt sought to understand how the holocaust, perhaps the most evil event in human history, could possibly occur. To be clear: I am not making a holocaust comparison; I am not offering moral equivocations between graphic designers and Nazis; and I am not diminishing the moral evil of the holocaust. However, the banality of evil has always been a useful framework for me. Arendt argues that evil does not exclusively or even mostly occur through malicious actors; rather evil is the everyday, uncritical—even unintended—implementation of policy. Evil is not usually exceptional and striking. Evil is office work. I maintain that the office work of graphic design is not exempt. (Again, I am only saying graphic design can cause harm. I am not making claims about the magnitude of that harm or the relative harmfulness of other actions.)

The everyday person is not responsible for reproducing the social categories. The graphic designer is, in some ways, ceding authority and so making another responsible.

2. Arthur Marwick, *A History of Human Beauty* (Hambledon & London, 2004).

3. Thanks to Will Mianecki. For more discussion on, see his thesis, *Jettisoning The Frame: Strategies For Designing At The Threshold.*

4. See "Gender Tools," in *Queer Spaces,* page 60.

5. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

unfamiliar house for dinner—must reflect upon expectations and negotiate acceptable behavior. When graphic design presents ambiguous objects, the person is not directed. This opens the world to alternative use, allows outsider knowledge.

The following essays look at three colors: pink, purple, and green. These colors are meaningful to me. These colors have confused my sight and have confused me. They represent my personal histories, values, identities. These are colors that have been contested by different groups, peoples, and cultures; and whose sense has drifted over time, masculine to feminine, marginal to mainstream, good to bad. The following essays will show how color is socially constructed. My hope is that be recognizing the social construction of visual categories—things that seem wholly natural—graphic designer recognizes these categories as unsettled and therefore already available to ambiguation. Pink, purple, and green are not prior to sight. They do not exist without an interpreter, and the interpretation is social.

Hues are never seen alone.

In practice, this may mean that the person falls back to the familiar. I have been refusing pronouns for a long time as a kind of political practice. This is intended to allow cis people a free encounter with gender. They can use whatever pronouns. I authorize their play. However, after a few days of ambiguity and uncertainty, people often revert to using he/him pronouns—the banal choice. I do not see this as a failure because it does and has forced cis people into deliberation over gender.

I exclusively use They/Them pronouns now. They still invoke ambiguity.[7] As I have become trans-ier, the danger of that ambiguity has begun to assert itself more strongly. When I get catcalled on the street, for example, the ambiguity is potentially admitting violence. (Of course, the answer is not for me to become less ambiguous in my presentation or identification.

Again, this final paragraph (ie the following essays) reference the original book, Marginalia. I choose not to re-edit the text for presentation in this format in order to emphasize the lack of coherence in my design practice — and in everyone's practice, and in everyone's life.

6. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," (1892), 6.

7. For further discussion on this point, see "Gender Tools," in *Queer Space,* page 60.
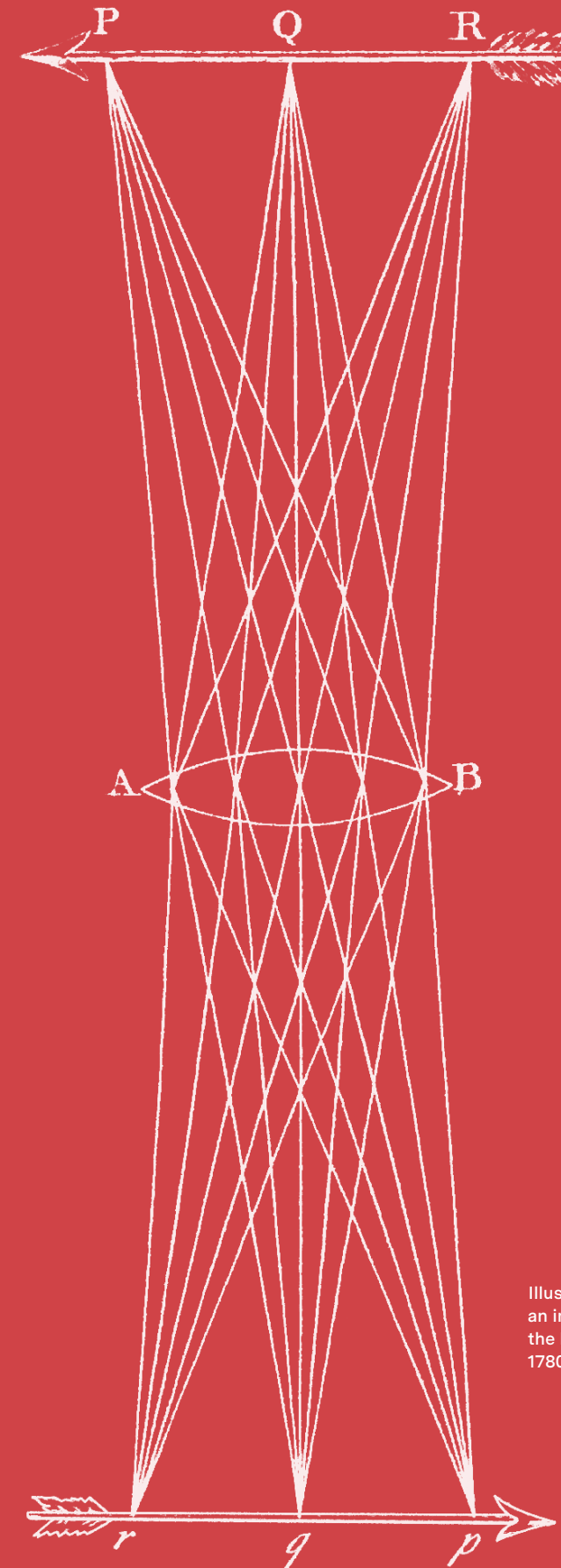
Illustration of how the eye turns an object into an image, from "A Treatise on the Diseases of the Eye and their Remedies," George Chandler, 1780.

GENDER TYPING

How Design And Typography Reproduce Gender Stereotypes

ADAM FEIN

FEBRUARY 2021

"Gender Typing" is an ongoing research project that collects investigations on gender and typography into a publication. The research has taken multiple forms. There were three questionnaires, with over 100 respondents from across the United States, that sought to identify the formal features that people associate with "masculine" or "feminine" typography, as well as the qualities that people attribute to those fonts. Surveys sought to find evidence of material consequences of gendering typography, including their use by professional organizations representing gender-segregated occupations. The publication also contains a visual archive of feminist publications to represent how women have expressed feminity through typography from 1693 to 2021.

Ultimately, the project seeks to explain to designers how and why fonts are gendered and how bias can be expressed through typography. "Gender Typing" argues that graphic design is capable of reproducing gender stereotypes and enforcing identity categories. By making the operation of gender in type visible, it seeks to help designers subvert its use.

Trim size is 8×10".

Digital, Linear, Coder-bro

Most typewriter-like fonts look masculine to me.
Possible associations: Programming and tech
culture, Kerouac, Clark Kent, Tom Hanks.

Aglet
Slab

The slab serifs and
geometric qualities are
why I chose Masculine.

Bold, Thick,
Careless

Analytical, Dependable, Frank

Masculine
as rated by participants

One questionnaire asked respondents to describe the displayed
font and, optionally, to explain the motivation for the description.
The results were striking: One, the descriptions were different for
masculine and feminine fonts; Two, the descriptions mapped onto
American gender stereotypes. Masculine fonts were described as
"knowledgeable," "assertive," "rational," and "scientific." Feminine
fonts were "friendly," "elegant," "cute," and "warm."

Makes me think of old
wrinkled men in togas

Bookish, Conservative, Autumnal

Certain,
Straight,
Stoic

Direct, Scientific, Knowledgeable

Sturdy,
Classy,
Intellectual

Mrs.

I see this as a historical
typeface. And, historically,
men were more involved as
publishers, type designers;
so I see this as masculine.

Eaves

Masculine
as rated by participants

Makes me think of old
wrinkled men in togas

Bookish, Conservative, Autumnal

Certain,
Straight,
Stoic

Direct, Scientific, Knowledgeable

Sturdy,
Classy,
Intellectual

Mrs.

Eaves

I see this as a historical
typeface. And, historically,
men were more involved as
publishers, type designers;
so I see this as masculine.

Masculine
as rated by participants

Ernestine

"FF Ernestine was born from the search for a versatile monoline text typeface that would feel warm, but also serious; slightly feminine, but not too swirly-girly; charming, yet sturdy."
—ErnestineFont.com

Percent of respondents who iclassified this font as

Feminine 28%
Masculine 72%

One questionnaire asked respondents to categorize fonts as either "masculine" or "feminine." In addition to the ratio, these pages also re-print descriptions of the fonts written by the designers that use gendered language. For example, Nina Stössinger describes Ernestine as "slightly feminine, but not too swirly-girly."

I am thinking in order to continue this project I need to team up with a social scientis to legit pursue this research. I do not want to perpetuate problematic ideas about gender and typography by performing un informed research.

Lust Script

"Sexy as the flowing curves of a woman's body. [...] Its lots of contrast, almost demure, coy contrast mixed with the flowing curves of a woman's body, incomplete, almost teasing ball terminals, and serifs that went on forever..."—FontMatters.com

"The font wants to be treated like a lady."—WeTheColor.com

Percent of respondents who iclassified this font as

Feminine 91%
Masculine 09%

75   Gender Typing

Sofia Liza

Maryam *Allyson*

Abel Oswald

Anton Davis

One survey reviewed every script and sans serif font on Adobe Fonts and Google Fonts, nearly 1,250 fonts in total. The survey was looking for fonts with gendered names. 63 sans serif and 46 script fonts with gendered names were found in total. Sans serif fonts were significantly more likely to have masculine names, and scripts were much more likely to have feminine names.

OPPOSITE Sofia by LatinoType. Liza by Underware. Maryam designed by Ricardo Esteves Gomes and published by Outras Fontes. Allyson designed by Paul D. Hunt and published by P22 Type Foundry.

ABOVE Abel by MADType. Oswald and Anton by Vernon Adams (Oswald is likely the most used font with a human name.) Davis Designed by Patrick Griffin and published by Canada Type.

Institute of Carpenters

CARPENTERS

ABNS

Even if fonts are gendered, does it matter? This survey sought to identify material consequences for gendering fonts. 10 occupational fields with extremely gender segregation in the U.S. were identified. Over 80% of the workers in each field were represented by one gender. The typography and logos for professional organization representing those fields were surveyed.

Occupational fields composed largely of women, like nursing, used "feminine fonts" on their websites. Fields composed largely of men, like carpentry, used "masculine fonts." The logos also demonstrated gender differentiation.

OPPOSITE The Institute of Carpenters logo, which uses the sans-serif Bellesa, featuring "masculine" features like geometric and sharp finials; and The National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) logo, which uses a custom geometric lettering, with "feminine" features like highly-rounded shapes.

ABOVE Logos for the Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters and the American the Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS). Even when using neo-grotesques, typographic logos typically demonstrate strong visual gender differentiation. Here we see contrast in weight and width.

The final section of "Gender Typing" collects feminist publications. These works are actively involved in the construction of the identity of women. Many sought to locate 'actual' women behind the gender stereotypes, hidden "suffocating somewhere beneath the caked layers of Softique and Jergen's lotion."[1]

Others sought to revolutionize women's identities, redefining them as voter, worker, artist. Each publication had to visually represent those identities and political goals. This collection attends to the nameplates or mastheads of feminist publications, the typographic titles that graphically define the publication. The typography in this collection reveals who women are and how they want to be seen.

1. Anne Bennett et al. *Big Mama Rag.* 1973.

The Female Tatler
1709–10

The Lady's Curiosity
1738–38
The English Woman's Journal
1858–64

Godey's Lady's Book
1830–78
Women's Suffrage Journal
1870–1890
Nylænde
1887–1927

The Lily
1849–53
The Una
1852–55
The Revolution
1868–1872

Shafts
1892–1899
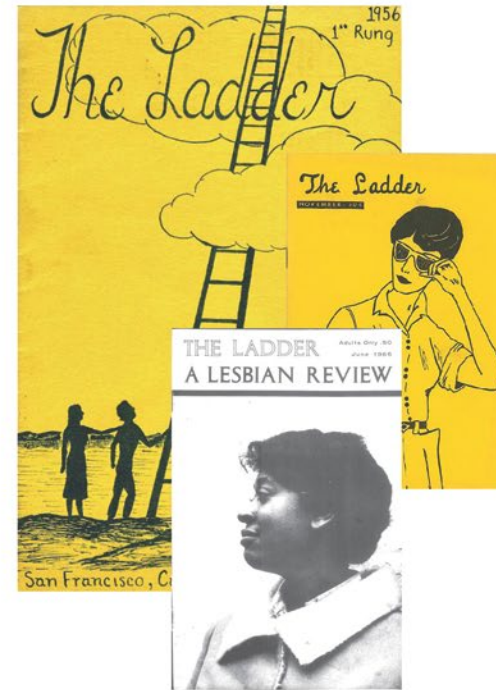
The Ladder
1956–72
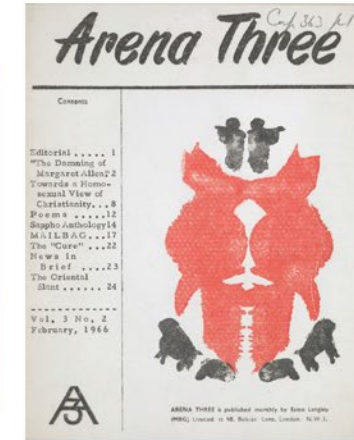
Arena Three
1963–1972
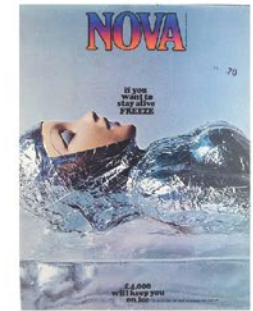
Nova
1965–1975

Aphra
1969–76
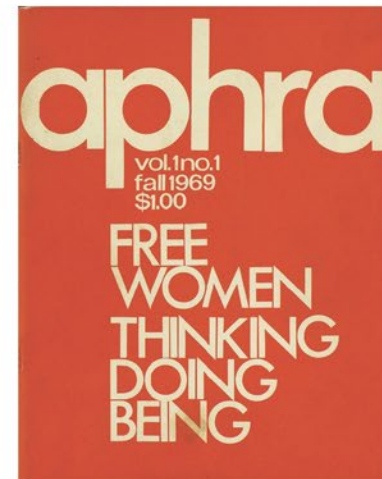
No More Fun And Games
1968–73

Off Our Backs
1970–2008
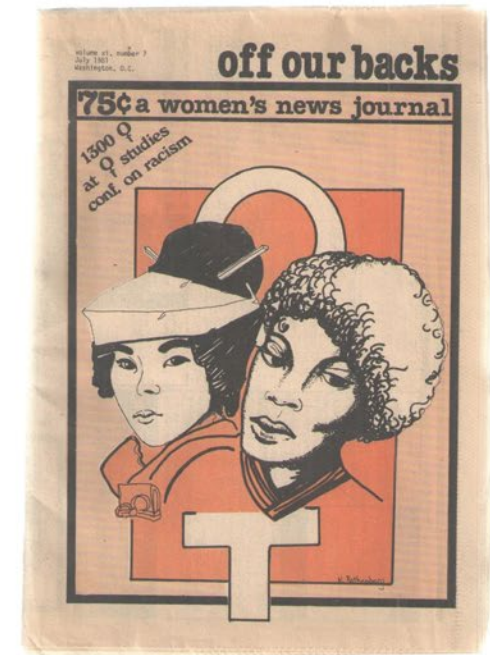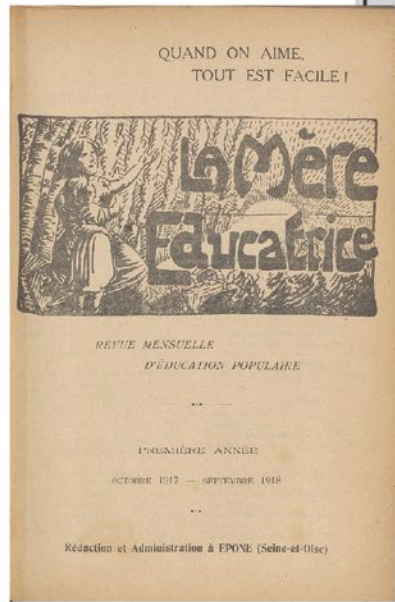
La Mère Educatrice
1917–1939
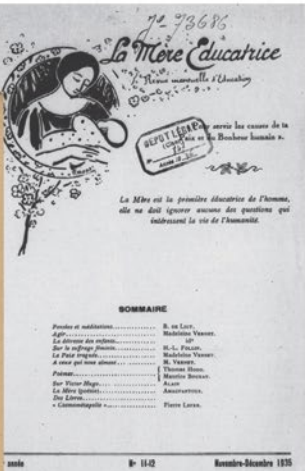
Time and Tide
1920–1979
[Document shown is a 2020 recreation of the original 1920 design.]
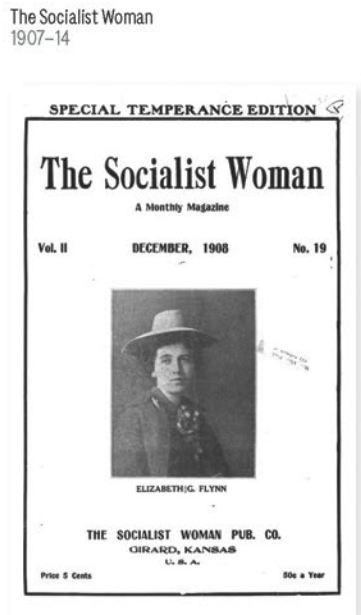
The Socialist Woman
1907–14
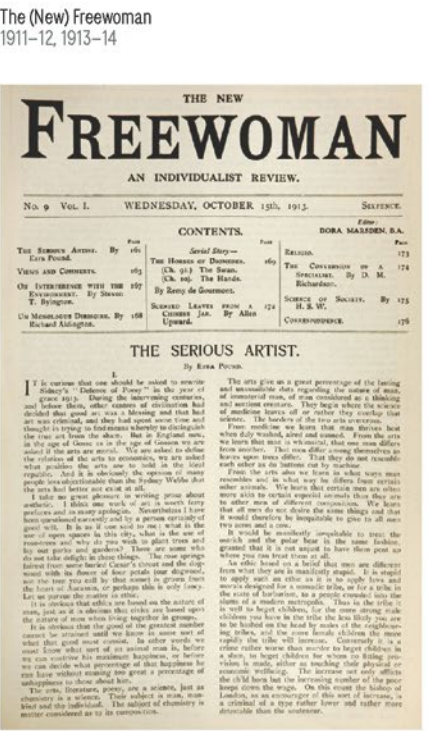
The (New) Freewoman
1911–12, 1913–14

Tidevarvet
1923–1936

Red Rag
1972–1980
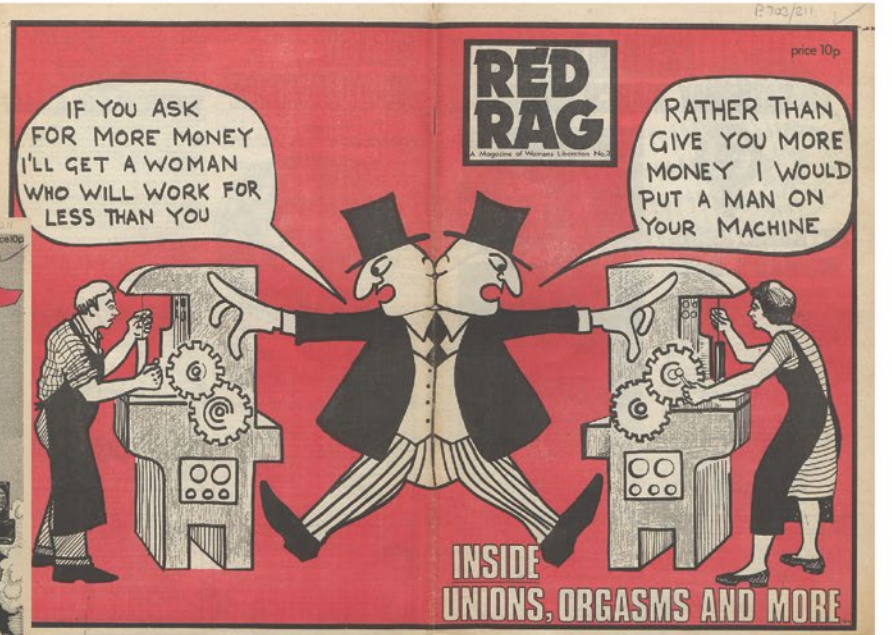
The Feminist Art Journal
1972–1977
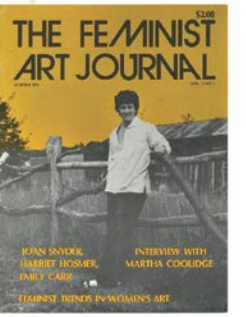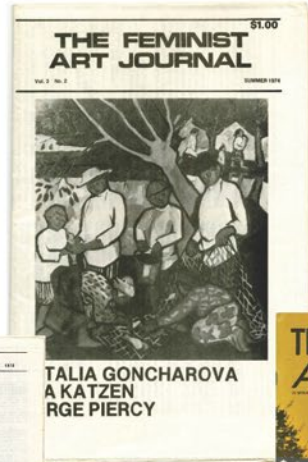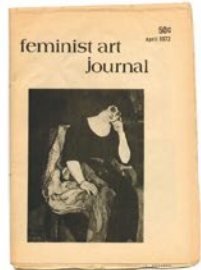
Spare Rib
1972–1993

Women's Press
1972–1981
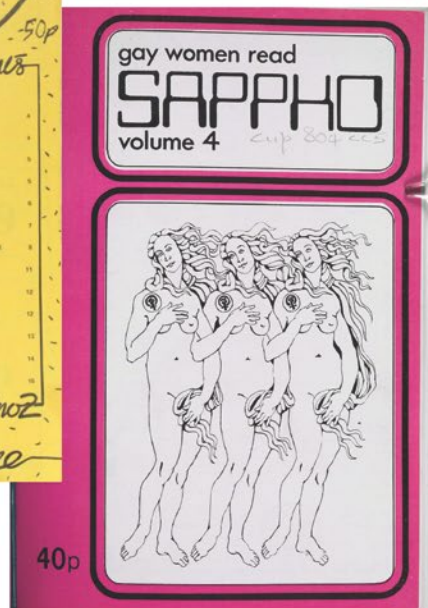
Women Artists News
1975–1992

Chrysalis
1977–1980

Sappho
1972–1981

Fett
2004–Present
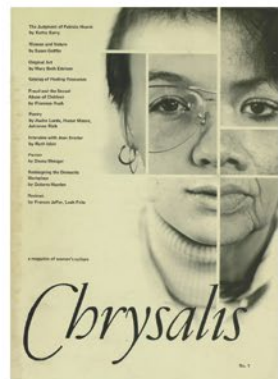
Jezebel
2007–Present

The Siren
2009–Present

Hoot
2010–Present

Sister
2010–Present

Polyester
2014–Present

Womankind
2014–Present

Lenny
2015–2018

EN/DECODING GENDER

The Visualization and Subversion of Gender Stereotypes in Design

ADIE FEIN

DECEMBER 2021

This project is a continuation of research into gender and typography.[1] The overarching goal of the project is to understand how gender is embedded into typography: how type perpetuates gender stereotypes, the consequences of that perpetuation, and methods that designers could use to subvert or frustrate that perpetuation.

"En/Decoding Gender "considers analytically how visual communication transmits gendered concepts. These models are each investigations into how ideas are visually relayed by the designer and then interpreted by the audience. Variously, these models address: how ideas are encoded; what happens when visual communication succeeds and fails; how visual and textual meanings are interdependent and reflexive; and how different language communities interpret meaning differently.

However, "En/Decoding Gender" ultimately exposes the limited power a designer has to influence meaning. The models visualize the networks of meaning in which visual communication operates. History, culture, and community inflect and distort any transmitted message. More plainly, a designer operates coordinate to an audience—and so is always dependent upon the audience's interpretation.

In an interview with Nat Pyper,[2] I propose the question: Is a graphic design necessarily conservative? That is, can graphic design do anything other than reproduce existing cultural norms? "En/Decoding Gender" suggests that yes, design can have social effect, but only within strict limits.[3]

1. See the previous section, "Gender Typing," page 50.

2. My discussion with Nat Pyper is printed later in this volume, under the title "Subversive Typography." See page 92.

3. The book *Queer Study* also takes up this question. See especially my conversation with Forough Abadian and Nick Larson, page 10.

Strategies for Subversion

The project proposes six strategies for subverting the communication of gender stereotypes, and the following spread discusses those strategies. The models expose sites at which these strategies may operate. For example, a strategy may be deployed during the 'correlation' stage.
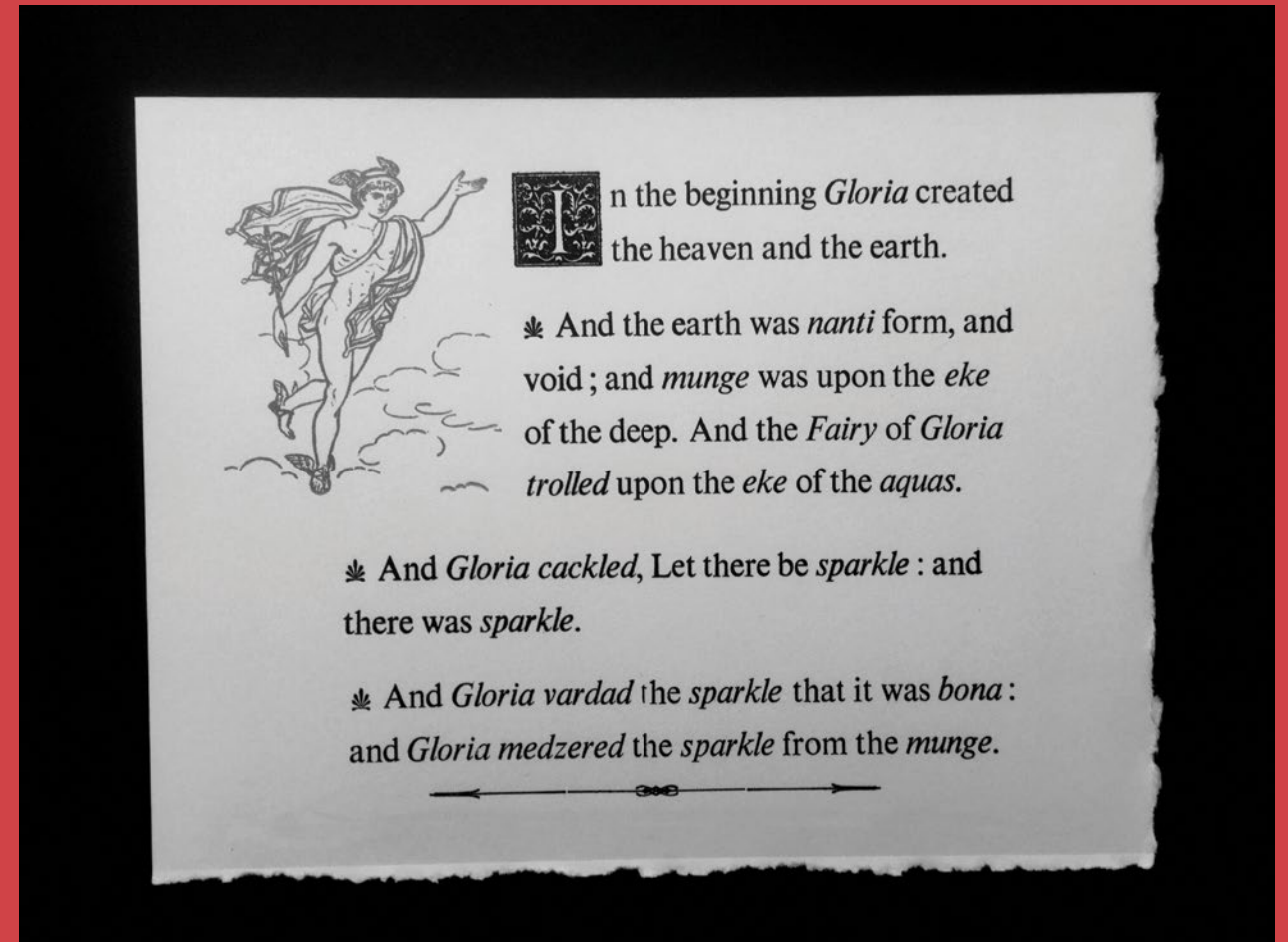
In the beginning *Gloria* created the heaven and the earth.

⚕ And the earth was *nanti* form, and void ; and *munge* was upon the *eke* of the deep. And the *Fairy* of *Gloria* trolled upon the *eke* of the *aquas*.

⚕ And *Gloria cackled*, Let there be *sparkle* : and there was *sparkle*.

⚕ And *Gloria vardad* the *sparkle* that it was *bona* : and *Gloria medzered* the *sparkle* from the *munge*.

TEACH LITERACY

Literacy is the ability to see and understand the symbolic field. Teaching involves communication of the conventions, meaning, and values of the symbolic field. To be literate in written communication, a person sees graphemes as words and understands the word as its meaning; for example, "d o g" is "dog" is "a domesticated canine animal." Persons can also be literate in abstract cultural relations; for example, a corporate logos relationship to a consumer product or a style of clothing's relationship to a subculture.

CONFOUND MEANING

To confound is to confuse, to mistake, to intermix, to perplex. To confound meaning is to introduce an incorrect meaning to a term. Literal interpretation in one example, as when Amelia Bedelia misunderstands 'dusting' and pours dusting powder on rather than wiping dust from the surface of a couch. Another form of confounding is "Stunt Doubling," as defined by Nat Pyper, it is the intentional misreading and misuse of an object. Pyper argues that queer zines intentionally misread homoeroticism into punk imagery and therefore created a queer punk scene. Confounding Meaning introduces alternate meanings for a term and so dominant readings become unstable, unreliable. Confounding Meaning allows one to challenge, confuse, and elaborate on an idea rather than simply reproduce it. (Ambiguate Meaning is a similar strategy, in which one admits multiple simultaneous meanings.)

BUILD COMMUNITY

A language community is a collection of people that speak the same language (read: understand messages in a similar fashion). Whoever properly decodes a covert message might demonstrate literacy within a certain community. To Build Community is to develop a new group of people who speak the same language; or, it is to alter the relevant attributes of a term within the local use of a specific community. In each use, the focus is on altering relations: queer relationships, not queer aesthetics.

AMBIGUATE MEANING

Ambiguity is about increasing the possible number of readings by equating two attribute or by eliminating all attributes. In an ambiguous sentence, multiple possibilities are collapsed into one phrase. Puns are one example, as in "I saw someone on the hill with a telescope." Ambiguity frustrates dominant readings of concepts because it makes alternative, distinct meanings salient. Ambiguity can also expose dominant readings be eliminating the motivation for their application; for example, "police officer" does not motivate the use of "he." (Confounding Meaning is a similar strategy, in which one supplies an alternate meaning.)

POWER EXCHANGE

Empower or encourage the audience to change the meaning of a message or object; or, admit alternative use of the message or object. For example, allow the audience to rearrange the order of a book; or to allow users to edit a website. Open source, modding, and modular design methods demonstrate power exchange. Designing experiences where the audience is expected to modify a dominant reading can produce subversive results.

SLOWNESS

Mass communication is defined by rapid distribution. Stereotypes are intellectual shortcuts that allow for rapid decision making. Slowness is a strategy to counter both the speed of design and the speed of its embedded stereotypes or values. Slowness is a refusal of predetermined (or strong) message pathways. A piece of slow design makes the distance between the referent and the encoded meaning longer; for example, makes it more difficult for the reader to connect 'woman' to 'curly type.' Slowness can also weaken the repetition of encoding and decoding that strengthens meaning: the reproductive cycles decelerated; and also there is also more opportunity for the audience to 'fall off' the en/decoding pathway.

Models

The following models are illustrations of how meaning is encoded into a piece of visual communication. For example, how the feminine introduced into a letterform. The models expose sites at which subversive strategies might operate, between the steps of encoding and decoding.

REFERANT

attribute A
attribute B
attribute C

VISUAL MESSAGE

exists within historico-cultural context

REFERANT

attribute B attribute C

exists within historico-cultural context

VISUAL MESSAGE

A + B

deviant success
referent is inferred, but incorrectly

D or Ø

failure
alternate or illegible referent

REFERANT

attribute B attribute C

exists within historico-cultural context

VISUAL MESSAGE

A + B

deviant success

D or Ø

failure

ENCODING

REFERANT

attribute C
attribute B
attribute A

exists within historico-cultural context

VISUAL MESSAGE

D or Ø

failure
alternate or illegible referent

A + B

deviant success
referent is inferred, but incorrectly

B

success
referent is inferred

DECODING

success strengthens pathway

VISUAL MESSAGE

attribute A
attribute B
attribute C

exists within historico-cultural context

REFERANT

ENCODING

D or Ø

success
referent is inferred

A + B

B

deviant success
referent is inferred, but incorrectly

failure
alternate or illegible referent

REFERANT

attribute A
attribute B
attribute C

exists within historico-cultural context

VISUAL MESSAGE

DECODING

REFERANT

attribute C
attribute B
attribute A

exists within historico-cultural context

ENCODING

REFERANT

attribute C
attribute B
attribute A

VISUAL MESSAGE

B

A + B

deviant success
referent is inferred, but incorrectly

D or Ø

failure
alternate or illegible referent

success strengthens pathway

REFERANT

attribute C
attribute B
attribute A

redefine *intervention here challenges the meaning of the referant, for example, imputing that 'man' has the attribute 'soft'*

disassociate *intervention here divides the attribute from its common or historical use, for example,*

relocate *intervention here recontextualizes the visual quality in application*

clash *intervention here emphasizes disparities between the visual and textual message*

TEXTUAL MESSAGE

alongside

REFERANT

identify select one or more historico-cultural attribute(s) of the referanttt

attribute

correlate associate between referant and visual culture and history

visual quality

symbolize apply relevant visual quality to a relevant formal output

visual expression

VISUAL MESSAGE

ENCODING

visual expression

extract contingent on familiarity with tropes of visual culture

visual quality

situate contingent on shared literacy

attribute

source contingent on familiarity with cultural tropse and roles

REFERANT

DECODING

failure at anypoint leads to the wrong referrent or to no referrent at all (miscommunication)

succesful en/decoding strengthens pathway

MODEL A This model addresses the encoding and decoding of language. The model breaks down each step of the process, exposing the ways that visual communication abstracts the referent. This abstraction makes it especially reliant on precedents, and therefore visual communication is pointedly vulnerable to stereotypes. Model A also addresses the effects of failure and success in the encoding/decoding process. Model B explains this further.

ENCODING

FEMININE

identify
select one or more
historico-cultural
attribute(s) of the
referantt

redefine
intervention here challenges the meaning
of the referant; for example, imputing
that 'man' has the attribute 'soft'

soft

correlate
associate between
referant and
visual culture
and history

disassociate
intervention here divides the attribute
from its common or historical use,
for example,

round

symbolize
apply relevant
visual quality
to a relevant
formal output

relocate
intervention here recontextualizes
the visual quality in application

bubble letters

clash
intervention here emphasizes disparities
between the visual and textual message

TEXTUAL MESSAGE

alongside

VISUAL MESSAGE

DECODING

bubble letters

extract
contingent on
familiarity with
tropes of visual
culture

round

situate
contingent on
shared literacy

soft

source
contingent on
familiarity
with cultural
tropse and roles

REFERANT

failure at any point leads
to the wrong referrent
or to no referrent at all
(miscommunication)

successful en/decoding strengthens pathway

An example of how "Femininity" might be encoded into type.
At each step of the process, there is opportunity for subversion.
For example, bubble letters placed against violent imagery may
ambiguate the message.
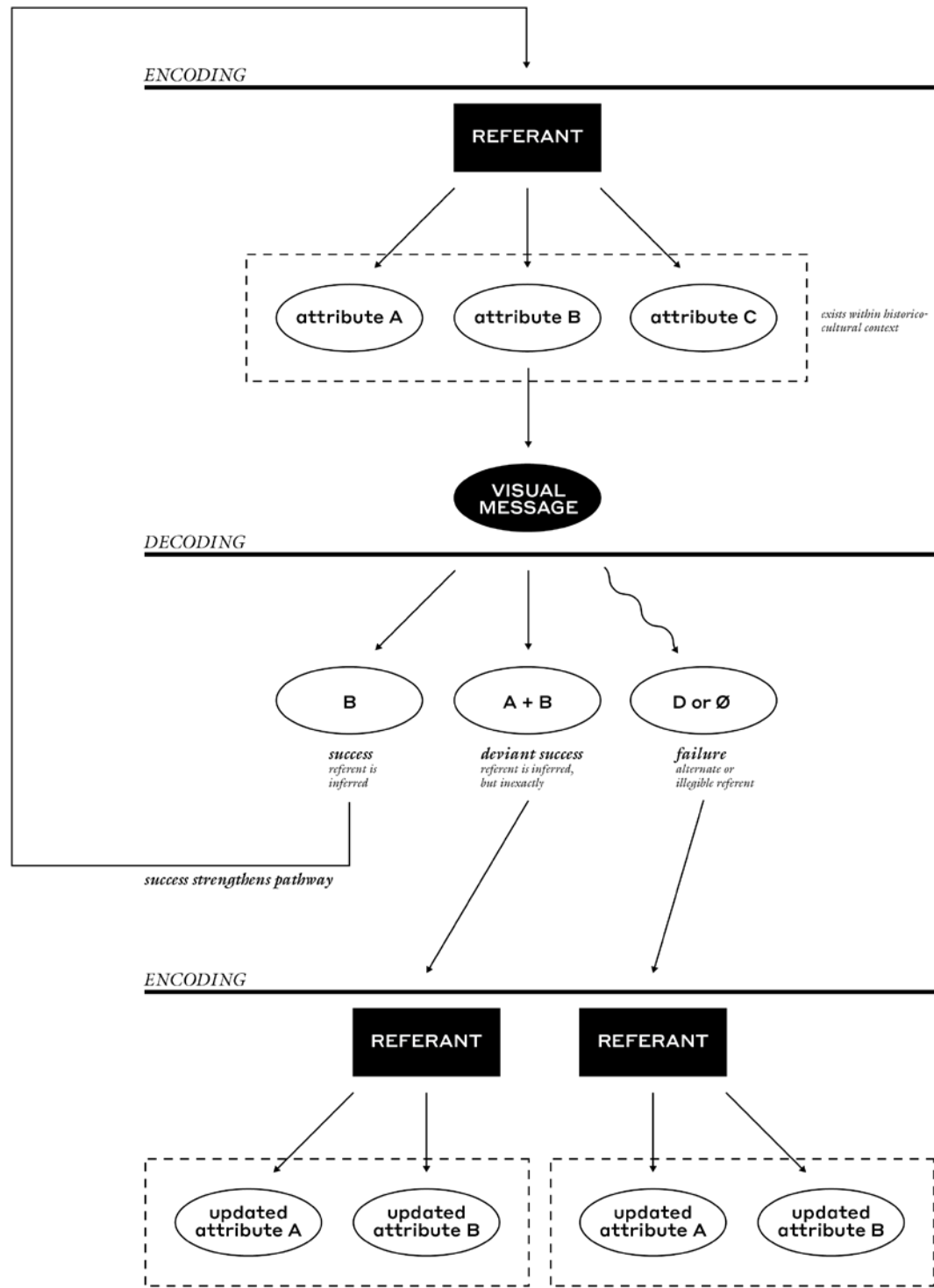
MODEL B This model addresses the success of visual communication. It proposes three states: success; failure; and deviant success. Success occurs when the audience accurately decodes the message, such that they connect to the intended referent, e.g. when the audience reads pink as referring to "girl." Failure occurs when the audience does not accurately decode the message. They either connect to the wrong reference (mistake) or connect to no reference (illegible). Deviant success is when the audience connects to the intended referent but perhaps misapplies attributes to it. Subversive strategies may seek to enact failure or deviant success.
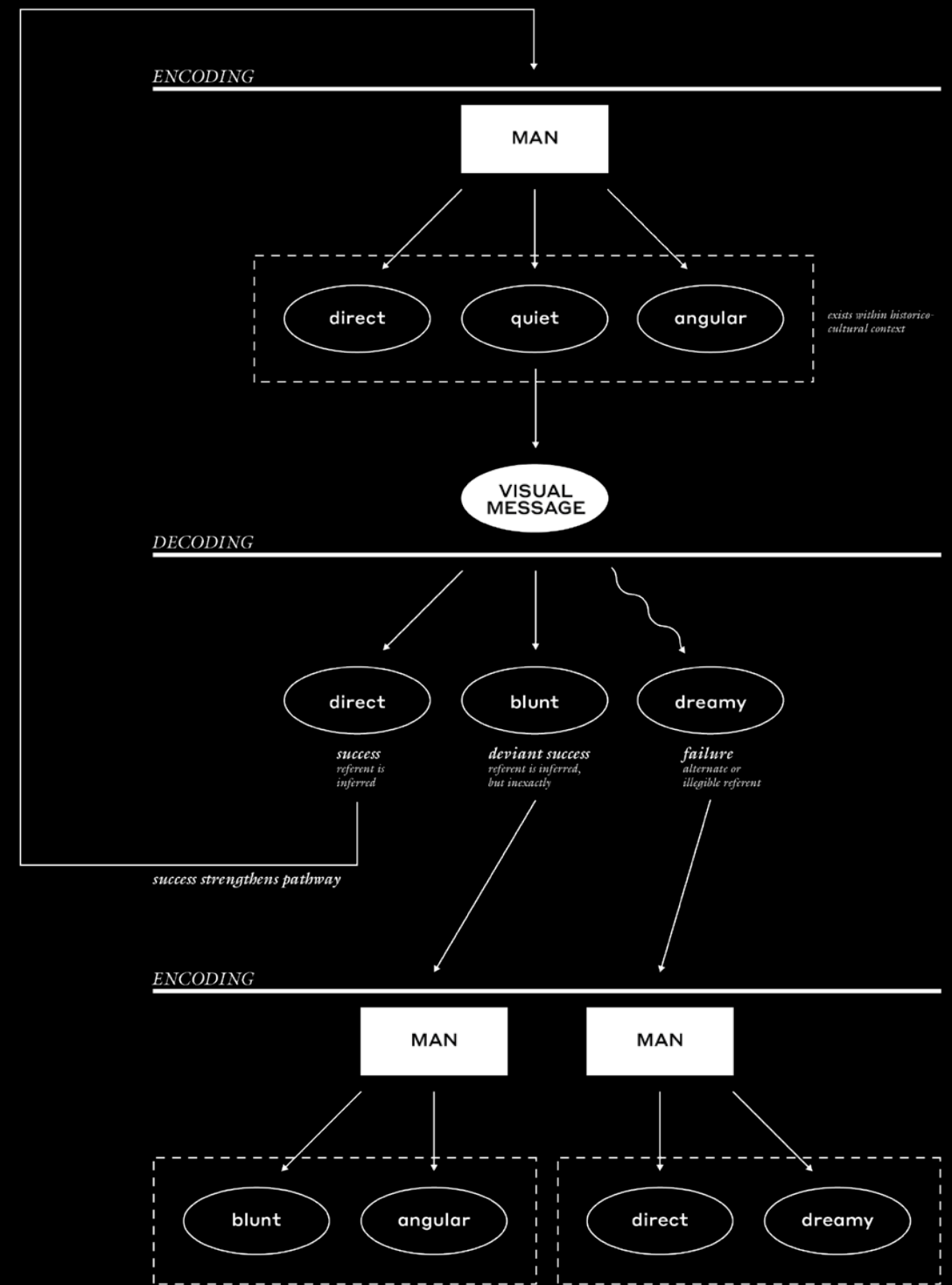
An example of how deviant success or failure might change the category "Man." In the instance of deviant success, the attribute "angular" is successfully decoded, but the attribute "quiet" is mis-received as "blunt." In the instance of failure, a wholly unrelated attribute ("dreamy") is generated by the audience.
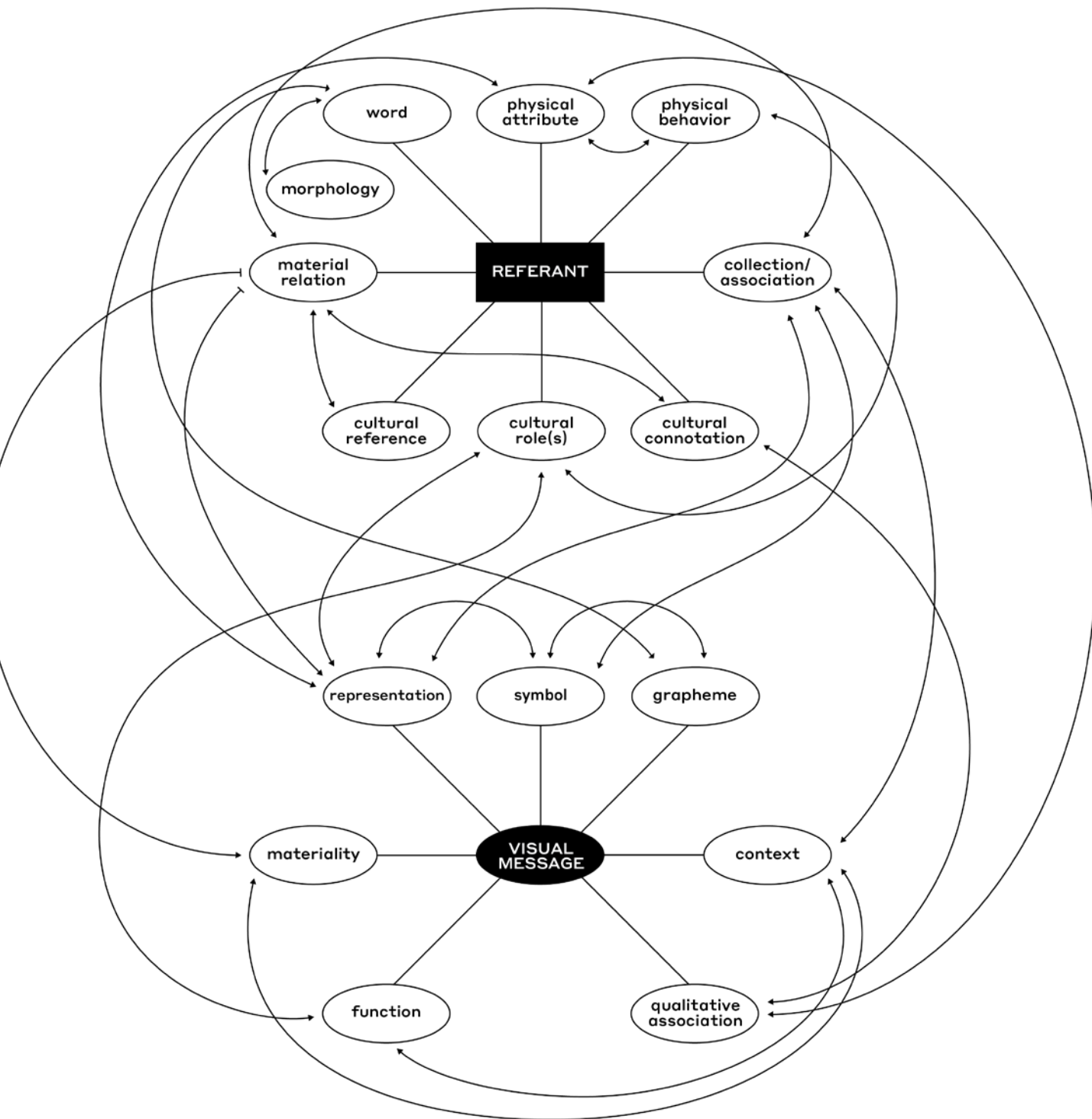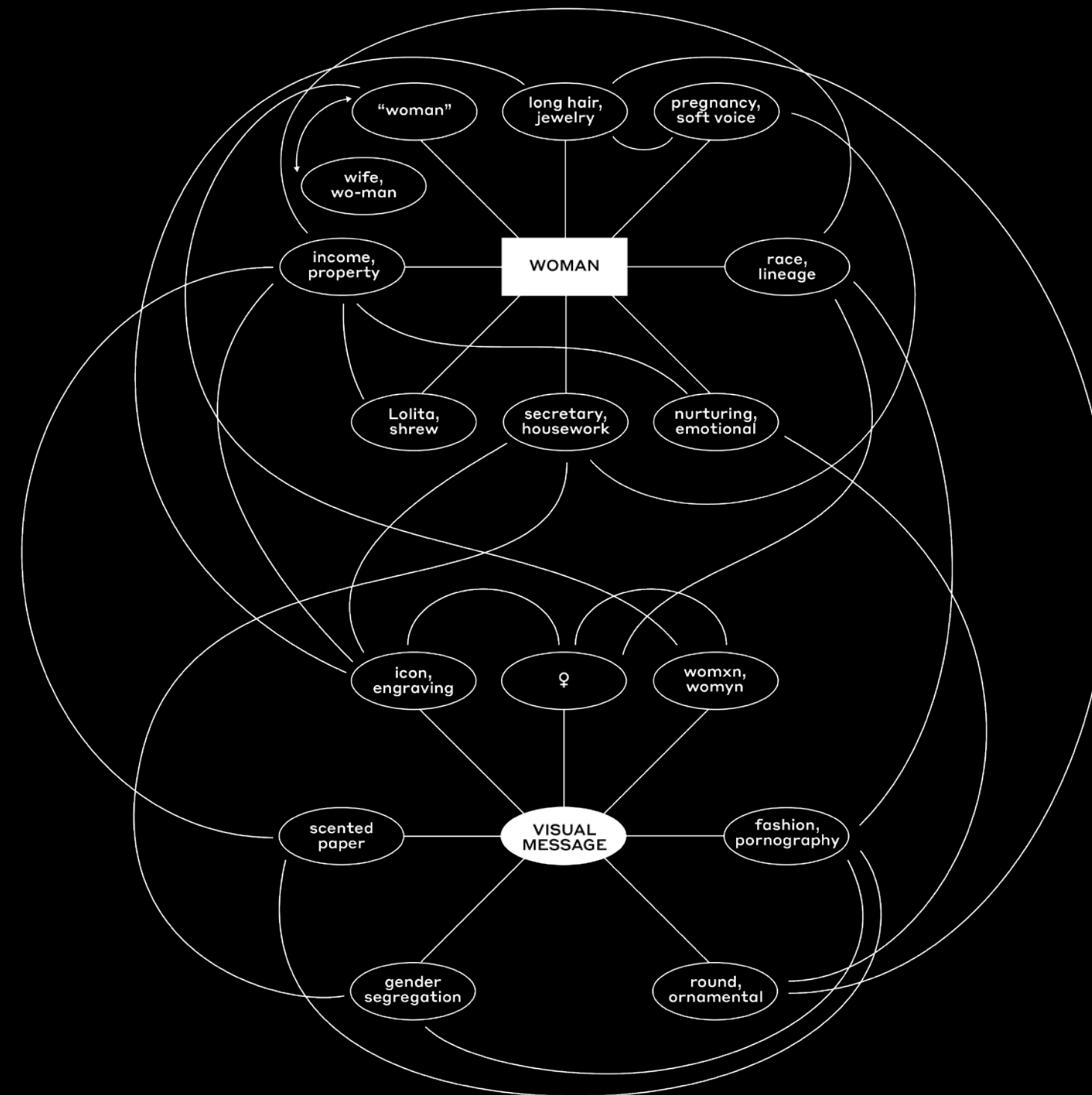
This example shows how different attributes associated with women influence one another. One illustration is the relationship between the word and visual spelling of "woman:" that "woman" contains "man" gave rise to alternative spellings like "womxn" as a rejection of perceived sexism in the standard spelling.
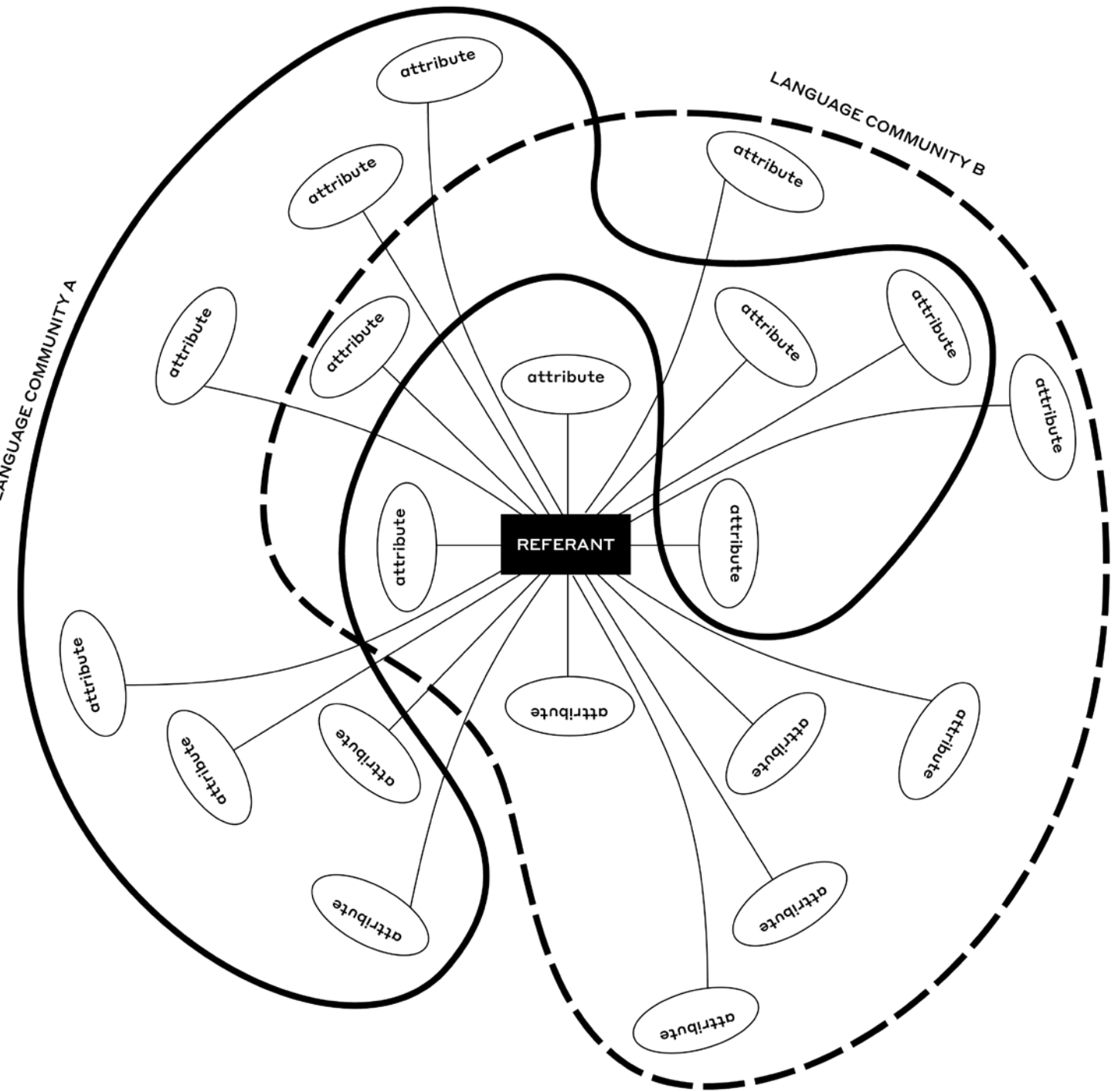
MODEL D This Model addresses how different language communities interpret a referent differently. One community may believe a referent has attributes A and B, while another language community believes a referent has attributes C and D; therefore, they can speak about the same referent but apply different meanings. For example, a priest may be a leader in one community (Catholic) and a reviled figure in another (Queer). To influence the meaning of a term or to subvert the use of a stereotype, the design may be better off shaping a community than changing the method of communication.
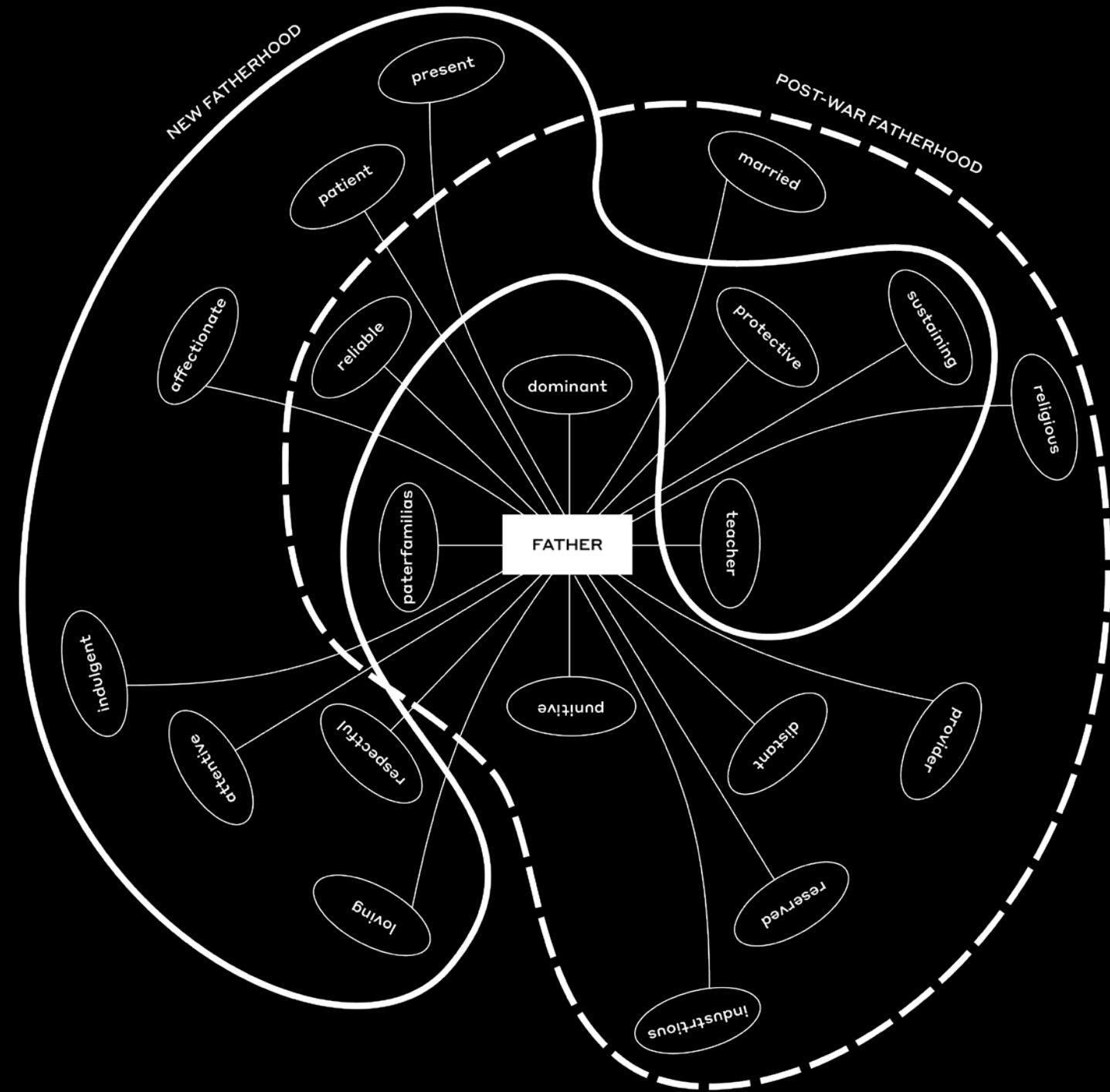
This example shows how different attributes are applied to "Father" by two different communities: Americans in the mid-century who understood fathers as cold disciplinarians; and Americans in the 21st century who understood fathers to be warm caretakers.

Materials

The project captured the models, subversive strategies, and interview with Nat Pyper in a series of publications and an installation. Only a few publications are shown.
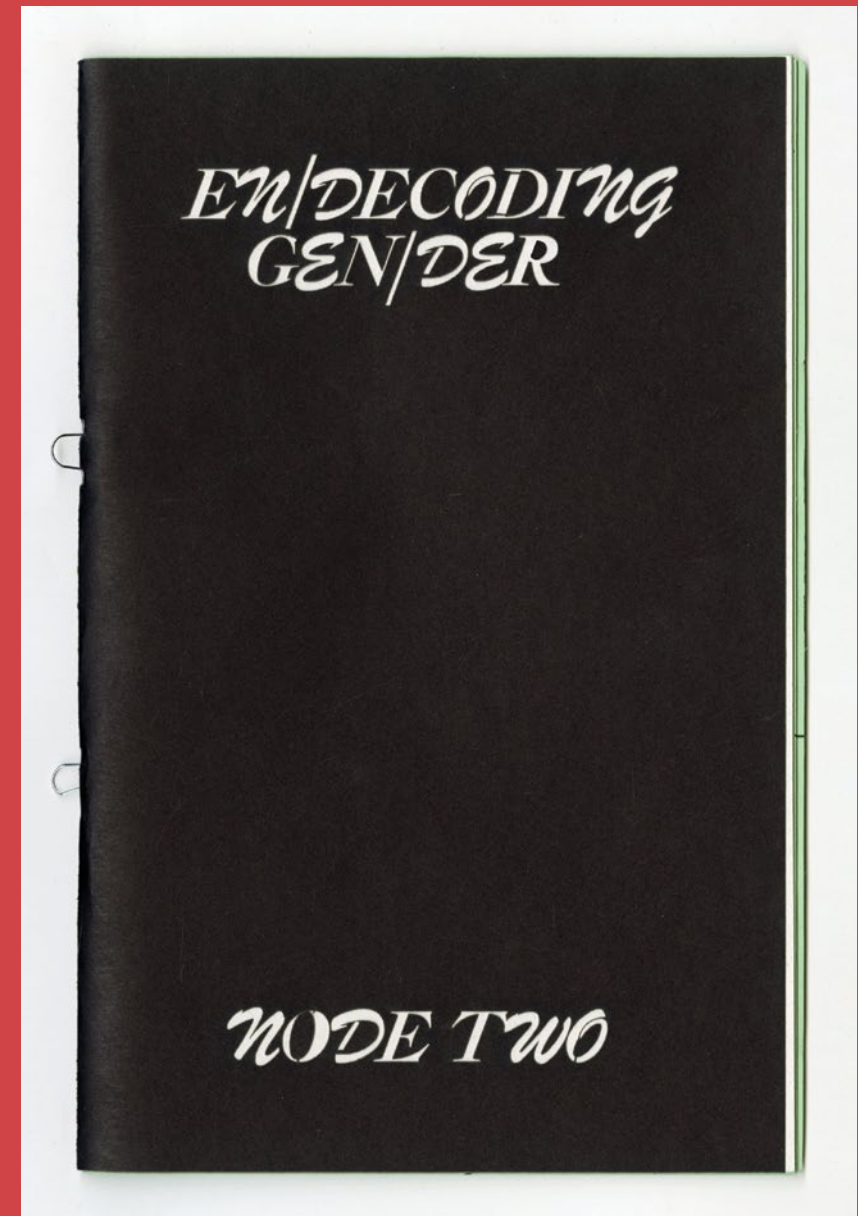
ENCODING

REFERANT

An object, category, or concept. 'Brave,' 'woman,' 'fire,' or 'police' could all be referants.

attribute

Any quality of the referant. Red and loud could be attributes of 'stop sign.' Nurturing and quiet could be attributes of 'woman.'

visual quality

A visual trait that illustrates the attribute. Large scale could repsent 'loud.' Slender lines could represent 'quiet.'

visual expression

The visual interpretation of the trait. Gigantic type could convey 'large scale.' Extra light type could convey 'slender lines'.

VISUAL MESSAGE *with* **TEXTUAL MESSAGE**

DECODING

visual expression

visual quality

attribute

REFERANT

The representation of an idea in a non-linguistic message is encoding. In the encoding process, the communicator selects one or multiple ideas that represent the referant and transforms the idea into a visual form. The interpretation of the visual message is decoding. In the decoding process, the receiver connects the encoded idea to a referant; for example, joins 'blue' to 'ocean.'

EN/DECODING GEN/DER

NODE FOUR

ENCODING

REFERANT

attribute

visual quality

visual expression

VISUAL MESSAGE *with* **TEXTUAL MESSAGE**

DECODING

visual expression

visual quality

attribute

REFERANT

An attribute is selected from the many historically and culturally situated concepts that constitute the referant.

The attribute is associated to another item, often by way of inductive leap. Visual precedents strongly influence that leap.

The attribute is signified in a visually concrete way. The visual idea is applied to formal output.

The formal output is combined with text (and other visual messages). For example, the word 'BANG' is set in very large type.

With each successive step, the message is further abstracted from the referant. Proper interpretation can be highly dependent upon context (the kind of paper or a nearby photograph) and history (how a particular color has been traditionally applied or the era in which a font was popular.).

Node Four explains each component of Model A. Trim size is 4 ¹⁄₄×11".

EN/DECODING GEN/DER

NODE THREE

teach literacy

Literacy is the ability to see and understand the symbolic field. Teaching involves communication of the conventions, meaning, and values of the symbolic field. To be literate in written communication, a person sees graphemes as words and understands the word as its meaning; for example, "d o g" is "dog" is "a domesticate canine animal." Persons can also be literate in abstract cultural relations; for example, a corporate logos relationship to a consumer product or a style of clothing's relationship to a subculture.

Graphic Design in the Post-Digital Age. Demian Conrad et al. 2021.

ambiguate meaning

Ambiguity is about increasing the possible number of readings by equating two attribute or by eliminating all attributes. In an ambiguous sentence, multiple possibilities are collapsed into one phrase. Puns are one example, as in "I saw someone on the hill with a telescope." Ambiguity frustrates dominant readings of concepts because it makes alternative, distinct meanings salient. Ambiguity can also expose dominant readings be eliminating the motivation for their application; for example, "police officer" does not motivate the use of "he." (Confounding Meaning is a similar strategy, in which one supplies an alternate meaning.)

Design Modernism. Experimental Jetset. 1998.

Node three is an accordian book that describes each subversive strategy alongside a visual example. Trim size is 7 ⅜×6 ⅞".

EN/DECODING GEN/DER

MODEL A

MODEL B
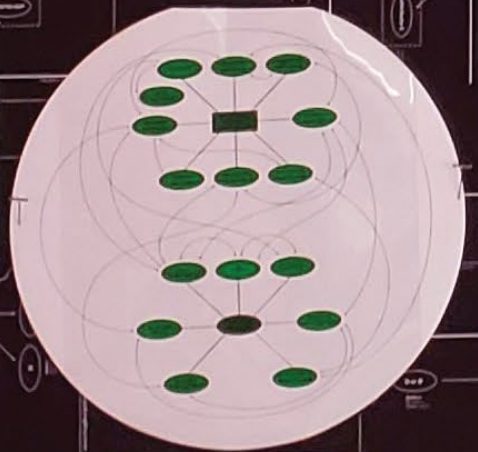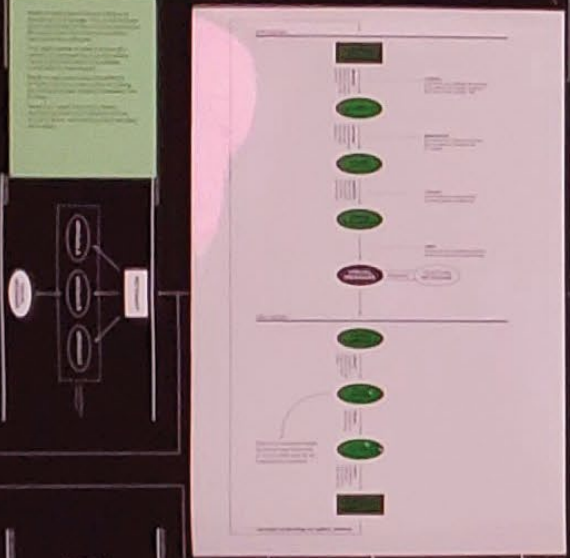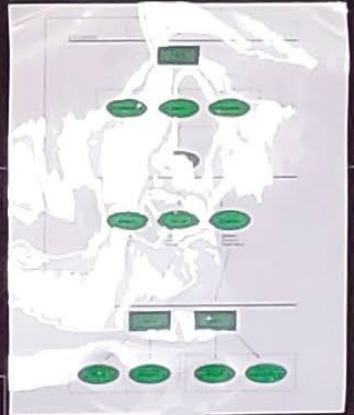
MODEL C

MODEL D

SUBVERSIVE TYPOGRAPHY

A Conversation on Design for Community, Progressive Design, and Gendering Letters

ADIE FEIN
& NAT PYPER

OCTOBER 2021

I first encountered Nat Pyper as a contributor to "How Will We Queer Design Education Without Compromise?"[1] There, Nat makes a claim that graphic design reproduces the ideological conditions that surround its production. During the course of my research in gender and typography, I became increasingly convinced of this claim. I chose to speak with Nat Pyper to explore the possibility of subverting those ideological conditions. Additionally, this conversation spends considerable time thinking about how graphic design produces legibility and how that might enable graphic design to construct community.

Nat Pyper is an "alphabet artist." They design wearables that highlight the role of the language in the construction of the body. They also design typefaces, write science fiction, and write on the history of queer punk zines. They received their MFA in Graphic Design from the Yale School of Art.

1. A collection of essays curated by nicole killian for the Walker Reader. Selections from that collection are quoted in "What is Queer Graphic Design?" in the book *Queer Things,* page 92.

ADIE FEIN I wanted to start with a really big question: Is graphic design necessarily conservative? To read from your 'Let's Talk about Body Reproduction' you wrote that "Each time the work we create is published it reproduces not only itself but the beliefs and conditions of the people who produce it. Inevitably, this act of reproduction also reproduces the power relations that yield these conditions." When thinking about this quote in relationship to gender and typography, I imagine the situation in which the designer needs to transmit a message to a gendered audience, for example, girls. The designer visually encodes general gender concepts and the communication, say, pink lettering, and if the audience properly decodes it—discerns the meaning or reference—then the graphic design successfully communicates. What is troubling to me about that model, if correct, is: One, graphic design depends on existing social conditions for success. Two, the successful communication of graphic design reinforces those social conditions. (The message indurates the relationship between pink lettering and girls.) To go back to that big question: Is graphic design inherently conservative? Or is a radical graphic design even possible?

Nat Pyper, *Even When...,* 2021

NAT PYPER That's a great, great question. It reminds me of this work—oh, goodness, I'm blanking on the name of the collective right now—who make work about public art and the collective understanding around art, and they feed it through this Marxist approach to work. The collective make this argument that public art, necessarily, needs to be legible as public art in order to be understood and received as public art. Public art necessarily needs to take a conservative approach to art for the public to register that the piece is art. It limits the forms that public art can take, because it needs to be legible as such. That is exactly what you're hitting on with graphic design. In order for an understanding about the intended audience to be understood there has to be these tropes or stereotypes employed, so that we come to a shared understanding of the meaning. In some ways, that is great because we depend on these social shortcuts that allow us to infer meaning that's not necessarily written. But it is problematic when it's applied to things like gender, because it requires that we depend on these outdated or incorrect assumptions about how gendered bodies are understood, processed, and valued.

When I consider this communication model, there seems very few possible openings at which a graphic designer might intervene to subvert existing social conditions. I wonder, then, if it even makes sense to talk about a radical graphic design in isolation. Must radical graphic design always pair with education or social activism?

I don't think so, or, at least, I don't think education and activism has to be apparent in the reception of the work. Radical resources or approaches can be embedded in the work. But I think that a radical graphic design probably doesn't really look like graphic design anymore. If a radical approach is applied, then graphic design as a concept isn't necessarily. If the point is

like transmission of understanding and information, graphic design might be a component of that, but it might not be necessarily the vehicle through which the meaning is conveyed.

That makes sense to me. In the same essay, you talk about stunt doubling, as a way to not just reproduce history but challenge and elaborate on it. What does that look like put into practice?

Nat Pyper, *Cutups,* 2021

When I was using that metaphor, I wanted to bring the body into the equation. I thought it was important that there was an understanding of how bodies play into this encounter with meaning, because bodies are so often not considered. If I begin to understand the ramifications of our work on bodies in space and time, that we might maybe apply a little bit more care to the work that we're doing and the way that we're applying it and also consider how our own bodies are producing meaning and conveying it to others. I wanted to use this metaphor of the stunt double as this body that takes risks. But also understands the scope of those risks and doesn't go beyond what is actually life threatening, what is damaging. Another way that I might rephrase that is—rather than thinking about stunt doubling the past, which is to put the past to the test—to put the past under extreme conditions and to see how we use it, if it's still useful. I might rephrase it now and say that stunt doubling is an act of intentionally misreading the past and then miswriting the past. In queer zines specifically, there's this intentional, purposeful illiteracy. There is a willful misunderstanding of the images that precede the zine when those images are put to new use. For example, taking a photo of a bunch of white boys wrestling in a pit at a punk show, and filtering that through a homoerotic lens is a willful misunderstanding of what was happening. It applies new meaning to it. The strategy that I may be encouraging in that essay is an attack or a method of intentionally misreading the past and then miswriting it to new use, intentionally perverting the meaning, giving it new meaning through a new form.

Later, you talk about practicing confusion as a skill, as the embrace of multiple readings of the same thing. Viewing the image from a place of confusion is one way to engage in misreading, right?

Definitely. I am still a fan of confusion as a creative method. It's a state of mind that's seen as a weakness, or, when describing our current world, it is seen as an issue or a problem. But, actually, confusion is a really incredible place to be, because it means that you're thinking as a subject who is able to hold contradictions. That kind of position enables that subject to work through those contradictions and to determine a new way forward.

In my own work, I've been thinking about ambiguity, which I think I am using in the same way that you're using confusion. I see ambiguity as introducing non-obvious answers into graphic design as a way of creating the possibility of an unrehearsed action. I've been thinking about this in

my personal life for a couple of years. I will often tell people that I'll accept any pronouns. I see it as a political act and a gift to straight, cispeople. I am saying that you can use me, my body, as an opportunity to play with gender by trying out different pronouns. I have found that for straight, cispeople people this is so confusing that they default to he/him. My question for you is how do you get people to embrace confusion?

That's a great question. Confusion as a skill, or as a skill set, is something that's probably already afforded or available to marginalized peoples. They are already these confusing subjects or identities that do not fit into the normative order.

When I was in grad school, I read this text by Lee Edelman[1] called "The Future is Kid Stuff" and it was profoundly life altering for me. I actually had to stop reading it halfway through, almost out of fear, literally had to put it down, because I realized that if I were to accept the argument that Edelman is making in the text, it would fundamentally alter my position to the world. I had to sit with and process it. That was a moment of confusion, where I was holding the contradiction of the text and my own understanding of the world. After I had finally finished the text, I recommended it to straight, cis friend in graduate school. This is someone that I respect, who has a really great, nuanced understanding of the world. And I was like, you must read this incredible text that made me look at the world in a different way. And I remember him being like, okay, cool, thanks. Obviously, this is just one experience, but in that moment I realized that for folks in subject positions that aren't challenged on a regular basis or at all, there is no rush or need to disorder the world, to change the normative structures. It was a realization that for most people queerness is perceived as an an add on, an extra thing on top of identity; rather than queerness as something that transforms identity completely, that transforms the position of the 'I,' that transforms the way that we relate to each other as individuals. So I hear what you are saying. For white, straight, cis folks, the world works pretty well for them for already. They see these markers of identity, queer or racial identities, as human plus X, as modifiers of identity rather than things that are constitutive of identity itself or things that transform what identity even means.

I don't know how to broach that divide. In some ways, I've shifted my focus, like I guess I'm not talking to those people. I don't want to put my energy into expanding the world for those people. I'd rather engage with folks who are already open and interested in talking about these things. And then move from there. My audience is definitely not white, straight,

Hélio Oiticica, Parangolé P1 Cape 1, 1964

1. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.)

cis folks. I'm not going to try to cater to their acceptance of the work. The issue is that we want to transform the world, that's going to require participation on probably a broader scale, and at the same time it's not my job to change their minds. It's their job to change their minds. I won't waste energy on it.

In your *Newcity Art* profile, they use this phrase, "literacy as a tool for liberation."[2] With your wearable text pieces, I see that as visualizing exchanges between language and the body, and so teaching literacy to the audience—teaching the viewer to read the body. Do you view your practice as one of teaching literacy?

Literacy is at the core of my work, whether it's queer zines or sci-fi, which comes out of the idea of writing and rewriting the world. A huge touch point for this understanding for me comes from Brazil: Brazilian theorists and educator Paulo Freire, his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* and his understanding of literacy as a tool for liberation, autonomy, collective understanding, and willpower; and Brazilian artists who were working with wearables during and after the military coup and dictatorship in the 60s and 70s in Brazil, and how they were using wearable artwork as a way to kind of talk about literacy as it applies to bodies, how bodies move through the world—artists like Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark. Oiticica has this series of works called Parangolés, which are these weird, flowy pieces that are kind of cumbersome in their construction. What they do is they kind of encourage literacy on both sides of it. For the wearer, this cumbersome wearable makes them more aware of themselves, their body in space, and also the world, its limitations, and how they interact with the world. For the viewer, they gain a mutual understanding. What these and other artists are interested in is consciousness raising, which was big in the 60s and 70s. The idea was to raise consciousness together in order to read, to be read, to write, and to be written. I see the wearables as a metaphor for writing and reading—but also actually, functionally writing the world. With regards to literacy and this queer punk zine lineage, the zine publishers wrote a queer punk scene into existence. The first zines that came out in the mid-80s in Toronto were jokingly writing about this big queer punk scene that existed in Toronto. They wrote that all these queer folks are going to queer punk shows which didn't actually exist. It was the editors in their apartment thinking, 'Oh, this is funny.' When the zines start to circulate, people begin to believe that there are a bunch of queer punks in Toronto, so more zines start to manifest, until, in the early 90s, there just

Parangolé in the 1979 film HO by Ivan Cardoso.

2. Kerry Cardoza, "Breakout Artists 2021," *Newcity Art,* March 24, 2021, art. newcity.com/2021/03/24/breakout-artists-2021-chicagos-next-generation-of-image-makers/5/
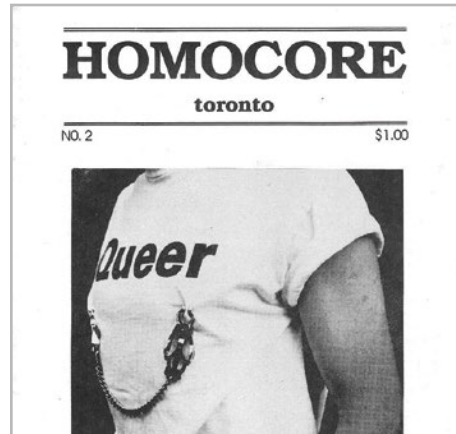
is a functioning queer punk scene—which all comes out from a couple of zines from the mid-80s. A whole music scene out of that. There is the actual act of writing a world into existence, literally, through the act of publishing. They created this entire subculture out of thin air.

At the same time, the authors are critiquing the world through these zines, and so they are rewriting the world as well. In the midst of the AIDS pandemic, they are offering a functionally 'other' queer identity, that was not about respectability or assimilation. They were offering another way to exist at a time when credit card advertisements are starting to show up in gay magazines, when gay and lesbians are becoming a commodifiable consumer group. When I think about reading and writing, I think about that history, because it illustrates what it looks like to read the world, to write the world, and to rewrite the world.

I'm currently doing a project with a partner, Nick Larson, in which we perform a close reading of Robert Bringhurst's *Elements of Typographic Style.* It has been interesting to revisit your work at the same time, because while Bringhurst is also really concerned with literacy, he uses it as a metaphor for normative behavior. As soon as someone fails to reproduce the past or stops using historical typographic methods, then Bringhurst says they are "illiterate." This makes me see literacy as a political category and so think about the political perception, availability, or legibility of marginal cultures. What is the relationship between literacy and legibility or the relationship between literacy and illegibility?
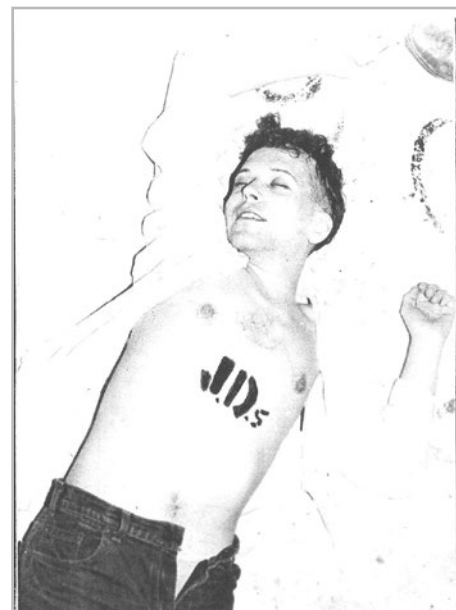
TOP Homocore Toronto no. 2, 1993, by Alan O'Connor in Toronto, Canada.

BOTTOM J.D.s no. 2, 1985, by Bruce La Bruce and GB Jones in Toronto, Canada.

One reason that I'm also drawn to this history of queer punk zines is that they were really insistent on embodying this contradiction of legibility and illegibility. They refused to be easily read by the culture at large. They are interested in confusion as a strategy, in willfully confusing other people's understanding of who they were, through gender fuckery or code switching—through the expansiveness of what queer can mean. There was a need to be opaque and illegible out of self-protection, at a time when it wasn't safe to be out, and also to preserve this subculture from being assimilated. It was really complex. There was no one voice in all of this. There was lots of perspectives and arguments and rivalries. I'm interested in this history because it was willfully illegible and yet depended on this shared understanding, this legibility, among queer punks. In order to communicate, to publish, and to circulate ideas, there needed to be legibility in place. There was a pretty clear division: "We're legible with our people and where we take care of each other. We work in codes that make sense to us. But we refuse to be legible to everyone else." Especially since at this time when surveillance was a real threat to the gay community, for example through AIDS registries. And at the same time, queer punks are starting to see these pleas for acceptance into the normative order. All that is to say that I think that it is really important question: when things are legible, when things are illegible? The stance that I've taken is that it is okay if the work that I make is not legible to a broad audience. Maybe I prefer that. It's important

that I am able to communicate with the people that I share values with, and to protect the means of communicating.

I am interested in the production of a literacy. My theory is that there is a mutual recognition of illegibility, and that leads to legibility, and that produces legibility. If true, this raises two questions: When is literacy the same thing as community? And is literacy a form of identity?

Ultimately, I am wondering if the appropriate intervention into gender stereotypes in typography is to help people become literate in gender. But then the question is does provoking a new literacy in a group of people therefore produce a new community, identity, or field of practice? One thing I keep encountering is the argument that to even acknowledge gender in typography would reify gender in type.

That sounds like when people say, "You're critiquing Apple, but you're using an iPhone to do it." There's a difference between reifying gender in typography and in acknowledging where it exists, pinpointing that, and being literate, being able to read those cues. The question is to what end where does it lead?

To summarize some of the salient points, I see your work as offering three modes of intervention with respect to identity or power in graphic design: teaching literacy, stunt doubling, and then writing community into existence, enacting kinships through writing. For the last one, exacting kinship, I'm sort of curious if there are places where you see that happening today in graphic design?

The place that I get excited about, where I see people building kinship, shared meaning, and visual language is Binchpress. What is exciting for me is that they are very much embedded within a larger community. The visual language that they are using comes from the community, and the work goes back into the community. It is hard to locate those spaces. The work does need to be done locally in order to understand how the work that we do has an effect on actual bodies, on actual places, on landscapes. There has to be an understanding of who these people are and where they live. How does this meaning work in their lives? But I cannot think of any more groups, so I guess I don't know how to answer.

Yeah, that's, that's okay. Well, that was my last question. Is there anything I should have asked you?

I'm curious about your project, what you're doing, how you're approaching gender and typography.

It is a big and growing project that is definitely going to outstrip grad school. I became interested in it a few years ago. I have been approaching it in a somewhat sociological method. I had this understanding that everyone agrees on what a masculine font is or what a feminine font is. Why? Where does it come from? From confirming this shared perception of gender in

typography, it has evolved into me trying to identify the consequences or effects of it. Where do we see gendered uses in the real world? For example, I've looked into the type used on websites for gender segregated occupations. I am trying to see if there are material consequences to which graphic design might be contributing. Lately, I seem to be setting myself up to examining the multiple intersecting influences on our perception of gender and typography. For example, where does our modern perception of cursive as feminine come from? What are the historical causes? The occupational causes? It is a massive project. Ultimately, I want to develop this knowledge so that I can explain it to other graphic designers—to convince them that it is real. I have had the repeated experience, for example, when I ask a person if they perceive a font as masculine or feminine, of being told that gender does not exist in typography or graphic design. So, in some ways, it has been a stubborn, spiteful pursuit. That is the overarching project.

Generally my research interests are the differing ways that power operates in graphic design, the way dominant or normative logics operate in graphic design. In a different project, my partner, Will Mianecki and I are looking at intentionally blank pages in Bureau of Land Management documents[3] as a way of investigating how graphic design participates in the literal control of physical space by the government. I see those being connected. Blank pages operate in the same way that gender does in graphic design: enacting power or reproducing the dominant ideologies.

It is an interesting question. Folks that say that gender does not or should not exist in graphic design are saying something like I don't see race. In a literal way, yes, that is true, and nowadays it is less clear when something is being applied towards a gendered use. I wish I had gotten a historical grounding in how graphic design manifests visually. In school, you learn about Art Noveau, Arts and Crafts, and other movements, but I did not learn about how context, world events, people, societies produce the need, or a desire, for a style of graphic design. I think another question worth asking is how desire plays into that. Through that you might get into the meat of how gender is enacted through graphic design. What desire does design provokes? What design choices are made based upon those desires? The opposite end of 'gender doesn't exist' is 'everything is gendered.' It is all a manifestation of gender and desire. Part of that is understanding where a typeface comes from, it's designed use and intention, and where it is headed, how people continue to use it—especially with typefaces with such a long history. So much graphic design these days are ahistorical. It is not necessarily dependent upon the shared understanding of an original

use of a font. It is a complicated subject. Even with the font series I do, the year of queer love letters, I am literally embedding this history in the font, in the metadata there is information on where these fonts come from. I'm putting these fonts out into the world fully aware that people are going to use them in wildy different ways that have nothing to do with the history that the fonts are referencing. It is a great topical exploration.

It is interesting to think about how to intervene, if at all. Some people say to stop talking gender in reference to typography, the gender-blind approach, like you noted. The argument goes that by ignoring gender, we will eliminate gendered uses. (Personally that doesn't make sense to me. It is like burying your head.) But should we fully eliminate gender in typography? To build on your comment about desire, a lot of people like their gender. They have a good or meaningful relationship to their gender. They want to see it manifest in visual culture. It seems wrong, then, to prevent that. It seems incredibly important to ask exactly what the effect that we want to achieve is. For me, I may simply want to make graphic designers aware that there are political consequences to what they do, because most ignore or deny that.

It is such a surface industry, and perhaps necessarily has to be, but that affects the discourse around it.

Recently I've been wondering if one solution is developing long-term relationships between the audience and the graphic design object—overturn graphic design as a tool of rapid, mass communication.

As a final thought, do you have any references for me?

Paul Chan's *Alternumerics*, which I thought about when working on my own fonts.

Great. Thank you!

3. See "A Very Long, Laborious Process That Yields 100 Blank Pages" in *Queer Space,* page 82.

Paul Chan, "The Future Must Be Sweet," *Alternumerics, 2001*

UNIFORM TITLE

How Systems of Classification Dominate and Obscure

WRITTEN BY
ADIE FEIN

FIRST PERFORMED BY
ADIE FEIN &
NICK LARSON &
ÁSTA ÞRASTARDÓTTIR

JANUARY 2022

"Uniform Title: How Classification Systems Dominate and Obscure" explores and problematizes the systems that museums—or any archiving institution—use to organize information. These systems are intended to make items accessible, available, visible; and yet the contents of this exhibition show how the systems can obscure their content—even subordinate and flatten their content.

   A uniform title is one such tool: When an item has no title, or when it has multiple titles, a distinctive new name is assigned that operates as the comprehensive, high-level name for the item. That is, if an item has been published as both Highlighander: The Sorcerer *and* Highlander: the Final Conflict, *the uniform title* Highlander 3: the Final Dimension *will be used in a catalog to access all of these versions.*

   All possible items reduced to one term.

ITEM ONE

A catalog is a database that identifies items residing within a specific collection. A catalog card is an individual entry within a catalog that records information about one item. The information can describe the item, indicate its provenance, locate it within a physical system, and more. Some cards, like this one, contain visual representations of the objects.

This catalog card describes an amulet given to the British Museum by Charles Temple in 1904. In part, the card reads,

"Africa W. TCot red angular charm, covered with brown
 leather.

Another similar: pattern as shown. Another similar: zigzag
 pattern. 1904.1015. 17. 18. 19."

Amulet, Af1904,1015.17, The
British Museum. London,
United Kingdom.

ITEM TWO

The concept of the modern catalog card was created in 1789. During the french revolution, the government seized all religious texts. Cards were used to document these items, so that the valuable texts could be identified, located, and sold to raise government revenue. Catalog cards have always been political.

This card documents one orthostat, a carved stone slab. The item was excavated and removed by a German national in 1911 (or 1927) and later seized as enemy property during WWII.

The removal of the orthostat was an act of colonialism. And the catalog card signifies a second, more subtle act of colonialism: the imposition of a system onto an object, a new way of knowing that lessens the local, cultural meaning of the object. It is an act of epistemic violence.

Michael Foucualt writes,

> *"In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one 'episteme' that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge."*[1]

Catalogue Cards Of Orthostat Relief: Winged Human-Headed Lion, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States.

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order Of Things: An Archaeology Of The Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 183.

ITEM THREE

In the 1920s and 30s, photography became widespread. Photographic reproductions of items were printed or pasted onto catalog cards, replacing hand-made illustrations. And the catalog cards themselves began to appear next to the items they referenced in photographs, invading the space of the object. The card—its accession numbers, locations, and dates—becomes linked to the item that the card documents. The catalog begins to catalog itself.

"Every Eye Sees differently. As the Eye–Such the Object."[2]

In other words, vision determines what is seen. Rather than pure representations of reality, video and photography and even the human eye frames and interprets the viewed object.

These amulets were given to The British Museum by Reverend Rose in 1916.

"Amulet. EA54214. Blue glazed composition step-amulet

Acquired: Egypt.

Time Period: Third Intermediate(?). 26th Dynasty(?)."

The third intermediate period of Egypt is widely regarded to have begun in 1070 B.C. and to have ended in 664 B.C. The catalog card blinds us to 180 years—and more.

Amulet, 128805, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

2. Quote by William Blake, which is taken from his annotations to Reynold's *Discourses*.

ITEM FOUR

Accessioning is the transfer of physical and legal custody of an item from one party to an institution. At the time of reception, an accession number is assigned to the item. An accession number is a unique identifier that designates the item's location within—and relationship to—a larger collection.

"Accession Number: 47.101.43"

This is object 47.101.43. It will always be 47.101.43.

> *Names are a logical truth, facts that are necessarily valid no matter the context or circumstances.* [3]

In all possible worlds—any fictional world we imagine, any earth of an alternate timeline—a name still designates the same thing.

If 47.101.43 leaves the institution, no other item may receive the same name. If this item disintegrates, nevertheless it always will have been and always will be 47.101.43.

To name is to identify. To name is to act upon something. To name is to change.

When the institution ends, we may look in its remains and find a catalog card.

It will tell us what is 47.101.43.

Amulet, 47.101.43, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

3. Paraphrase of Saul Kripke, from *Naming and Necessity*.

ITEM FIVE

"Museum number 123030.

Accession number 1931.101.98.

Condition: Fair.

Reason: Scratching."

Accession numbers are inscribed upon an item so that

> *"it can always be identified and cannot be separated from [its] documentation."[4]*

Standard conservation practice dictates that accession numbers should be harmless and durable. The marking should neither damage the object nor be removable. That is, the inscription upon an item must be both permanent and temporary—perpetual yet inconsequential, absolute yet invalid [in-valid], absolute yet invalid [in-vuh-lid].

But no—

It is not the inscription, but the catalog itself that must be infinite. The J. Paul Getty Trust states the following in its accession policies:

> *"the Trust has created records that it believes to be of permanent value."*

To build a relationship between an item and documentation is to create value. The chief cultural charge of these institutions may be the maintenance of databases, of catalog cards and their relationship to items. Can we imagine an institution whose only holdings are a catalog?

Imagine the museum as a house of cards.

amulet (?); pendant (?), 123030, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

4. Nancy Enneking and J. Paul Getty Trust Institutional Archives. *Accessioning Manual, 5th Edition.* (Lost Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2016), 30.

ITEM SIX

Systems of organization demand systems of organization.

The human documentor is imperfect: the illustrating hand may tremble; the surveying eye may overlook; the stuttering mouth may transpose. An incorrect detail can assign an item to irretrievability within a vast holding.

Photography promised a more objective method of representation. Light translated directly to material form. And yet, as photography entered the museum catalogs, it demanded additional tools to verify its documentation. Rulers begin to line the edges of images. They promise scale, even as the photographed object floats in a white, featureless void.

"Museum number: 128805.

Accession number: 1936.0613.201

Height: 53.50 millimeters.

Length: 74 millimeters."

ITEM SEVEN

New classification and conservation technologies promise better access to the object: To better locate the item on archive shelves; To better perceive the item's visual qualities—its proportions, colors, and texture; To better understand the object—its significance, context, and content.

"Cup(?).

 Accession number 1868.1228.80."

Systems of classification are ways of knowing. These system and their tools generate facts: composition; age; weight; height; microscopic black-brown pigments nestled in ceramic cracks.

"Period: Hallstatt(?).

 Excavated: Cemetery(?)."

These facts reveal the nature of things. By them, we come to appreciate the objects. We understand the objects. We finally know them for what they are.

"References: Undated note from Dr. Gutav Klem, 'deep cup with neck'"

 Bracketed curator's remark: "item incorrectly labelled as 'deep cup with neck.'"

Cup(?)., 1868,1228.80, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

ITEM EIGHT

"Body shard of vessel, possibly Alabastron. Black-figure decoration of bird—possibly."

Excavated by Dr. David George Hogarth: British. Male.[5]

"Decoration Top: vertical lines. Possibly neck feathers(?)."

Dr. Hogarth's Address: Chapel Meadow, Forest Row, Sussex, United Kingdom.

"Below: Incised lines Possibly tail feathers(?)."

Dr. Hogarth: Wandering Scholar, title of autobiography published in 1925.

"Left: red pigment for filling ornament(?)—possibly"

On the vessel shard is a sticker that reads—

"Excavated and given by Mr. D. G. Hogarth, 1903."

It is the most prominent ornament on the item.

Certainly.

Definitely.

Absolutely.

Alabastron (possibly), AshmLoan.480, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

5. "Dr David George Hogarth," Collection Terms, The British Museum, accessed February 28, 2022, britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG53866

ITEM NINE

In a survey of its condition, the object is described as brittle, fractured, smudged, and having lost pieces. It has been reinforced with kraft and glassine paper. On that paper, the accession number:

"1950.0522.1."

The cataloging tool ensures the continuation of the object. The catalog preserves the object.

The catalog preserves itself.
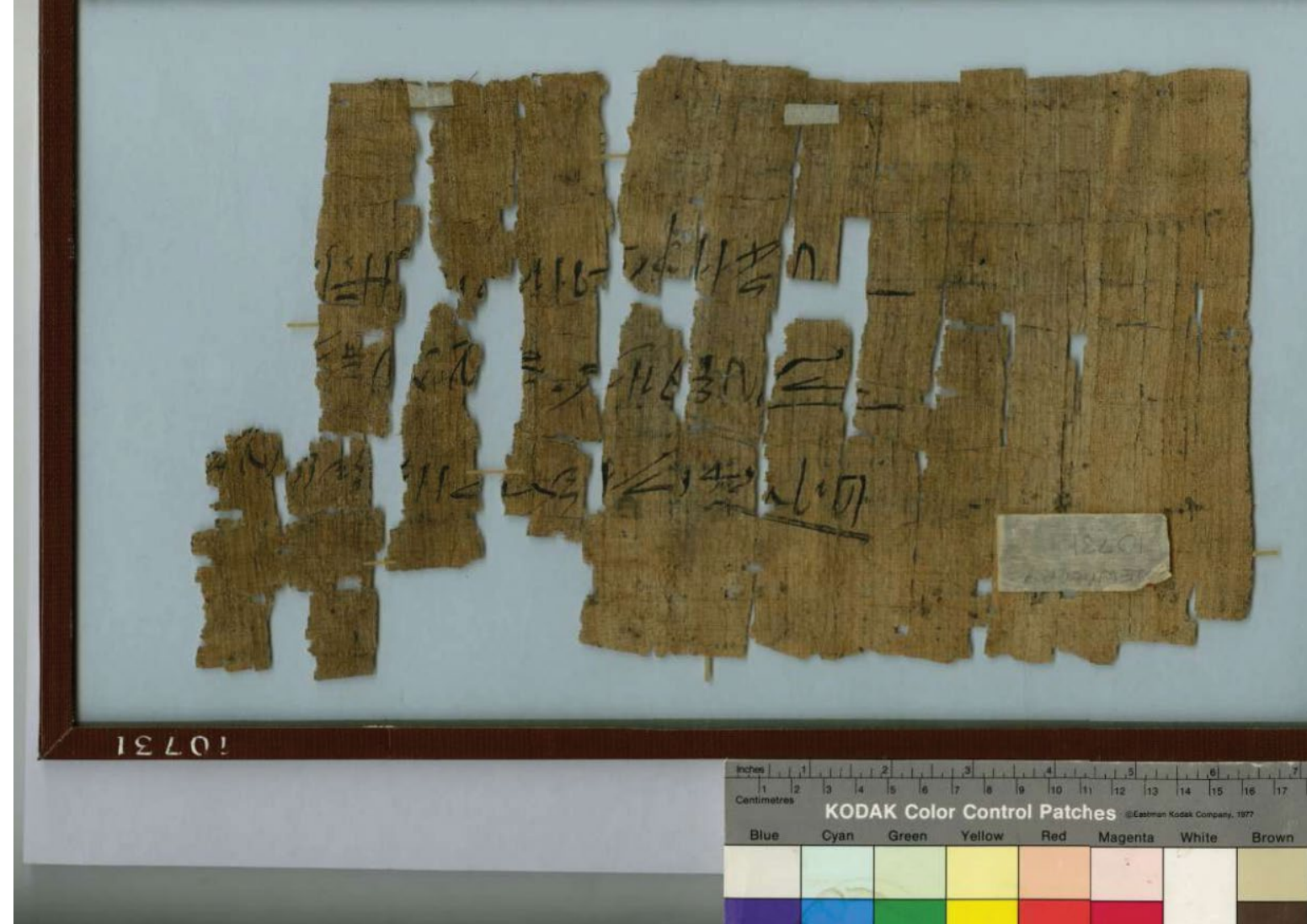
Papyrus; amulet (?), EA10731, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

ITEM TEN

Within this system of knowing, the catalog itself becomes more important than the archived item. The cataloging tools reflect their prominence: text is set at larger sizes; stickers occupy more territory. The object is symbolically and literally obscured by the information that locates it.

What counts as knowledge? Epistemic Violence is the domination of knowledge, the subjugation of ideas considered beneath the level of cognition or science. Colonized subjects are silenced by their perceived lack of rigor or objectivity—their inability to speak the language of knowledge.

"It is the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other."[6]

It is the papering over of the Other.

"Accession number 1923.0619.9.

Location: Not on display."

Shabti; amulet, EA56824, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can The Subaltern Speak?: Reflections On The History Of An Idea,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2010.)
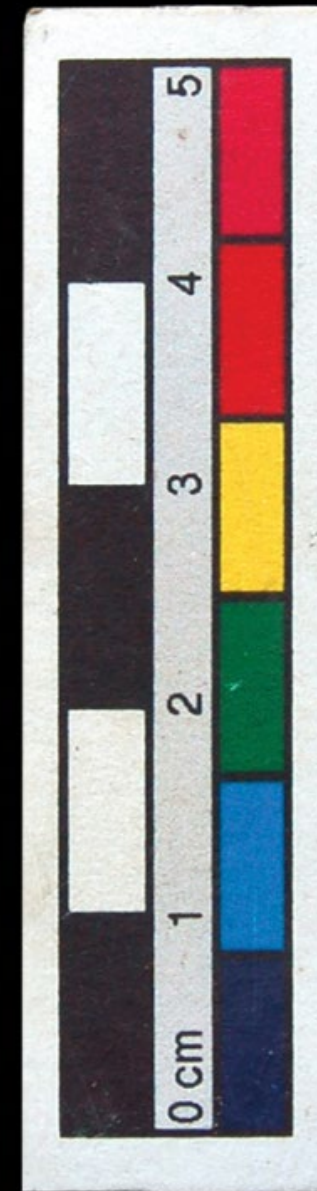
ITEM ELEVEN

What counts as knowledge? Who may produce knowledge? Who may own knowledge?

"Curator's comments:

Previous owner number: Santa Cruz Group 1.4.35 written on label on object.

Previous owner number: 1944.OC.2.1206 written on label on object.

Previous owner number: 3611B written on label on object."

"Persons excluded at the interior have not just been excluded from an interaction. They have been excluded from being human—excluded from intelligibility."[7]

Knowledge systems are value systems.

What counts as knowledge? Who may produce knowledge? Who may own knowledge?

"Found/Acquired: Santa Cruz Islands (Oceania)"

The Lapita culture is the name given to a prehistoric Austronesian people who lived on many Pacific Islands, including the Santa Cruz Islands. The term Lapita was coined when an American archeologist misunderstood the word xapeta'a.

Adze, Oc1944,02.1206, The British Museum. London, United Kingdom.

7. Neil Silberman, *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology, Volume 1,* 2nd Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 210.

"Accession Number: 2011.604.1.2652"

"We see the world in terms of our theories."[8]

Classification systems are designed to seem objective, neutral—obvious. Numbers, grids, names. Dates, lengths, data. With enough contextual information, we can locate any object: find it within a collection, a culture, an era.

"Period: Archaic. Date: 500–480 B.C."

"The primary task of critique will not be to evaluate whether its objects—social conditions, practices, forms of knowledge, power and discourse—are good or bad, valued highly or demeaned."[9]

Classification systems are systems of knowledge. It determines what is and what is not a fact.

It privileges certain ways of knowing. It asserts that certain things are worthy of knowing.

"The primary task of critique will be to bring into relief the very framework of evaluation itself."

"Gift of Dietrich von Bothmer. 2011."

It is a way of seeing that obscures vision. Classification can locate more value in documentation than in the object. The material item becomes lost under its own facts. Ornament becomes identifying stickers. Frames become measuring rods. Names become accession numbers.

Classification becomes its own goal.

Classification is its own goal.

The catalog catalogs itself.

Terracotta fragment of a kylix (drinking cup), 2011.604.1.2652, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States.

8. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1970.)

9. Judith Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," in *The Judith Butler Reader,* ed. Sara Salih (Malden: Blackwell, 2004).

DESIGN AS BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

A Conversation on the 2021 Biennial, Design Education, and Power in Design

ADAM FEIN &
GEORGIE NOLAN

MARCH 2021

In this conversation, Georgie Nolan and I discuss the 2021 RISD Graphic Design MFA Biennial: its history, context, and lessons. This conversation takes up two issues: design education; and the power of graphic design. It is within this conversation that I first articulated a position that graphic design is a fundamentally conservative field, and this conversation is reprinted here for that reason.

The 2021 Biennial was titled "Everything You Can Think Of; Nothing You Want."[1] The biennial contained two shows: a traditional display of graphic desiprojects; and an uncurated collection of memes, emails, voice recordings, and more that spoke to the state of graduate education and the condition of graduate students. It ran from January 21–February 21, 2021. The biennial hosted six events, which focused on community building.

Georgie Nolan graduated from the RISD graduate program in graphic design in 2021. She is currently a visiting lecturer at The Glasgow School of Art and a Creative Strategist for propGen.

This conversation is also published in "Marginalia," see *Queer Things,* page 40, and in Georgie Nolan's thesis, *Future as Medium.*

1. The contents of the 2021 RISD MFA biennial website, including images and curatorial statement, is published in *Queer Study,* page 34.

2. Students from nine MFA graphic design programs gathered for a biennial event. Students responded to ice breaker questions with text or doodles. Images in this interview are screen caps of those responses.

GEORGIE NOLAN What were we thinking when we came up with the theme for the biennial? There was this sense going into planning that everyone was already exhausted before we had even started. Everyone was burnt out and tired and confused and overwhelmed. I remember we discussed doing a graphic design version of *The Great British Bake Off.*

ADAM FEIN In those early ideas, themes of institutional critique and refusal were essential, and then it was about deciding a form. It started out specific—we were going to do a reality-tv-style competition or we were going to draw one another's work rather than actually submit work—but it became more inclusive.

Because one one hand we wanted to communicate discomfort and refusal, but, on the other hand, there was a desire to celebrate our program, to show our work, and to bring attention to the program. We were pulled in these two directions: wanting to refuse but also wanting to display work; how we're really feeling but also what the department wants from us and what we're expected to want from ourselves. The theme, "Everything You Can Think Of; Nothing You Want," was a way to demonstrate the two sides of this coin.

Right, there was one side that was meeting the productive demand of the biennial: to advertise our work, to make the department look good. And then there was the shadow biennial. (Initially, I wanted to do a biennial that was totally off site: not on risd property; not accessible to RISD ip addresses. I love that idea and still wish we had done that.) The shadow biennial, the "Nothing" side, became about what we were going through: our feelings about the work, the context of the professional/polished side of things, and our burnout and fatigue. The institutional critique came from the relationship between the two sides of the biennial, and of graduate school, rather than from an outright rejection of the traditional biennial format.

A funny paradox: working hard to not work hard; being ambitious about doing less. This happens to me over and over again. Resisting dominant values of productivity and professional success is very difficult.

We embraced these two sides in the biennial programming, which was something that the graphic design department hadn't done for a biennial before. We invited alumni, faculty and students together to discuss and explore the two sides to the graduate experience.

Why did we decide to do programming? Why did that seem like something that we had to do?

At the time there was this feeling of lack of community because of the displacement caused by COVID and how abruptly that situation escalated. It was clear that we needed to talk about the issues that we all experienced during that first online semester and how we could improve things. Biennial programming was an opportunity to bring people together. We also wanted to find answers to questions that we were asking ourselves, like, what does it mean to be in grad school when we're completely online? What is the value? What is the value going to be when we graduate? Inviting the alumni back gave us insight and helped us see the world beyond

the virtual walls of Zoom school. So many people say that the value of the RISD experience is the connection to this global network of RISD alumni. But we didn't know alumni, had never seen them or heard from them during graduate school, which seemed like a lost opportunity. We didn't really know how our degree would translate when we left the institution. That was one initial impulse for programming, alongside just getting to do something a bit different given the lack of physical space. But then it started to take on other ambitions as well.

That was definitely part of it. What were some of our original ideas for refusal? Returning to *The Great British Bake Off,* the motivation was that we did not want to show work. We would just create work as a performance for one day to make the biennial as easy as possible, but also as a refusal of the biennial. It started there, but we ditched that idea for a much bigger thing that was harder to accomplish.

We learned a valuable lesson. We were refusing the institution and trying to do something that made it easier for us, but we actually ended up completely overworking. For the other students, the events did achieve some of the goals that we set out to achieve. But for us, it was just a lot of work. That's why refusal is so difficult—it does require work. It's not as easy as "I'm not going to do xyz." To refuse, and to do it in a successful way that carries meaning, is hard.

Right, refusal is not just non-participation. It is a reimagining. You have to both understand the institution—where you're operating, within what structures you're operating—and then have to do something entirely outside of that. It is a lot of work, because it's imagining two different systems.

There are always going to be these conversations. There are always going to be students and faculty that really want to make a change. But there will also be students that realize that, actually, in order to refuse and to do this, it's actually going to take more effort.

Going back to why we chose to do programming, we realized that we were in Zoom school and that we weren't able to do a traditional physical biennial. So why recreate a traditional biennial online? It didn't make sense to reproduce what was normal in an abnormal period. That realization opened up the possibility, weirdly enough, of programming, which we probably wouldn't have even thought about otherwise.

Yeah. Through the biennial, we met people that we otherwise would never have met. We got a lot out of it. This is something that I'm thinking about in terms of adaptive models of education. Having to think this through and create events that would be meaningful to the invited speakers—because initially, we asked them to participate for no compensation—was a learning experience. To create events that would be interesting for students, to manage the negotiation of the whole thing, running events, running the advertising. We learned a lot: practical skills that we can take with us,

and these are contacts that we've now made and can take with us into our careers. Doing and organizing events has been equally as important as completing design briefs. In the real world, these skills, these things we asked of ourselves through the biennial, are the things that we will be doing when we leave school.

Yes, that is also something I learned through the biennial: the organization is just as important as the design. The themes that we were interested in, like refusal or self care or community—those are things where you have the most access to them by creating spaces where interested people can come together and talk about them. Like you said, the biennial activated the RISD network and made it palpable. That was something really empowering for me to see. I realized how easy it is to reach out to people. If you have a fairly precise interest—Zoom school or institutional critique or design education—others who are interested will be very happy to talk to you about it, to spend time with you engaging in those issues. You do not need to have well-formed ideas about the topic to justify those conversations. Making community can be as easy as wanting community.

Which events do you feel were the most successful?

It is a hard question to answer. Once you organize something, once you create a biennial, then you are forced into an extractive position. The question becomes not only what is the most interesting event for me personally, but what is the event that's going to produce the most ephemera or interesting outcomes. For us, that means what event made the most stuff that can be captured in the *Manual for Care,* our post-mortem publication?

We were looking for answers in a way, which maybe changed our perception. I don't think people would usually be doing that when they put together a program like this. But because we wanted to make a change and to find some actionable things that we can show our department as a way to move forward, that added pressure.

The event where I feel like I learned the most was Federico Pérez Villoro and Chris Hamamoto's workshop, "Mirror Schools." That was a three-day workshop about exploring how to subvert and extract material from the institution to give it to a broader community. Plus, Chris and Federico built up an amazing group of references on their website, their presentation was so great, and we got to talk to Joe Potts of the Southland Institute. That was my favorite event personally, and a lot of interesting proposals for work came out of it. In terms of producing content, Elizabeth Leepers's event was maybe the best.

You could really see the care behind Elizabeth Leeper's workshop, "Dream Syllabus." I really enjoyed imagining the syllabus as a speculative tool or tool to manifest care. Also, coming together with students and faculty in one place with designated time to talk about the syllabus from our varied perspectives made for really engaging conversation that felt productive. It

was interesting that, in some feedback on events, people found the issues raised quite confrontational, like life after graduate school, the realities of the industry, what does and doesn't earn money. Elaine Lopez did a fantastic job of showing us the "Nothing" side of her work, the stuff she doesn't show when she's invited to give a presentation. Yes, perhaps it was a bit shocking to be confronted with the idea that when you leave grad school, you have to make a living. But it was also refreshing to see the honesty, to see *how* the skills and thinking she developed translated out into the world. We don't talk about that enough. I think bringing awareness to other modes of education outside of what we are experiencing was also really formative for me. Speaking with Joe Potts was a definite highlight.

Yeah, that goes back to the idea that refusal—or trying to set up alternatives to what felt like unhealthy situations like Zoom school—is a lot of labor, and you hope that it pays off. But you have to sacrifice your body on the wheels of alternative education.

I can't wait to work on all of this again in creating the *Manual for Care* publication.

I think I am still recovering from the burnout that putting on the biennial caused. I don't think I ever quite got over it. What was your favorite event?

I enjoyed all of them for different reasons. It feels like such a long time ago, and we didn't get a moment to absorb just what we'd achieved. The graphic design community event, which Bobby Joe Smith III created, felt really productive. I had a lot of fun there too. It felt really necessary. When we were planning it, we didn't think that it would go as well as it did. I see people that connected during that event are still staying in contact, still in touch on Instagram, asking each other about the thesis process. The community event felt less self-serving; it was an event needed by a wider community. I hope that the network stays together. I hope that it continues or that somebody thinks to do it again. By doing that event, we created this community that needs love and attention, which we need to make sure it gets. There's a responsibility there that we didn't realise at the time.

Yeah, the community event expanded outside of RISD and allowed a larger community to discuss overwork, burnout, and weighing the demands of professional versus personal interest. It allowed us to see that these concerns are actually symptoms of larger structures beyond the school, beyond RISD, that require more organized attention rather than anger at any individual program.

Learning how to organize, how to get things done, how to stop complaining and do something about it, that was definitely a learning curve. It's fine to have these ideas in school, to be angry and upset, to realize what is not working for you. But then you actually need to think about why. How do we talk about that in a space with other people in a way that is not just complaining but actually constructive? How to frame the complaint?

Right, that also goes back to the conditions that we were complaining about, which was burnout and overwork and feeling compelled to constantly produce. Those conditions prevent people from engaging in organization to improve their environments—but also even prevent people from engaging in conversation about those conditions. During the community event, everyone said how great and important it felt to connect with others in the graduate graphic design community, to connect with others who are going through the same things. But we probably would never have met any of them otherwise, because the institutions are competitive towards one another, because the schools won't build inter-programs spaces.

There is a competitive energy between students, and then also between departments, and between schools. Graphic Design isn't always seen as a collective pursuit that is collaborative.

Right, the form of collaboration that seems to be allowable within graphic design is where you interpret someone else's vision. There is no working towards some shared goal or project together.

That was actually an interesting part of Tatiana Gómez Gaggero and José Menéndez's presentation. They were really showing how graphic desican operate as a community-based and collaborative effort, how they were working within the Providence community. A sad realization that I had during that talk was that we aren't really engaged with the Providence community. It's something that I hope changes.

It is important for both RISD and Brown—if they want to continue to position themselves as elite institutions—to maintain a certain amount of separation between themselves and the local community. If they were more porous, then they would not be elite anymore.

I have a job lined up at Harvard after I graduate, so I have been thinking about this again. (And yes I feel conflicted about working at an Ivy.) Elite institutions are reputationally elite through exclusion. But also elite institutions produce high-value research, and that is a good thing. Does RISD do the same? Can graphic design ever be said to produce high-value research?

Might this change?

I hope so. I want RISD to be non-elite, but I do not think that anyone else wants that.

That is something that we spoke a lot about, in the early stages of thinking about refusal, why do people come to RISD? Is it more about the piece of paper and the name and the network? Or is it about the work that you're actually producing and what you're learning? When we all went to Zoom school, we lost so many parts of the graduate experience. What people were holding on to was "I want to finish because I want to graduate from RISD."

To go back to our early thinking on the biennial, one of the reasons we moved to this position of refusal and institutional critique was to ask the question, what is a biennial, and who does the biennial serve? Especially in the case of the 2021 biennial, where we weren't allowed to have a physical space, we thought, "It's our graphic design projects. We're doing all the work to put on the biennial. We're personally paying for digital tools. So, why do we have to do the biennial at all? Why isn't it okay for us to not put it

on? Or do something different? Do whatever we want? Why does it have to be about showing projects, when it's ultimately all unpaid, student labor?"

How do you feel like Zoom school has gone? How do you think design education at the graduate level is working? What direction do you think that this all needs to go?

I don't know what direction we're going in. I don't feel like I know enough about design education more broadly. But at least, at RISD, in my experience, there should be less work. I honestly don't think students will produce worse things if we do 20% less work, have 20% less demanding schedules, have 20% less requirements. We might event produce better things. One of the big benefits—perhaps the foremost benefit—of elite design education is the network. A big part of that is actually spending time with other people. I think "elite" Zoom-based education is impossible. And I don't think RISD as a fully Zoom-based program would be successful. This year was an experiment that showed our program has to be in person. What do you think? What did you learn? What do you think the future design education is?
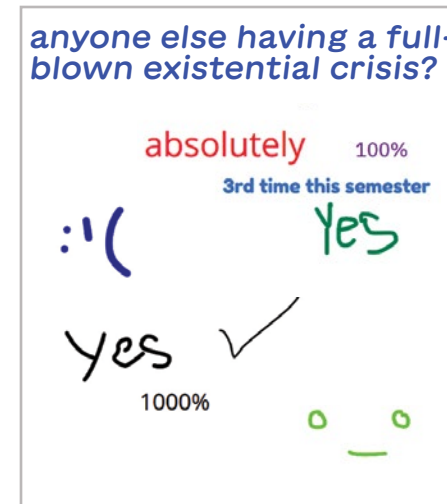
It became clear to me during the last year that it is really important to have trust within a design department, to trust students to organize and to produce events that they find meaningful, to get the most out of their own education. Space for student organizing is really important and encouragement and time for student organizing is really important. What I know from speaking to other grads through that community network and from my own experience is that the most important takeaways from graduate school aren't really the things that happened in the classroom but what happens between people, for example, in the studio. Those relationships and what we learned from one another are the most important. Design education has to change. There is a general feeling that we need to reassess curriculum. We also need to reassess the ways we are teaching it, and the environments and the spaces that we are teaching in, and how to make that a place that's not stressful—a place where students really feel like they can explore.

To build on your point, one of the things we learned from the biennial was that we are capable of creating the sort of educational experiences that we want to have. We invited the speakers we wanted to hear from. We invited the teachers we wanted to learn from. It raises the question: do schools need to be an organization? Or could they be nomadic, little moving events that people join and then leave? Could they be dispersed and cloudy—not buildings but clouds?

What if there are no assignments or strict structures, but instead you float through, find things to attach to, and explore? That might be a more intuitive way of navigating an institution.

It definitely feels like it's moving away from skills-based learning.

We're not learning skills. We're learning how to think. That's why we don't leave, because we want to know how to think, and we all see value in that.

Right, it makes me wonder if we are moving away from school as a place to develop a personal visual voice or brand. We are no longer asking, "how do we make our own studio?" Instead we are figuring out alternative forms of knowledge production or ways to organize alternative relationships and communities.

I talked to Rory Hyde yesterday, and we considered a related issue. Architects today are thinking about the future of housing but designing based on the existing legal constraints. Is that really imagining the future? Because that is designing to today's constraints. Maybe what you need to do is reimagine the constraints. Do we need to build in the same way that we've been building since the 50s? What we need and the ways that humans live have changed. A more productive way of teaching architects may be to have them consider the law, its framework, and how to advocate for policy change. But that's not the stuff that we spend time on at school. Maybe the future is less aesthetic and more ethical.

Graphic Designers should all be lawyers, and lawyers should be graphic designers?

Exactly! In all seriousness, though, graphic designers need to stop behaving as if they exist in a vacuum, where it's just about making things look pretty. That's so loaded. What do you really learn if you are just learning to make things look pretty? In 10 years, that particular "pretty" is no longer relevant anymore anyway.

I think that's actually what grad students at RISD do: speculate alternative ways to be a graphic designer. Could a graphic designer be this or that? Maybe that is what the biennial was. What are some existing alternative practices that people have built?

We need a class on alternative practice. Maybe? Where we could actually just explore that. Anyway, I feel like we have covered a lot of stuff. Is there anything that we didn't talk about that we should talk about? I'm gonna edit this to make at least myself sound smarter.

Make me sound smarter too! Maybe we can replace everything that we said with quotes from books? I hope this was good for you. I hope you got what you wanted out of this.

I definitely did. I am speaking with Annelys de Vet later today, and there may be things I want to follow up with you about. She already asked me an interesting question: What makes design education different from art education?

That's like the question, isn't it? How is design different from art? I think art is the field where we can test value, where we decide what we care about

and what we should care about. And design is the social enforcement of that value: how do our values appear in the world? How do they direct us in the world? If that is the role of the design, it makes sense that RISD graduate students are all thinking: How can we find freedom within the way that design operates? Does graphic design always need to enforce established social values or can graphic designers instead resist or subvert values? Part of the reason that design cannot be a field in which you speculate value is that for design to operate it has to have some sort of social recognition. A street sign in order to guide people to places can't be in an alien language, right? But art can be an alien language, and it's fine, because there's no material effect. Either people believe the art, or they don't believe it.

I would both trouble and emphasize this. A street sign in an alien language can make us think about: what is language? What is a street sign? What does typography do? For the most part, though, these questions provoke us to consider graphic Design, its ontology and activities. When does graphic design prompt us to look beyond itself?! Perhaps only when the content that the graphic design contains is radical, ie. the graphic design can only transmit radical notions, not be radical itself. But that is okay! We just need to focus on developing relationships and communities that produce and enact radical content.

What kind of spaces, interactions, or questions are specific to graphic design and design pedagogy?

This is hard because I have never been in an art class. So I shouldn't really be talking about art. But I feel that a lot of what our design does is engage in the interpretation of other things. How do we take an input, put it through whatever-design-is, and create an output where we recognize the input but it is improved, altered, made legible. Design is input the transformation then output. Art is, maybe, more about collecting things, interweaving things—art is about making blankets!

Art is about making blankets, and design is about making...

Widgets! It is a factory! What I am getting at is that in design there is more of an emphasis on the interpretation of a thing. How will people interpret your thing? And how can you control that interpretation given the history of interpretation, based on how everything else has previously been interpreted? Whereas for art, the question is: How do you say something new and how will that new thing be read?

Perhaps design has more to do with behavior, understanding behavior. In art, you are open to many different types of reactions, to all responses. Whereas in design, you're trying to predict that or you design for a particular kind of behavioral reaction. I'm wondering whether this idea of design as problem solving—whether that is still true. And art is more exploring rather than solving?

One difficulty in locating the difference between design and art is that both can do similar research: How do people see? How will people interpret that thing? Art can do that. So I like your point that design operates within a narrower field of behavior. There are fewer reactions, at least culturally, that design is supposed to produce. Art can disgust you, or gross you out, or make you angry. Where design isn't supposed to do that. And if you are grossed out by design, it needs to be clever enough that the viewer reflects on their own disgust and thinks, "Oh, the designer was so smart. They provoked a response in me." When there's like a negative affective reaction that's associated with it, design must also draw attention to the way that

anyone struggling to get back into school? ✔

‼ → dreading the semester, lol how do i make +1 work again? +1

+1

LOL :\ +1
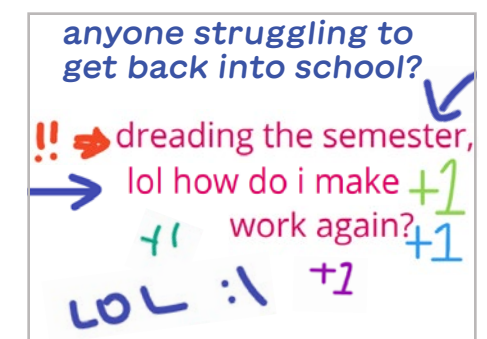
that negative reaction was produced. Art doesn't have to do that. Do you think that's true? I don't know. I don't know what art is.

This makes me feel that what I'm doing is not design. It's closer to art. I do not think that we are asked to really think about design in the RISD graphic design department. We are not thinking like designers. We are thinking like artists.

Really, if I have to give a safe, definite answer, I would say design is something concerned with type and pages.

Design feels more methodical or constrained. It serves a purpose in some way. Whereas art feels more like personal exploration.

This is why I am so interested in type. I want to talk about graphic design, and type is the only way that I'm sure I'm talking about graphic design.

Graphic designers deal with typography, and we know that as a fact.

Right, we know that!

Graphic design does not feel like design in the same way that industrial design feels like design, at least in the way that it's experienced at RISD.

The "design process" is good at capturing the feeling of what design is. Except for two things: One, Everything—well most things—we do in grad school is clearly graphic design, but it doesn't go through a graphic design process, not literally. Two, the process applies to so many different things. If you are an artist, and you're trying to make a painting that produces a particular reaction, you go through the "design process:" You consider what is going to cause the reaction, do a couple of drafts, then you show it to people. If they don't react appropriately, then you try more versions, and then you put it in a gallery. That's the design process.

What actually is our design process when we are working at RISD. Usually it is weighing our work against a set of expectations. Is this work serving the goal that you were trying to achieve? Are you speaking to your intended audience? Is this communicating XYZ in the way that you want it to? So there's a consideration of how it's received on the other end. And what I'm arguing for in my thesis is thinking about the ethical implications of how you're saying what you're saying and the possible interpretations of that. That might be how graphic design goes more into design as opposed to art? We do design because the work goes through a distillation process of examining it against the public's expectations.

What you're saying is that designers need to also consider the ethical behavior that results from graphic design?

Well, that doesn't make you a designer, but designers should be thinking about the long-term or even short-term ethical implications of the way that a message is communicated. That gets complicated because the message may be a personal message that comes more out of an art process.

Then the question is does this perspective need to be in the world? Is this serving me? Thinking about the ethics of what you're saying sometimes means that you actually end up saying nothing. Because then it is not design, maybe it's more art.

Right, one of the significant ways the graphic design has been defined throughout the 20th century by modernists has been as a neutral thing that does not affect people's behavior. Graphic design transmits messages and the message affects people, but graphic design doesn't take any responsibility for the message.

Yeah, what happens after you put that message out into the world? Maybe that is what makes you a designer: You consider the behavior produced in reaction to the message. Is that serving my intended outcome, my intended audience, or not?

That's interesting. You tell me if I'm understanding you. What I'm hearing is that design is unique in that it exclusively focuses on the behavior that it produces in its audience. That's different from art because—Op art, for example—can purely be focused on inducing visual pleasure. Art can potentially be non-coercive or non-political. Whereas graphic design always necessarily is concerned with human behavior. Is that what you're saying?

I think so. But then there is definitely graphic design work that happens within our department that is purely formal—explorations only meant to induce pleasure. Is that graphic art, though, and not graphic design?

The many layered onion that is graphic design. The bloomin' onion of graphic design. Your people's national food.

It definitely is. Good chat, though.

Yeah, I am glad we didn't end earlier.
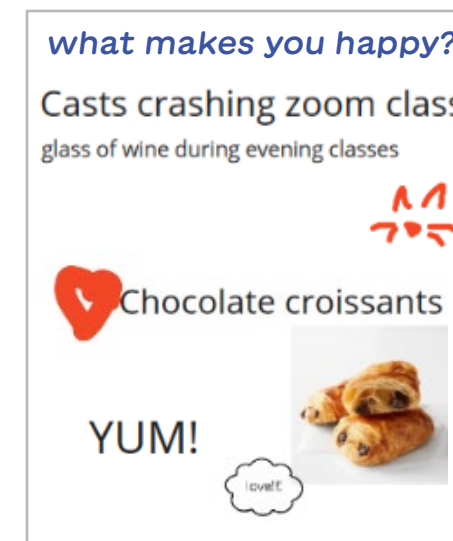
Yeah. I'm excited to see what Anlys thinks makes design education different from other types of education? And what do we need to educate designers that we do not need to educate other kinds of creatives. This has come up in a lot of the conversations I've had, even with Rory Hyde and with Forest Young: Designers are chasing our tails. We keep teaching design education in the same way. It is not producing the designers that we actually need. (We do need people with design skills and to execute design briefs. We definitely need that. But that is skill-based training that can happen in another way.) But the designers that we need, who are the more conceptual thinkers, need to understand how statistics and data and the science around clients' projects, and they need to understand the world that we live in a deeper way—not in an art way, but in a very factual, scientific way through hard evidence. We're not really teaching or exposing students to that. And it is an issue, because there is a gap between what clients need and what designers want to give them. There is a position in the middle, between science and art, that doesn't really exist. I think

Forest Young tries to be—and Wolf Olins overall does a pretty good job at being—in the middle. They want to understand a client and its needs based on research done into the future of the client's field, and so Wolf Olins has some power to direct the next five to 10 years of that business. And they're conscious of the power that they have. (Of course, ultimately, when they make design products for a company, Wolff Olins cannot fully control what the client does with the designs. But the decisions that are made while that brief is at Wolff Olins is really important.) That means having designers who know enough about the industry that they can reframe the brief, ask the right questions, and actually make a difference in these conversations, can actually affect a client's direction. But so many designers don't want to get involved with big companies. That is not what we want to do. That is not what we're taught to do in school. We're taught to reject that.

That is the paradox of personal practice. You pursue a personal practice in order to be a more ethical designer, but then you're significantly less capable of having an ethical effect in the world.

One thing that I am getting at here is network effects which entails an emphasis on the communities in which graphic design operates. That is, if organization(s) enable a greater ethical effect, then graphic designers need to care deeply about organizing the correct kinds of institutions and communities.

There can be a spot in between science and design and art. Schools like SVA have tried to fill that gap in the past, by having a more of a corporate, industrial focus, but that is also not right. There is something that makes designers different from artists. But what do they need that is different and how do you teach that? Do you teach business theories? Forest Young uses world building a lot. He hires actors to play out these alternative futures that he projects for companies 10 years in the future. The actors take on personas that come from research. It is so art school! But they do it in a way that is really productive, that shows clients the futures they engage through design products—a potential outcome from a proposed set of decisions. That is something you could teach in design school. How do you apply this creative thinking? But we never take it that far. We never answer how the processes that we engage with in design school can be applied in different environments for purposes other than our own research interests. For me, I want to change design education from the outside—but from inside institutions. I care about the way that we talk to people that are going to go into design, because discussions on design ethics are the most fruitful in the beginning. But there are people that have to do it at the client level. There need to be people that care about design ethics both inside and outside.

what does success look like in your department?

I'm not sure if there's a defined metric for success? It often seems like a strange balance between pushing forward with the work I'd like to make but trying to qualify it or spin it to make it fit into coursework.

!! I'm not sure at the moment but I am sick of faculty saying to not stress and so I don't stress...but then I go to critique and realise I should have been stressed more ✓✓✓   Range of exploration

In the past, a single defined, polished project. Seems to be more open ended now.

Fully finished projects that are beautifully designed. Generally one year long project.

- Process based exploration/thinking
- Formal and critical perspective

my program isn't just graphic design, so we all end up doing completely different things. which makes it hard to measure what they see as success (maybe is a good thing??)

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Approvals

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the Department of Graphic Design of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island,

by Adie Fein [for now].

It has been approved by the Master's Examination Committee:

BETHANY JOHNS
GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

QUEER

QUEER RELATIONS
NOT QUEER AESTHETICS

STUDY

QUEER
STUDY
adie
fein

The embeddedness of Thelonious Monk's music has more to do with being able to understand the politics of it. He made music with, and for, and of the people: the people of his neighborhood.

All these musicians say the most important thing to do is not to play but to listen. You have to be able to listen to each other, to be able to play with one other, to play in response to one another. It's like a set of conversations. Because making music is not about virtuosity. It's about being able to create a kind of community voice.

This concept has caused me to move away from "empathy." What I've called "empathy" was really, if you get down to it, solidarity. Empathy pivots around taking a singular story, someone's singular experience, and then projecting out. As if that singular experience—empathizing with the individual—then allows us to understand everyone who might be suffering from a particular set of circumstances or struggles. It gets you into the problem of "innocence." That is, you empathize with victims and not so with those who are not identified as victims, as not "innocent," but as perpetrators. I want to understand other positions. Empathy also requires identifying with the person you're empathizing with. And sometimes you only identify with those whom you recognize. That's a problem because part of solidarity is the people who you don't recognize. The people who you don't see yourself in.

Our support and solidarity with people who are struggling for human dignity and justice should not depend on their knowing anything about us! Solidarity is not a market exchange. It's not, you need to give us your love and we'll give you ours!

INTRODUCTION

Queer Study addresses graphic design graduate education. What is school for? What are students' experiences in school? How can the institution accommodate sorrow and joy, mind and body, self and others? Can one locate self-actualization inside the academy?

Queer Study in particular advances a vision for graphic design and graphic design education that emphasizes community: the graphic designer as an embedded member within community; and graphic design as a tool to uplift and to create community.

This book also considers the radical potential of graphic design and its opposite, design pessimism. Does design education have liberatory potential? Or does it promote a vision of graphic design that is impotent.

conversation

SORROW NOTE

On Feeling Bad, Sad, and Mad in Graduate School

ADAM FEIN

APRIL 2021

Dear Adam of Tomorrow,

At the moment of writing, I am—this Adam is—in despair.

An authentic despair: unresolvable aloneness; breathless, hopeless; big bodily pulse of pain; chemical relief, blank-wall-staring, brain-on-fire despair.

It has been, for everyone, an extremely difficult year spent in a pandemic: a year of isolation, anxiety, uncertainty, vulnerability. Virtual education is extremely exhausting, and so you've spent the last eight months teetering into and out of burnout. Your burnout has, at times, made you a miserable person to be around: angry, spiteful, ungenerous. Over the past several months, perhaps beginning in February, your burnout has matured into depression. Plague and University are not the only reasons.

A tumor was found in your father's brain on July 21, 2020. (You named this tumorversary in your calendar application.) It was successfully removed, but Dad has been undergoing radiation and chemotherapy since January 20, 2021. Well, Dad's been on and off it as his health fails and then recovers. Your long-term relationship is, perhaps, crumbling. You and Kylie discussed breaking up this Thursday, April 29, 2021. And you've felt increasingly alienated from your own body. These are all hardships happening but hopefully resolved when you return to this text as some tomorrow Adam.

1. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," (1892), 3.

The critical position is intended to answer the normative philosophical question of what graphic designers ought to do. For the graduate student, it is a defense of their future: this is the work I will produce; and this is why the work is justified; and this is why others should imitate my practice. Yet, as I am now, the future feels precarious. At this moment, thinking desperate thoughts, a critical position seems irrelevant.

What is and what is not allowed in a critical position? Is anger or complaint, sadness or despair critical? Do moods locate you within the world? As you are, right now (or perhaps long ago), feeling hopeless it is hard to imagine what you have to offer any person, let alone the department, school, field, and world. How can I have a stake in the future of the world while dismissing the point in which that stake is planted? There is a body behind this critical position, heart that beats onward and sensing organs and a feeling center. Where is that body in this compendium? In this graduate program? In graphic design? How can this [gestures around at everything] be separated from that?

Dear Adam of Tomorrow: It was not only bad. While you have felt alone, you have never been alone. Thank you to your family, friends, faculty, peers, and therapist.[2] Thank you to films and books and gummy bears. There was pleasure and joy and accomplishment in your work. The struggle has been against yourself too—your location of value, your ability to ask for help—and you have grown. But it was also awful, and so do not redeem it retrospectively.

Graduate school asks you to announce an interest and then to pursue that interest to the exclusion of everything else for two or three years. The only way to deal with your human shit is to containerize it, transform it into a vehicle for productivity. I have done this several times: I made work about burnout in Graduate Studio; I was heavily involved in the 2021 MFA graphic design biennial, which turned complaint about virtual education, exploitation, and burnout into an exhibition; and now I'm spinning a weekend of hopeless depression into a compendium text.

Every time I have made extremely personal work, work that exposes vulnerable emotional and physical states, it has been poorly received. My presentation on burnout was literally ignored. RISD faculty were largely absent during the biennial. I assume this letter will also be badly received, perhaps seen as a "cry for help." It is not. (I mentioned my therapist above. He is aware. You do not need to refer me to CAPS.) This is just a person overflowing. I have run out of compartments into which my emotions might be privately secured. Avoidance is not the only way that graphic designers reject the personal.

Often the response of the department is not "How can we help?" but "How can we help you finish?" That is, how can we ensure the production of work? This does speak to the culture of RISD and the RISD GD program, but I think more specifically addresses the structure and function of graphic design generally. That is, graphic design is empathetic toward productivity; designers sympathize with the user in order to produce a design solution. Graphic designers confront issues by operationalizing them. There is no space for the expressive—even the personal aesthetic is graded for its communicative value—there is only space for the functional. Graphic design is itself what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney term "a call to order."[3] It is the systemic capture of untidy things.

As graduate students, we often complete assignments by capturing our critical thinking or experimental visual in books or websites or posters. This is what graphic design does: materializes thought; transforms it into a consumable product; circulates it within a system of signifiers. Consider, for example, something deviant, like sexual photography. Turned into a poster, the deviant is assigned a specific function in the public sphere. The deviant is designated as publicity material, perhaps becoming spectacle. The audience knows how it should be interpreted, seen, read. The real radical potential of deviance—the potential of unrehearsed relationships—is transformed into an understandable interaction. The poster, or whatever graphic design object, returns even the deviant to traditional social forms. Graphic design has a built in telos.

Graphic design needs to make space for more. My despair demands entry for the body, emotion, and ugliness. We must fling open our compartments, let us air our moods and disappointments. Not everything should make sense, or be legible, or be productive. Graphic design needs to find a way to be non-productive. I need to find a way to be non-productive. I need to find a place for my depression and misery without a requirement that those moods are redeemed through productive labor.

Can we imagine an alternative? Graphic design as a practice of loafing. I want to be alongside people. Sit with them in the real shit of it all. I do not want to empathize but be brought inside. I want to wail with. And to make that sorrow legible: An affective visibility that is not availability to political or industrial systems—but rather entrée to communion, to community. This is not graphic design that containerizes but instead a graphic design that dissolves the barriers between I and You, Author and Reader, Designer and Audience. It is not a graphic design that controls vision but one that itself engages in seeing the other, in really seeing you.

2. See Acknowledgements in *Queer Power* for a full list.

3. Stefano Harney & Frank Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013), 125.

Dear Adam of Tomorrow: Did you save the world through graphic design? That is a joke. You will not and cannot. Graphic design will not and cannot. As Camus said, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." So why is the life of graphic design worth living? Why do graphic design? It is surely not more rewarding than other fields. It surely is not necessary for human life. It is not currently a source of pleasure.

Perhaps the only reason to do graphic design is because Adam, this Adam, me now, I find satisfaction in it. You make graphic design now because you cannot do otherwise—or maybe because you can do graphic design. At the moment, the world seems unturning, perpetually dark and dusky. Graphic Design is where you can loaf until the sun rises. While you do not find happiness in graphic design, in graduate school, you do find purpose. Every day you return to the same tasks with the same tools toward the same goals. Graphic design is a practice: something one does over and over again, repeating it until it becomes meaningful. Hopefully that purpose can bloom one day again into happiness.

One must imagine Adam happy.

Nora Khan May 2nd, 2021 at 9:43 PM
Thank you, @Adam Fein! I receive your sorrow note with great tenderness and not poorly at all; I think all feeling can be captured in a critical position and affect and critique are inexorably bound; let us discuss the ways the work and feeling inform and complaint all inform each other. Each expression is political. I thank you for writing this!

❤️ 5   😊⁺

1 reply

Adam Fein 1 year ago
Thank you, Nora. I appreciate hearing this.

🙏 1   😊⁺

DOING DOUBLE WORK

A Conversation on Design Education, Student Needs and Exiting Grad School

**FOROUGH ABADIAN
& ADIE FEIN
& NICK LARSON**

APRIL 2022

Three thesis-year graduate students discuss their experiences in the RISD Graphic Design program. This conversation circles around three questions: What are the ambitions and activities of design education? What is the form and purpose of a graphic design thesis? And what actually is graphic design?

Forough Abadian is a member of the graduating class of 2022 of the RISD graduate program in graphic design. Her work addresses issues of diaspora, identity, and archives. Her forthcoming thesis is titled Ports of Entry.

Nick Larson is a member of the graduating class of 2022 of the RISD graduate program in graphic design. His work addresses issues of semiotics, recursive processes, and contemporary media. His forthcoming thesis is titled !.

ADIE FEIN What kind of comfort food do you have in Iran?

FOROUGH ABADIAN We have hot dog and pizza places. We also have traditional wraps.

Nick Larson I would be very happy if I could replace the ubiquitous hot dog carts in New York City with falafel stands.

Have you tried Halal Guys in New York? It's very famous. They are open until 3am.

Being open late is important. Have you had Haven Brothers? It is a diner food truck that parks off Kennedy Plaza. It is only open from 5pm to 3am.

How is the food?

Their cheese steak sandwich is so good. It is so bad for you. The bread is soaked in grease, but it's still crispy. It's what you want.

Why does everything unhealthy taste so good?

Better question: Why does everything healthy taste so bad?

Is it a design problem?

Everything is a design problem! We can save the whole world! when I moved to the United States, I gained so much weight. I have this illusion that if I move somewhere else I will become thin again. when

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ADIE FEIN Alight, let's get started. My goal for this is to continue conversations that I've had at different times with you both about graphic design: What is it? What can it do? How has our idea of it changed over time? I am also interested in having an open conversation about how we're doing, how we feel about school, and how we feel about the thesis. If we were to identify three themes that I hope to explore in this conversation, they would be: graphic design education, design pessimism, and thesis. But we don't necessarily have to hit all of those. Thoughts?

NICK LARSON Graphic design is not fun to talk about in graduate school! Talking about graphic design typically means, "Hey, look at this cool packaging. Isn't that nice?" But what it means in grad school is talking about processes, systems, and their implications. Because graphic design is medium agnostic—it doesn't have a specific thing—conversations about graphic design are about context without content.

Are you saying that because graphic design has become media agnostic—and so we cannot speak directly to what graphic design is—we talk a lot about what surrounds graphic design?

Yeah, we talk around graphic design. Because it's so pliable, you can go in any direction and so it becomes about narrative. What people miss when they read a designer-as-author-type article is that it is just one narrative of graphic design. Taking these ideas as cannon or intellectual framework just isn't interesting to me. When we talk about CalArts, Pomo, Las Vegas, whatever, it is so divorced from responding to things that people have designed. We're no longer talking about a thing that we see in front of us as a material object. The act of labeling it as such is the conversation.

Right, a lot of what we do in graduate school is historicize. We try to explain how something fits or doesn't fit into existing categories—

Discourse about discourse!

Yes, graduate school is a meta-discursive practice.

Everything should be grounded in or responding to what someone is showing you. But every art school critique I have experienced is just so opposite to that. It involved projecting outward and associating. Crit becomes about building historical narratives around work.

you eat poorly you also feel worse,
sluggish.

People say that they feel better
with a healthy diet. I am very
healthy — and I still feel like shit.

That is what pisses me off so much.
You can't just eat well or just sleep
well or just exercise! You got to do
all of them!

FOROUGH ABADIAN*You know, it's funny—I decided to leave architecture, because it's so broad. That is ironic! I wanted to do something more specific, and then I found myself in graphic design. It is even broader! The reality of architecture is that at the end of the day the final output is pretty rigid. It is a structure. It is a form that you inhabit. The starting point can be anywhere, the references can be from everywhere, but the output as an architectural piece is a concrete form. Graphic design is such a muddy ground. What makes us so disinterested in graphic design? Why are we not engaging with it more directly?*

It often feels like graphic design is trying to legitimate itself by creating an independent history of graphic design. The question is "graphic designers specifically started doing this one formal move at this point" rather than "graphic designers started doing this at this point, after being influenced by a technique used in painting for decades." It just doesn't make sense to me to divorce graphic design from other art historical contexts.

Right, so, in the context of historicizing graphic design, the separation is never in service of providing explanation. It's in service of individualizing a narrative—either of the field generally or of one person specifically.

Yep, creating a narrative. I didn't realize that in graduate school I would be expected to do every project twice: I come up with a topic that I'm interested in working with, and then I am asked to turn it into a PowerPoint presentation.

That's a really interesting point. Going further than PowerPoint, I would say the expectations of the field—both what is professional practice and what is graphic design ontologically—structures everything: our labor, processes, and projects. We do have to do double work. In the fine arts, you make the piece, and it is done; you display it in a studio or gallery. In graphic design, you make the content, you also make the container for the content, and then you also make the presentation for both content and container. The graphic design thesis is nested containers: an exhibition, a website, a presentation, a book, projects. That is all "graphic design."

Graphic design is more professionally focused on presentations than other fields. Whether the project is big or small, freelance or in-house, you have to sell it to the client. That informs the model of Fiverr or competition-based

QUEER STUDY   14   FOROUGH ABADIAN, ADIE FEIN & NICK LARSON   15

design services, and it feels like it has invisibly informed design education. I say invisibly because, within the department, we never address what makes a good presentation or how to present. We may discuss the narrative of a project, but we rarely describe that as building pitches.

Yea, and feedback is often, "You didn't really sell this idea to me." Why do you expect to get something right when you first see it? If I am presenting something, it could be something I myself don't understand—this is something I just made. Why is there a hurry to resolve? I didn't think that, at a program like RISD, it was going to be professional activities dressed up differently.

The pressure to have a deliverable and a presentation to package and contextualize the deliverable feeds into another issue in graphic design. Presentations in school very often look like "My work is about this, the project does this, and the outcome is this." It obscures a messy process or disconnected interests. That is narrative—and I don't trust it.

When you buy an item at a store, you are buying into a whole system of things. Graphic design masks that system. The intention of a lot of graphic design is to remove an object from the lineage that produced it and make the object appear as though it always existed on a store shelf. As if the object had never been anything else or been anywhere else. So when I encounter design that is clear, slick, and resolved, I think that is hiding an agenda.

That relates to an issue we talked about last weekend: that graphic design is a kind of visual code switching. Graphic design attaches cultural signifiers to an item so that it can be directed toward the desired audience or context, regardless of, as you put it, the item's lineage.

Graphic design is, in a lot of ways, this process of regurgitating the same things for a different context or a different audience. If I want to sell water to black metal fans, I'll apply a spiky font that says water. I am referring to Liquid Death. It is pure marketing.

This is graphic design as vibe dealer. A vibe is an aesthetic meaning associated with something. Graphic designers typologize those aesthetics. For example, "dollar store" will conjure bubble letters, bright colors, kitsch. The graphic design's job is to become aware of consumer aesthetics and then to reproduce or iterate on them. Everything is a remix. That is why it is bizarre to me for anyone to claim ownership over a style.

A good graphic designer becomes deeply literate in the many forms of visual culture—their aesthetics, values, and use cases—so that when a client identifies an audience, say a middle-class woman in her 30s, the designer can deploy the exact typeface that appeals to her. What is so strange to me is that we are doing this entirely separated from these communities. None of us learned what a middle-class woman in her 30s wants by surveying her. We are learning about peoples' desires through visual culture. We ingest and then transmit. I bring this up for two reasons: One, a successful graphic designer reproduces cultural norms; Two, a successful graphic designer must learn about and communicate with diverse groups without ever engaging with those communities.

That is the way of the world right now. That is what getting news from social media is: getting a set of data points—10 things you must know about Ukraine—and making an inference. Increasingly, that kind of content is not made by graphic designers. You don't need to be a graphic designer to produce graphic design at all. You can make really convincing content that fits into its aesthetic surroundings, like native advertising, without any knowledge of design tools or skills.

I think about cultural literacy a lot. I feel that I will never be culturally literate in the United States. I am always one step behind pop culture, and I will always be catching up. If I want to engage in social or cultural ideas, I am afraid that what I want to say will be obsolete. It just makes me think that the projects that I have made in the past two years are my attempt to find my place here and my belonging here by becoming culturally aware. I don't think I have very much to say to any audience in the United States. Perhaps that is pessimistic. Lately my work has focused on the Middle East, because I'm from there and so I supposedly know more about it. Who knows, though, maybe I am as unaware of events there as here.

Partly, that is the culture machine reinforcing the idea that you're behind: cultural FOMO. To perpetuate itself, culture needs to move so fast (or create the illusion that it's moving so fast) that no one person can comprehend it.

I have two responses: One is that there is value in hybridity, in bringing two typically separate things together. Some will view your perspective on American culture as a strength. And, also, I do not believe any person, even if

raised in the United State, is fully-literate in all aspects of American culture.

Two is that no person can consume everything in their field. Even in smaller, more specific fields, say Victorian literature or queer theory, people can only read the most consequential or relevant material. Unlike those fields, however, graphic design is massively productive. Like Nick said, even "non-graphic designers" are generating graphic design. What does it mean, then, to be an expert in the field of graphic design? That you've looked at all of the logos? Used all the fonts?

Looking at stuff is the best graphic design education. You want a branding class? Go to the grocery store! Most people have more visual acuity than they think they do. A lot of graphic design is making this look like or not look like things you have seen before.

One role of graphic design education is not to develop visual acuity but to develop the language to describe what you are already seeing. That is one skill that is practiced in the presentation of work.

It is a ridiculous expectation, though, that we should have the language to address everything that we make. Other people may have better language, and that should be the point of critique.

The best critique is when the critic says, "I hear you are saying this, but I see this," or "I would use these words to describe your work. Does that feel right?" And the worst critique is rule based and normative, which enforces this idea that a graphic design process should look one way and produce a certain kind of outcome. I'm reacting against the idea that everyone at the end of the program should be a graphic designer.

How many people do end up being graphic designers after graduating?

That would be interesting to find out, but I am speaking more personally. I like making graphic design. I am interested in graphic design. But I am not sure that I want to be a graphic designer. I am not sure that I am—cringe—passionate about designing. Whatever that means. I frequently wonder if I just have the wrong feelings. Why do I not care about what I am supposed to care about? I wonder if everyone else has totally different experiences in their body and mind than I do in relation to graphic design and

the act of designing. (Huh, that is a transy thought: Does everyone just feel good in their graphic-designer bodies, and I don't?)

The conflict between academic and professional practice or traditional and non-traditional work is interesting. Beyond grad school, graphic design has a pretty precise definition. But in grad school, suddenly everything is all out the window.

RISD has a reputation as experimental for graphic design, yet it's still one of the more rigid departments within the college.

If you show up with a sculpture to a graphic design class, people may be confused. Whereas if you show up with a book to a sculpture class—

—no one's going to question that. Because graphic design is media-agnostic, there's a heightened emphasis on intention. You chose to make a sculpture. So much of the graphic design feels like training in how to talk about our work rather than, you know, getting feedback about typography.

Do you want a cider? Isn't the label cool?

It is badass. This is some fucking graphic design right here.

That's the funny thing, though, isn't it? There is all this dissection of graphic design, but it may be nothing more than image making.

Right, as a professional practice it is making images, making narratives, and selling them both. For so much of the graphic design that gets lionized—particularly, modernist things—stupid is better. One frustration I have with the program is the emphasis on work being graphic design rather than us figuring out what the work actually is together. I'm interested in things that don't have a clearly prescribed narrative, and that approach gets push back—a lot of pushback. At no point do I feel like we have been given the opportunity to be legitimately experimental, at least in a required graduate studio class. Maybe form?

What would "experimental" look like?

Doing something you've never done before. Being given the time and space beyond two weeks to try something. I feel like they expect you to have the narrative or framing of the project done before you finish, which never happens. There is a resistance to letting you figure it out.

Sure, in the real world, you might get an assignment where the narrative of the work is complete. That's someone else's idea, that is someone else figuring out all of the steps, and it is about having the technical proficiency to execute something that is being asked of you. That may be cider packaging that looks punk, neon, funky, and edgy. In those cases, the client says, "I have this idea or need." And the designer says, "I can do that." There's no ambiguity. There's no experimental attitude there.

Yeah, we're speaking to a couple of the unresolved tensions within the program: One of them is the double demand for content that graphic design has, where we both have to produce the thing and to produce the container for the thing. I believe that causes a structural resistance to experimentation. Because if the designer doesn't know what the content is or where the content is going, then how can you design the container for the content, right? Designers, in a traditional sense, respond conceptually and formally to content; the container will be a book, and not a poster, because the content is a sequence of images. Design education, in part, is learning how to justify those responses to clients, to pitch those to clients. But to be truly experimental might mean that you don't know where it goes. And therefore you cannot make quote-unquote traditional design decisions. That is perceived within the program a little bit as a failure. That's one tension.

The other tension exists in professional practices versus less traditional forms, like an art-based or research-based practice. For less traditional practices: What is the student doing in school? Actually doing? Are we learning a set of skills? A way to pitch clients? Developing an individual style that can be commoditized to sell to a client? A visual research process? Or just learning quote-un-quote uppercase-p Process? (Process is an idea I would love to return to later. What do we actually mean when we say process? Can anyone define it? Are we talking about the same things when we say it?)

I was thinking about process last night—this will get at a larger issue. Sometimes the assignments that we are given are so divorced from the current reality of the world. When we were given the brief for the Atlas project, we were talking about mapping and representing a place, but we never talked-ed about the problematic side of mapping itself. Its colonial roots. We are given assignments and we go along with them without understanding the magnitude of what we are asked

to do. Mapping and representation is a huge thing! Imagine the context for the Atlas project: me, a nobody, one year in Providence, tasked with going to Olneyville, which is historically rich, but which I barely know anything about. In the span of one week, I have to do quick tasks without having connected to the neighborhood, and then I have to present, here is what I know about Olneyville, and here is my reasoning. It is ironic! My role here is no different than that of a British colonial traveler going to the Ottoman Empire, who then comes up with this bullshit travelogue: "Here's what I think about this place." How was my role different from that person?

This gets at a general issue: we need the time and space—even before making any design work—to really understand what we were doing here. We just do not understand the magnitude of the issues and tasks that we are engaging with. I expect some people will say that I am being too dramatic about it.

That hits the nail on the head. Particularly in the first year of the three-year program, there is so much emphasis on learning the skills, and we are told not to think about content. Nevertheless, there is an implied objectification in the prompts; you are taking something and turning it into content. There is not much conversation about what that means.

The graphic design program has two expectations: One, to engage in research (or to develop a conceptual foundation); Two, to produce formal outcomes. In a different discipline, if we were in school for anthropology, we would begin by learning research methodologies and their ethics. Here, we are pushed toward image making without learning how to responsibly engage with that image making. Furthermore, my perception is that the program prefers a well-developed formal outcome to a fully thought-out concept

If the goal of graduate education is to explore how graphic design may be done differently—distinct from professional practice, like in a studio—what does the program want? Different how?

That is a great question. Another way to phrase it may be what kind of person is successful in the RISD GD program?

I had this conversation with Everett last year when he was really struggling. He said, "Kit is crushing it. They

are a super-talented, hardworking genius—but their experience teaches me that the better you are at pushing yourself to the limit, the more you will succeed in this program." A lot of what we have been talking about is not having enough time to fully complete or flesh out projects. If there is not enough time, one strategy is to overwork yourself. You must put yourself through the wringer, push as hard as possible, burn yourself out to be successful. It is not an okay thing to say, but you will do better in this program if you disrespect yourself and discount your own needs as a person.

I agree somewhat, but, you know, it is a bad mix. I am a person that pushes myself hard. I feel uncomfortable completing a project early. If I finish with time to spare, if I am not working up to the very last minute, then I begin to question my process. I think something went awry. Perhaps the time constraints or project structure do not allow me to fully realize the idea, but it is mainly my own frustration with achieving the idea that is in my head. I see it as a personal issue, not an issue with the program. Every semester I feel— not that I failed exactly but—disappointed in myself.

I am hearing you say that it does not reflect on the program, the curriculum, or the communication of expectations, but that the disappointment is caused by a lack of work ethic or intelligence. I think many graduate students have felt that same way. Similarly, I know so many graduate students admire Kit for being able to push themselves so far. I envied (and still envy) Kit. You know, I was committed to pushing myself for the first two years of graduate school. I overworked until I became incredibly burnt out.

I do not think I ever told you two this story. I entered the 2020 Thanksgiving break burnt out from working on the biennial and class projects. I was so physically tired, so stressed, but I did not feel like I could stop working. I was at my parents' house, and they own a stationary bicycle. During that break, I would design for 30 minutes, after which my energy and focus faded. So I would furiously ride this bicycle for 10 minutes to get my heart and adrenaline pumping. The exercise would enable me to work for another 30 minutes. I did that over and over again—30 minutes work, 10 minutes exercise—so that I could work for a full day. It was a successful strategy.

In retrospect, that is fucked up. I had internalized the disappointment. I think it is terrible that I felt the need to push myself that hard. Of course, you two know that

my burnout only got worse over the next few months and became acute depression. That is why I started therapy and actively worked on doing less. You've been working on doing less too, Nick, right?

Yes, and I suck at it. Like you have both said, there are many reasons. My parents are workaholics. They are both teachers too, so I have always felt that education and working hard in school is very important. You begin to lose perspective on what it means for something to be important? You can say that anything is important, but how you spend your time truly indicates what you materially value. Last semester, I was at studio for 12 hours a day, and I went home just to sleep before returning to studio. I got to a point where I hadn't seen my friends. All of my conversations were about work. I have a tendency to over commit. That is how I ended up with 18 credits and with two assistantships. That should not be okay. That should not even be allowed. Their system should be set up so that is not even possible.

On one hand, you do need to petition to take more than a normal course load. I do not know if that is a significant or negligible barrier. On the other hand, there are also structural barriers to taking less than a normal course load: you may lose financial aid; you may take longer to graduate. I am in 12 credits now, which feels like the right amount of work, and I have received some cultural pushback. For example, people have tried to convince me that additional classes will look good professionally. I also feel that people will perceive me as lazy, even though no one ever explicitly says that. Moreover, there is a general sense that graduate education is a person's one opportunity to experiment, or many people take 18 credits because they believe it is their only chance to learn certain skills.

I actually ended up dropping to 9 credits after spring break. I highly recommend this for future graduate students. If you have a lot of work that you need to make to achieve the thesis you envision, that is fine. But focusing exclusively on thesis is very freeing, plus you can apply for jobs — and go on dates and spring break in Cancun and go to Boston every weekend.

Many of the classes that people feel they need to take— their overload courses—seem worthless. Why would you come to a graduate graphic design program to do, for example, a fake branding project in a branding class? There are so many books with prompts and so many on-line courses. You can do that on your own time. I choose to take classes for the professor's perspective, for the specific content, for an unusual process. I want things that I cannot do with an interested group of peers outside of the institution.

Of course, someone who is into computer science might say, "Don't take computational poetics. Just Google

JavaScript." The point for me is that I am interested in classes where the subject is larger than the tools associated with it. I am excited to see other students' attitudes and beliefs about computation poetics. In contrast, I have never been surprised by packaging design; the best possible outcome is something visually neat that prompts a purchase. This is a tangent: The attitude of "I want to buy that" is so pervasive. The only comment people had at the conclusion of my jacket project was when are you going to produce these so I can buy them?

I disagree, slightly, with the idea that one should not come to school to do a branding project. There are issues with diversity and access there; who has the free time to locate prompts and do branding projects? That provokes a larger set of questions: What is graduate education for, and who is graduate education for? If it is to gain professional skills, a branding project may make sense.

Maybe it is the case that RISD is not for people trying to gain initial access to the field. Even in the three-year program, I believe most people apply with graphic design or graphic design adjacent work; plus everyone has an undergraduate degree and is able to move to Rhode Island; those both imply certain privileges and a level of access. And perhaps the program should not be for people seeking initial access. That sounds icky, but I would prefer the institution be honest about it. Do not promise everything.

To your point about "I want to buy that," it seems to be a core value of the department that things are redeemed by labor. A project is good if someone can purchase it or if it results in a marketable style or if you put a lot of work into it. (That, in part, reflects American values. That sometimes also reflects a lack of intellectual engagement, as in it is hard work therefore good.)

I would like to imagine an alternative design education that pursues and prefers failure. That could look like a lot of things: developing an experimental process that doesn't work; researching people relevant to your practice, without needing to converse with them; or perhaps you just read books without it relating directly to your practice.

This is a dumb example, but the relationship between grad school and the professional world is like this relationship between Batman and Joker. They are nothing without one another. Grad school defines itself in opposition to the professional realm. I think "experimental" branding projects are now those that address real world problems, weirdly enough.

I feel that graduate school—and even the whole practice of graphic design—has lost the belief that it can effect change. Now it exists in a state of fantasy and hopelessness.

There is an expectation that the work should matter somehow or be important—but at the end of the day, it's all just personal. That is okay. Anytime you contextualize the work globally, it becomes fatalistic and depressing, because what can graphic design do? Anytime you embed social commentary, it falls flat, because it is coming out of this elite institution that really only serves to advance the perspectives of the people who made it and the people it was made for—that is, people at RISD.

The hope is that we can have some political effect, that we can do something to improve the world. That is how I interpret Forough's use of hope or hopelessness.

I did this ISP with Kelsey, focusing on how we encode social concepts or culture and how that relates back to the audience. My conclusion was that the graphic designer just doesn't have very much power at all. We cannot affect the ways by which people decode messages or affect the composition of the community that receives the message. I came away thinking that the idea of graphic designers doing anything is overstated. At the very least, we always have to think about it as how can graphic designers work within a community? How can graphic designers engage in community organization? That is, graphic design must always be accompanied by social activity for it to have political effect.

This points to another tension within graduate school education—or specifically RISD's model—where there's this sense that your work ought to be consequential, yet it structurally frustrates the pursuit of impactful work. I do not believe RISD provides the latitude, time, or training to do meaningful research into the effects of graphic design. For example, the structural requirement to complete two or three projects each semester strongly disinhibits community involvement. How can you locate a community, understand local problems, and develop an impactful solution within the three-project structure? Where I have seen students engage with community-related issues, they are relying on relationships that predate RISD. There is very little emphasis on going outside the institution. So, the tension is how can one do work of social or political consequence in isolation?

Or, how do you locate community during the semester without sacrificing your body? Is it possible to do it while also sleeping enough, while also taking care of yourself? It becomes another way of emphasizing that the work is more important than the person. The desire for individualism divorced from the individual body.

In thesis, graphic design students are supposed to narrativize the years they have spent in the program through the articulation of a process, something like "I have these interests, and I use these methods to investigate or to transform those interests." That model stresses the individual: their interest, their activity. The idea of an individual style or individual research process, to some degree, precludes the possibility of external intervention, the possibility of community influence.

The thesis book itself has powerful upstream implications. These are individual books describing an individual process that induce our next individual professional step. How can you engage in communal and pluralistic work when that is your charge? In my own thesis book, for example, people are finding it quite weird that I want to, say, use multiple names or list multiple authors; I was told "this is an opportunity to present your own vision." In other programs, like architecture, the thesis is one final summative project. I wonder if that might change how studio is conducted or how projects are structured? There may be less emphasis on creating an individual narrative while in the program. There may be more room for failure and experimentation.

All graduate students just at RISD make a thesis book. Only in graphic design is the thesis book *the thesis.* It raises the issue of double-work again: you have to do the work, and then contextualize it in an easily digestible thesis book. (And that book needs to obey the rules to be easily digestible, but not too much because then it is not cool.)

Thesis is a dehumanizing process. Why does the work and projects need to make sense in relationship to one another? Making a narrative also divorces the work from lived reality. For example, we went to school during the coronavirus pandemic. In Spring 2019 and Fall 2020, during the height of remote school, my goal was to make funny things that made me and everyone else happy. None of that will be in my thesis book, because my other work addresses serious issues. The singular statement about your work is a sterilizing thing.

What would the thesis look like if it reflected a whole person or a whole practice? Even broader, what would design education look like if it addressed the whole person? I am thinking of bell hooks, who said that "Teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students." That had multiple meanings for her: she wanted education that connected to her lived experiences as a black woman of racism or sexism; but she also wanted education that nurtures other facets of humans, like humor. For me, the question is can we imagine a graphic design education that is more concerned with creating platforms rather than packaging? A party rather than persons?

I think many issues that we encounter in graduate education stem from or reflect the professional world: expectations that outpace capacity or compensations; designers as individuals who must brand themselves; work as an extension of yourself.

As a participant in the economy you are just a portfolio.

That is accentuated in grad school. You are your own client. There is more agency over content.

Again, what does graduate school want to be? If it wants to exist outside of the professional sphere, it should not be concerned with those issues.

What do you think that would look like? If graduate school was actually outside of the professional realm?

Graduate school would be a moment of self-reflection, just for yourself. It would be self-actualization, and the thesis would show that journey. If at some point on that journey you change direction, then that can be apparent in the thesis. Even if it doesn't make sense to others, it makes sense to you.

Okay, so, what exactly is the thesis?

The form is dictated: book (but it can be experimented with). It is a demonstration of what you did here. Graphic design is one of the most insecure mediums, not materi-

1. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

ally but ideologically. I think that is why we are expected to write so much or write in an academic tone. In fine arts, it can just be a book documenting work. Most Yale theses are just 100 pages of pictures.

The class of 2021 before us wrote a lot. I like writing a lot. But, I don't think there is that much expectation for writing. That said, I don't think a RISD thesis can be 100 pages of pictures. It has to do more. What do you feel like you're supposed to do?

To put it simply, I'm treating my thesis as a portfolio. It is a way to introduce myself to really cool ass people that I want to impress. I am going to mail it to them.

It is a networking document. It is a postcard.

I had a meeting with Clement Valla this week. He asked me, "What do you want to do after this?" The idea is that the thesis should reflect that. If you want to attend for a Ph.D. program, this is a good opportunity to write about your work using academic language. If you want to apply for jobs in graphic design, you can write whatever you want, because people aren't going to read it. No one is going to read the book in a design interview.

That's totally true. Another question is who is the audience for the thesis? It could potentially be employers, and then the goal is showing off a cool book that I spent an entire semester on. But, more often than not, individual projects on your website are sufficient for employment. I don't think it is an employment document—though perhaps at one point in time it was, before our current digital systems. Maybe we have lost the history but retain the physical item. Still, that leaves the question of who the thesis is for.

I am thinking about the thesis as a gift, a precious thing. When I imagine mailing it, it would be to people who I look up to, who are interested in the things that I am writing about. Perhaps I could collaborate with them in the future? At the very least, the thesis says remember me.

Sorry, I hope you didn't feel like I was disagreeing with you. I wasn't trying to question your approach to thesis. I was just trying to raise questions about the document.

No, I understand! I want the thesis to live outside of the library and Bethany's office. Perhaps I am being pessimistic, but how many students look at thesis books for the content?

To get even more pessimistic, with what content do you actually engage? With what percentage of the many things that you see each day do you interact? One thing I dislike about being asked to explain my work is that explanations are not typical. Most graphic design is seen for one second as it is scrolled past on the internet or it is glanced at as you move through a supermarket.

That speaks to the demand for immediate legibility within graphic design. That also gets at your personal resistance to even describing your work as graphic design.

Totally, nothing that I make for myself is graphic design. It's all art. My process is never, "Oh, I am my own client, and these are my demands." That's just not how I work. I like to make things, respond to those things, and then change those things. I find images are more helpful than words for me for understanding things. I can express ideas with my hands and tools better than I can with words. Thinking only gets me so far. The act of making changes the end result.

That seems to be the dominant mode of thinking within the department. People are visually focused, and that makes sense. (And what I am about to say is neither directed at you nor meant to diminish your work. I love you, and I love your work!) Can we imagine a department that respects different forms of thinking about and through graphic design? A department that celebrates things other than image making?

Can the department be receptive to different people's ways of working? Not in my experience. My work is well received, but only once it is finished. I stopped showing work in progress to graphic designers, because they are not helpful. It goes back to what you wrote, specifically about depression: the response being not how can I help you, but how can I help you finish this project? The goal of graphic design critiques, from my perspective, is resolution. It is racing to the point. Who can conclude fastest? But oftentimes, I am working through a process visually, not making a product that needs to find an audience.

The thesis, the way it is constructed, feels increasingly artificial to me, because it is something that demands resolution. We must state clearly what happened in the last few years. Can we imagine an alternative design education—this is my new catchphrase—where people

do not have resolution, cannot make sense of their body of work, perhaps have nothing to carry forward That might be interesting, even valuable. Those outcomes all seem really bad because they don't align with current values; it sounds like wasted time.

First and foremost, there should be reassurance and emphasis that your thesis is your thesis. The audience for this project is you. The object is for you. The question is not "who is your audience" but "who do you want to share with?" Audience frames it as a performance, as a product to be distributed.

As Forough said, the thesis can develop relationships.

The thesis might also be thought of as an educational document. To actually ask who might find this thesis valuable, rather than presuming graphic designers would. I am mostly thinking about graphic design education this semester, and so I don't expect that the majority of people in the department, who want to practice professionally, will find it helpful. That's fine.

We've described the thesis as something you do for yourself. We've also described it as an opportunity to make sense out of your time in school, maybe that is a narrative. And it may also be a generous act for other graduate students. For example, this conversation we are having right now. I imagine it may be very interesting to future graduates who are trying to understand what the thesis is. This conversation is not something we need for our theses. Yet it seems nice that we can be vulnerable in that way.

Isn't the act of sharing any work at all with people like some sort of generosity? Creative work in particular? It is a very vulnerable act.

A tangent: RISD weaponizes the language of care a lot. For example, the use of the word "generous" is so backwards. Generosity is a character trait that doesn't neatly apply to situations where you are paying money to be there. When people say you are not being generous, they are more likely communicating that they are personally confused. When did it become okay to call someone "ungenerous" if they are making work that you do not understand?

That is interesting. Generosity implies surplus. To be generous is to exceed cultural expectations. You cannot be generous by performing usual behavior. In the United States, tipping is not generous; however you can tip

generously when you exceed expectations, and you can tip ungenerously when you do not meet expectations. It relates to normative behavior. So, can introductory text in a book ever be generous?

Generous has an embedded moral. It sends me up the wall.

I was thinking about expectations today in a somewhat related way. The final presentation we will have at the end of the program has been described as a celebratory moment. Why a celebration? What does that imply about what we have done here? What does that tell us about education generally? I suppose that we have accomplished some feat. But is it a celebration? Or only a celebration? I wonder if it might be worthwhile to also frame it as a moment for mourning. We are losing community and place. We are losing our habits and schedules. In addition to being celebratory, the thesis may also be a sad document—or a failed document that might speak to frustrated expectations.

Not every story should have a happy ending.

Yes. We should be *free* to have a sad ending.

Not for me! I came out of grad school understanding who I am and what the fuck I want to do!
I am ready to conquer the world.

ADIE FEIN How do you want to say goodbye to the school?

Nick Larson I do not want it to be goodbye, but rather: We'll see you again, if not soon. This is not goodbye goodbye. This is not never again. It is a change, but it is not terminal.

My best goodbye was leaving Oregon to come here for graduate school. Kylie and I spent several days on the coast. It is nice to mark seperation with difference: go somewhere new, do an unusual activity.

FOROUGH ABADIAN My best goodbye was leaving New York and coming to Providence, because New York was hell. I was traumatized by my professional experiences.

So it was a good goodbye because it was leaving a shitty situation. Like I don't need you anymore New York!

Yeah. What do you want your goodbye to RISD to look like?

I want to go to everyone that mattered to me and give them a sweet little kiss on the cheek. What is the first thing you will do after you graduate?

A nice, long nap.

I want us all to get tattoos— Fellowship tattoos.

Hell yeah.

2021 MFA GD GRADUATE BIENNIAL

Everything You Can Think Of; Nothing You Want

CURATION AND DESIGN BY
RYAN DIAZ
ADAM FEIN
GEORGIE NOLAN
EVERETT EPSTEIN
KIT SON LEE

WORK BY
STUDENTS FROM THE CLASSES
OF 2021, 2022, & 2023

FEBRUARY 2021

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the 2021 RISD MFA graphic design biennial was held entirely online. In an abnormal year, it felt inappropriate and irresponsible to attempt a traditional biennial. The curators, instead, wanted to address concerns of graduate education that the pandemic had laid bare: the extractive nature of higher education; the demand for productivity; and the disregard of student physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

The biennial addressed these issues in two ways. First, there were two shows contained in the virtual biennial: the traditional display of graphic design projects; and a shadow gallery of memes, text messages, emails, voice recordings, and other ephemera that documented and made visible students' current conditions. Put another way, the shadow galley exposed the context of the polished work in the traditional gallery. Second, this graphic design biennial was the first to host programming. Lectures, discussions, and workshops offered visibility into the real lived experiences of graduate students and provided an opportunity for students and faculty to develop solutions to department-wide feelings of burnout, isolation, malaise, and alienation.

The biennial was a refusal of the traditional format. Rather than showing tidy displays of professional and intellectual competence, the biennial was committed to vulnerable disclosure of personal failings and human costs. The programming too was untraditional; rather offering reasons to perpetuate the institution, it instead imagined alternatives.

Curatorial Statement

Written by Ryan Diaz, Adam Fein, and Will Mianecki

morphine love
@morphinelovemua

Replying to @morphinelovemua

literally go on girl give us nothing!

LIVE 👁 565

Rudy Rodriguez
OMG SHES POSSESSED GUYS

Cathalina La Bella
Replying to Cathalina
Xtian Saint Cartier llámenle 🦋😹😹 ella
tiene que ir

Christian DeVeaux
IM SCREAMING😂😂😂

Pablo Omar
Jajajajajaaa

Veronica Sacristan
Bueno tenia insopnio... pero esto me
esta ayudanfo a relajarme

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4:19 AM · Apr 14, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Drag queen Anahi Santos fell asleep during a livestream performance in April 2020.

The 2021 Graphic Design MFA Biennial is about everything and nothing. Everything You Can Think Of; Nothing You Want is a reflection of our varied experiences in this graduate program: what it is and what it is not.

Everything You Can Think Of and Nothing You Want correspond to two separate but related bodies of work—like two sides of a coin, informing one another—housed in one virtual biennial. Accordingly, the show may exhibit graphic design as would any traditional biennial, yet it may also make visible those things obscured by the polished pieces on display: the exertion, the exhaustion, the expense.

Everything You Can Think Of is abundance. Possibility and imagination. This exhibition represents a sliver of the output of the diverse, ambitious graduate student cohort at the Rhode Island School of Design. We are expanding our field through formal experimentation and critical writing. Everything You Can Think Of portrays the idealized MFA experience: The institution provides freedom, knowledge, and equipment for students to produce beautiful bodies of work, pursue interesting research, and cultivate meaningful practices—but the experience often comes at great cost.

Nothing You Want is everything unseen. Artifacts of students' lives concealed and discounted. Another sliver: financial precarity, sleepless nights, alienation, loneliness, frustration, depression, fatigue, burnout, anxiety, anger, shame, doubt, guilt, debt—things ugly and untidy, yet common in our graduate program and others, surely. The material on display reveals that students perform a calculus of neglect, where sleep, food and community are weighed against work, labor and production.

A word of caution. Do not let one side of the show distract from the true message. We both admire the work on display and endorse the expressions of complaint. This show is a slim volume of the RISD GD MFA program in totality—beauty, ugliness, gaps, redactions, and erasures included. The message of the show exists in the tension between the two sides, including the complicity of graduate students.

Exhibiting Nothing You Want is a precarious act; there is an imbalance of power between faculty, administration, and students. We are committed to challenging this imbalance but in doing so are left vulnerable and risk misinterpretation. We intend transformation, not malice, not insult. These grievances are revealed with care and consideration to induce

positive change. The argument of Everything You Can Think Of; Nothing You Want is that the only way forward is transparency, testimony and open dialogue.

2020 and its attendant crises have shown us that—while risk-taking and failure are encouraged—failings are unacceptable within the university. In the midst of burnout, physical and mental illness, and a global pandemic the institution has not sufficiently revised expectations regarding production and productivity. But as our shadow biennial, Nothing You Want, establishes: work is not just a product; it is also labor. 2020 has revealed that RISD students have inherited unsustainable systems which ignore or scorn student wellbeing. What we reluctantly accepted a year ago seems unendurable now. There must be a better way.

Our programming attempts to reconcile what we endure and what we desire. Our speakers, all RISD alumni, will offer reimaginings of the MFA program. Many have become educators after graduating and have seen both sides of MFA education; they offer perspectives on how institutions can care for students and faculty alike.

Traditionally, a biennial is a moment to pause and reflect on the ideas and concerns of the RISD graphic design students during the past two years. Presenting the work of the MFA cohort in 2021 without reckoning with the material and emotional conditions of those same students would be a dereliction. We owe more to one another and to ourselves.

We join with students[1] across[2] the[3] world[4] in saying: institutions must change if we are to reconcile everything and nothing. We want their full energy committed to our cause.

Go girl, give us everything!

1. "ART@COVID.EDU: Studio Art MFAs and the Cost of Remote Learning," (Panel, CUE Art Foundation, July 7, 2020).

2. Glasgow School of Art MFA Student Protest, accessed January 8, 2020, gsamfa.net.

3. FUC, accessed January 21, 2020, fuc-series.org.

4. "Yale Art Students Demand Tuition Refund," *Artforum, March 23, 2020, www.artforum.com/news/as-curricula-moves-online-yale-art-students-demand-tuition-refund-82531*

Virtual Biennial

Website design by Laura de Baldeon, Everett Epstein, and Kit Son Lee.

EVERYTHING YOU CAN THINK OF NOTHING YOU WANT

EVENTS

ABOUT

RISD GD MFA BIENNIAL 2021

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EVENTS

ABOUT

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EVERYTHING YOU CAN THINK OF NOTHING YOU WANT

EVENTS

ABOUT

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ENVISION YOUR SELF-CARE PALACE.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

The biennial hosted a series of online Zoom events. These included talks from RISD alumni, workshops, and a social event that connected graphic design graduate students from 9 different institutions.

UP NEXT

TATIANA & JOSE

ALUMNI
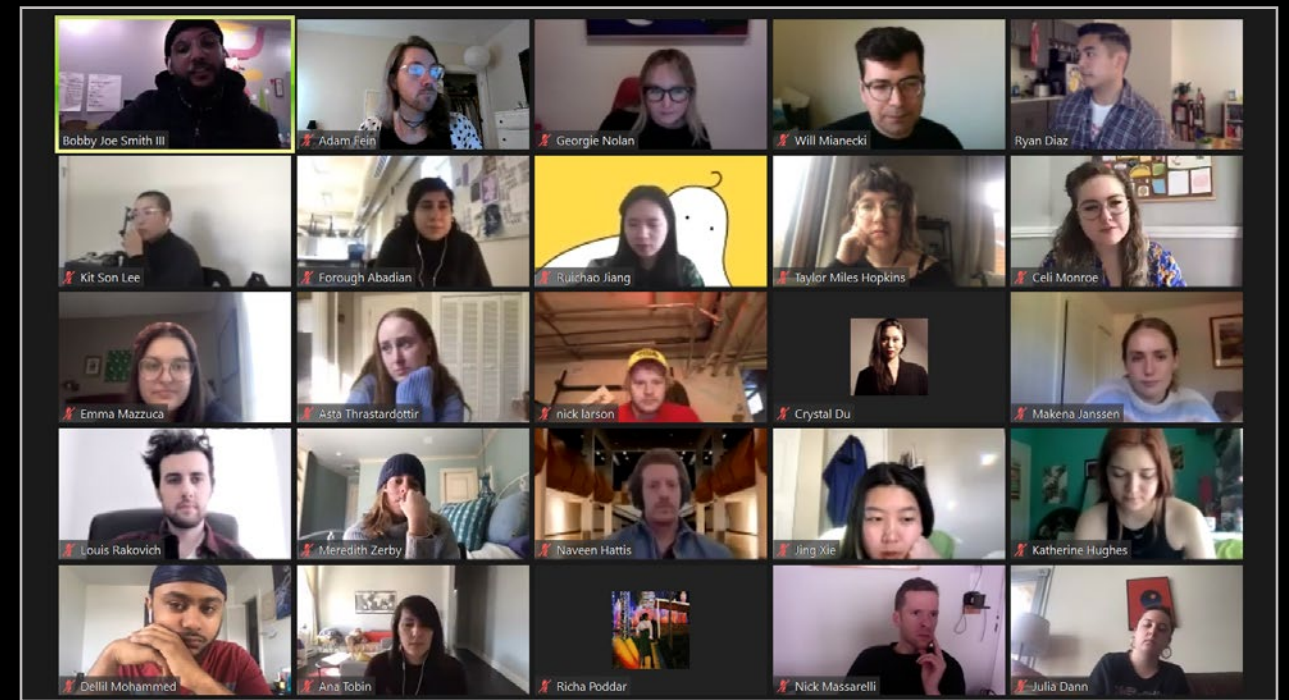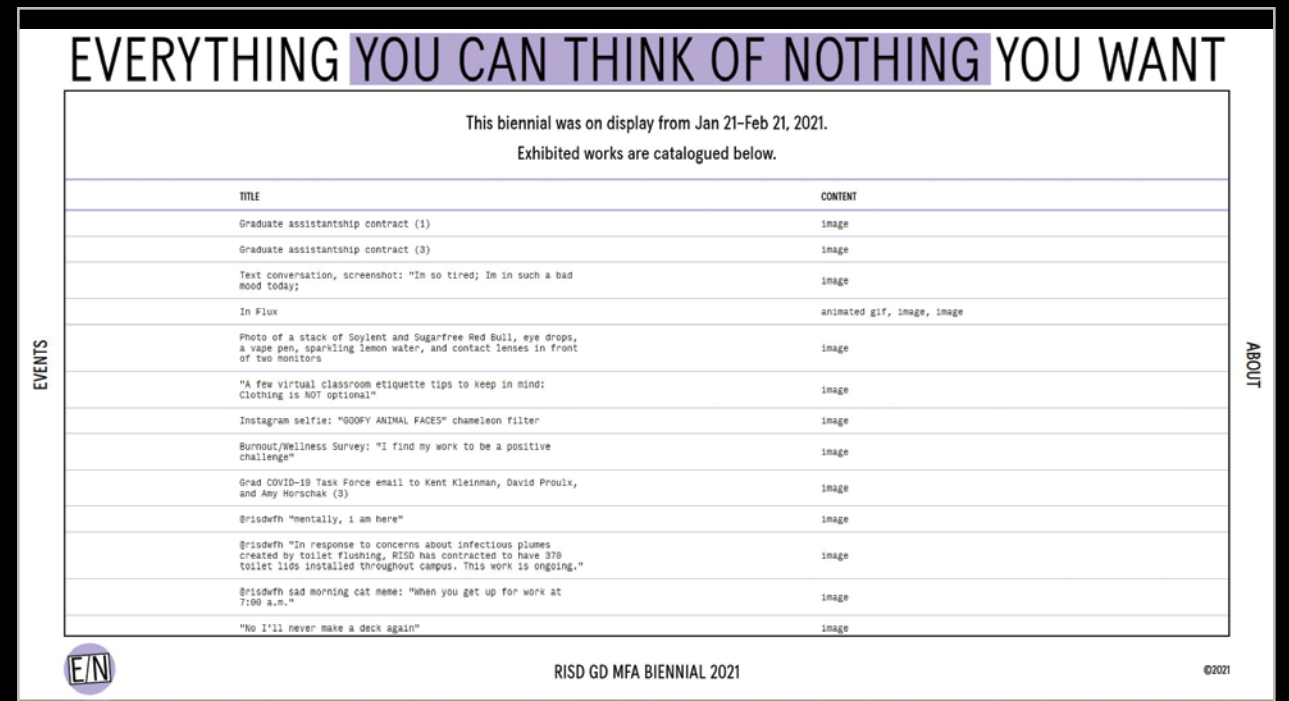
OPPOSITE In addition to graphic design work, the biennial website hosted an event schedule and sign-up and the curatorial statement.

ABOVE At the conclusion of the biennial, the website transitioned to a "dead" state. All of the submissions were cataloged, but no images were displayed.
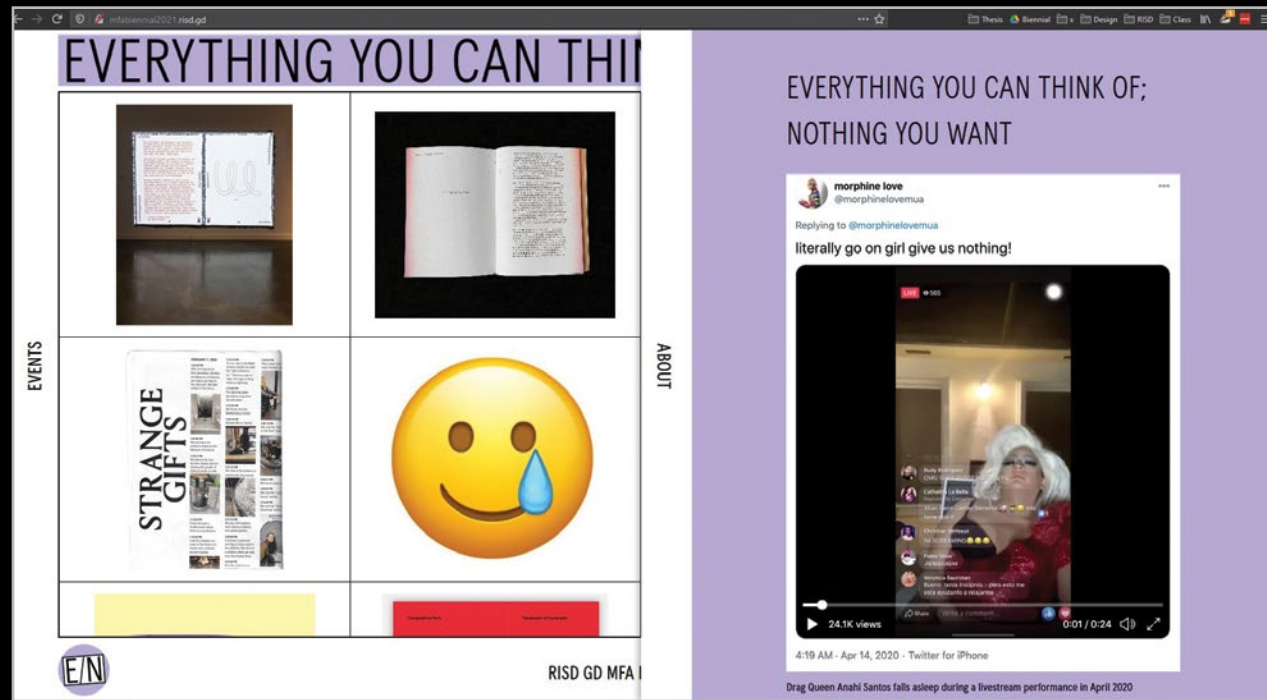
CAPTURE, CONTROL, CIRCULATE

Toward a Circulatory Design Education

ADIE FEIN
MAY 2022

PART 1: WHAT DOES GRAPHIC DESIGN DO?

Graphic design is a field defined in relation to content. This relationship can be generalized into three activities: the capture of content, the control of content, and the circulation of content. These operate as a sequence: capture to control to circulate.

This sequence is very clear in algorithmic processes or generative design: data is ingested, manipulated, and then output in a new form. For example, an algorithm might collect images from the internet, sort the images by color, and output a collaged gradient. In a more conventional graphic design practice, "capture, control, and circulate" might look like: the reception of text; organizing that text into a designed hierarchy; and the production of a publication to distribute that text. The text is the captured content. The creation of a typographic hierarchy is the control of the content. The designed publication circulates the content.

Classical design education focuses on the control of content, such as hierarchy, formal composition, and the order of content. This is apparent in traditional design education texts. *Typographie* by Emil Ruder is divided into sections like "form and counter-form," "arrangements," and "rhythm."[1] *About Design* by Gordon Salchow primarily consists of two parts, "form" and "aesthetics," the latter of which addresses topics like "harmony" and "composition."[2] When emphasizing control, graphic design education often focuses on responding to content: How does the chosen typeface or paper reflect the content?

More recently, graduate design education has shifted to an emphasis on capture. This is graphic design that produces or determines content. For example, the designer might generate the text that is then typeset. Perhaps the most prominent framing for this type of practice is "graphic design as research process," pioneered by studios like Metahaven. When emphasizing capture, "process" becomes significantly more important, both aesthetically and ethically, because "process" often means content generation: How did the inquiry result in this particular content and its form?

Circulate refers to graphic design's ability to promote, publish, and disseminate content. This is the construction of platforms for delivery, like the running of a press[4] or the design of a website. Graphic design as circulation is central to zine culture, for example, which connects niche and marginal groups through the exchange of publications.[5] When emphasizing circulation, the content itself—not the designer's stance towards it—is

Silvio Lorusso argues that the graphic designer as researcher developed in the late 20th century alongside the rise of the computer.[3] As the control of content became less specialized—as graphic design tools became cheaper and more accessible—graphic designers began to emphasize their intellectual labor. This begets things like "design thinking," where designers' unique relationship to the production of content is the locus of value.

1. Emil Ruder, *Typographie: A Manual of Design,* (Salenstein: Niggli, 1967).

2. Gordon Salchow, *About Design,* (New York: Allworth Press, 2018).

3. Silvio Lorusso, "Welcome to My Thread," (talk, New York, November 19, 2021), The New Design Congress, tv.undersco.re/w/a35d14c4-a1a0-428c-b4f7-9481d4246d5d.

4. For example, Binch Press, GenderFail, Hyperlink Press, or Other Publishing.

5. For Nat Pyper, circulation not only connects but also generates community. See "Subversive Typography," in *Queer Power,* page 92.

of primary importance. The questions become: What voices, perspectives, or communities are involved?

These are intended to be descriptive accounts of generalized design activity. All graphic design passes through the capture, control, circulate sequence. It is not possible to eliminate these; however one can choose to privilege and valorize one activity over another. Historically, graphic design education has emphasized capture and/or control, and in doing so, it has almost always accentuated the individual: the personal manner in which one responds to content, which could be called style or taste; or the personal relationship to content, which could be called process or viewpoint.

The field has emphasized the individual for a variety of reasons. Some are ideological: the great man theory of history; the theory of the auteur. Some are practical: a personal style is marketable; individual class work is easier to facilitate and grade. None of these are trivial.

Elsewhere, this thesis considers the possibility for a progressive graphic design.[6] That is, can graphic design itself be radical or must is simply communicate radical content? Or, more pessimistically, is graphic design conservative in that it necessarily must reproduce the existing dominant culture in which it operates? The capture, control, circulate framework can help us to approach these questions.

PART 2: CAN A BOOK BE A FAGGOT?

On the cover of each volume within this thesis there is a handwritten inscription. The inscription for *Queer Things* reads "can a book be a faggot?" I was very hesitant to use this exact phrasing. Faggot is a slur. Many queer people have endured it as a slur, and it evokes only negative experiences. And, personally, I never felt that I had a right to its use, that I was never queer enough.

Nevertheless, faggot felt compelling. Partly, I wanted to deploy it for writerly reasons: the title already included the word queer and so "can a book be queer?" would be repetitive. Partly, I wanted to deploy faggot for rhetorical reasons: to command attention, to shock; to invite political interpretation; to ask can graphic design ever invoke political transformation; to ask can graphic design ever be liberatory. And partly it is funny in a way that "can a book be gay" or even "can a book be *limp wrist gesture*" is just not.

I asked multiple queer folks whether they felt the use of faggot was okay, and most said yes. They thought the word needed to be reclaimed or that I had every right to the term or that I simply needed to write a sentence to motivate its use. Paul Soullelis was the only person who challenged my use. Paul said that when he read "can a book be a faggot," it prompted certain questions for him: Can a book be humiliated? Can a book

Although, is it a humor motivated by homophobia? This essay cannot be an unpacking of faggot, unfortunately, but allow me to note that the most common use of faggot in my personal history was the casually homophobic goofing of highschool boys. Am I then reproducing an internalized homophobic use?

be scared? Can a book be beaten? Perhaps Paul was communicating that the application of theory in academic design contexts abstracts and so distracts from the material hardships of minoritized subjects. That is, perhaps Paul was saying this is a dumb question.

And you know what? It is dumb. Yet the question is valuable for exactly the reason that is dumb. At the end of a three-year inquiry into queer design, I have concluded that the answer is "No, a book cannot be a faggot" because visual surfaces and designed objects are disconnected in important ways from the material, political, and social lives of human beings. The development of a queer aesthetic will not help queer people—or anyone else.

I no longer believe there is liberatory potential in developing a queer visual style. Any visual style can be appropriated and put towards causes that are contrary to their original intentions. I do not believe that graphic design can engage in argumentation at the symbolic level, that it could in isolation substantially trouble the meaning of, say, restroom signage. Any visual style will depend upon the receiver of the visual message recognizing the intended message, and recognition is dependent upon pre-existing cultural meanings; that is, symbolic messages are conservative.[7] And further, visibility is meaningless if there is no material improvement in the lives of the represented group. Finally, I do not believe that graphic designers—as a professional class—are positioned to make those changes in isolation, without social, political, or economic reform.[8]

That is not to say that graphic design is inconsequential. Representation, communication, symbols, and visual metaphors matter, and graphic design as medium for these matters, in particular when it is the expression of power.[9] However, the efficacious political tools available to designers are not visual, are not the control and capture of content. For graphic design to be radical, critical, or progressive, it must be grounded in community, in connection, in deep association with real human lives. That is, there can be no queer aesthetics but only queer relations.

PART 3: A CIRCULATORY DESIGN EDUCATION

Circulation as a liberatory tactic is meaningless if it reproduces existing social relations, if the same privileged voices are platformed, if the same dominant perspectives are distributed. We must reimagine graphic design as an apparatus for uplifting existing and for generating new communities. However, community cannot be located in isolation: in the individual practice of the designer or even the enclosed population of the academic

I want to softly challenge this (even as I agree with it in the next few lines). There is just something off about grounding 'faggot' exclusively in negative experience. That premise entails that 'faggot' cannot be reclaimed; if there is nothing positive in faggot than it cannot be used positively, for joy, pleasure, humor. Perhaps my own most salient experiences with faggot have been of someone yelling it at me—an announcement of surveillance that is scary, embarrassing, and sad. Does being called a faggot in public make me want to be visibly less queer? Yes, certainly! However, I write this essay while traveling alone internationally, during which time I have felt more vulnerable than usual. Nevertheless, I went to the queer clubs in Cancun earlier this week. Before going out, I reviewed my outfit in the mirror and said proudly to myself, "god, you look so faggy. These Mexican twinks are going to love you."

6. See "Graphic Design as Infrastructure" or "Design As Behavior Management" in *Queer Power,* pages 4 and 128.

7. See "En/Decoding Gender" in *Queer Power,* page 66.

8. For more, see Neurotic Arsehole: @neuroticarsehol, twitter.com/neuroticarsehol; @neuroticarsehole, instagram. com/neuroticarsehole.

9. See "A Very Long, Laborious Process That Yields 100 Blank Pages" in *Queer Space,* page 82.

institution. Therefore, this particular volume calls for greater emphasis on creating new relationships. We must build collaborative relations between and across and outside.

I want a graphic design education that pursues work with the local community. That could be service learning, where students offer volunteer design services to nonprofits. That could be internships, where students are placed in local organizations. That could be community responsive design projects, where locals people propose projects that students solve. That could be returning to a personal community, bringing skills, tools, and materials to places where students feel prior belonging and ownership. Crucially, in all of these models, students are operating within and alongside local community members.

However, a circulatory design education also suggests new values. I want a graphic design education that seeks community as the foundation—the predicate, the motivation, the permit—for communication. That entails less investment in the individual and more in the group, less class time spent in critique or more time spent in conversation, less time spent authoring and more time spent collaborating. This is a graphic design education that emphasizes pluralism in all of its forms: diverse ways of working and of idling, of producing knowledge and graphic design, of speaking and looking, of being alone and together.

Pluralism is expressed several ways in this thesis. The publication design demonstrates it in the several typographic voices, the shared space of narrative and notation, and the multiple volumes. More importantly, *more circulatory,* is the introduction of many other perspectives, as in "What is Queer Design?"[10] or the conversations that appear in every volume. And while this might not seem radical, that choice to include many others received a lot of resistance; I was told, for example, that the thesis was an opportunity to express my voice and that others would muddy it (as if one develops a voice in isolation in order to speak only to one's self.)

I have chosen to include introductory and concluding "chatter" for these conversations. This is text that is (perhaps) irrelevant to the "serious" subject matter or arguments. For example, the interview within this volume begins with chatter about food and ends with chatter about goodbyes. These sections may be aimless, but they are not purposeless. The chatter exhibits the human relationships—the jokes, the relational concern, the mutual interest—that undergird these conversations. The interview subjects are not sites of knowledge extraction, but people with whom I am in *communion*.

Though, of course, I *do* want to learn from conversation partners. It is a social exchange.

This chatter represents naïve or non-authorized knowledges. In *The Undercommons,* Fred Moten and Stefano Harney describe a situation in which a teacher enters a classroom, as class time is about to begin, and the students are talking—about relevant material or not. The teacher is expected to end that chatter and to begin class. They write that what the teacher is "supposed to do is to call that class to order, which presupposes that there is no actual, already existing organization happening, that there's no study happening before I got there, that there was no study happening, no planning happening. [The teacher is] calling it to order, and then something can happen—then knowledge can be produced."[11] The conversations in this thesis maintain that chatter that occurs before and after the conversation has begun.

My pedagogy emphasizes community building. One way that I do that is by almost always beginning class with silly little games: drawing our favorite meal; sharing our dream vacation. The activities are also a form of chatter. I could justify these in terms of traditional design production, for example, as ice breakers that enable better critique. However, they are valuable beyond that, as exercises for intimacy, fun, and community. A graphic design education that foregrounds circulation must emphasize "being with" others.

I raise the concept of chatter because it is one basis for new relations and new knowledge. Graphic design will never platform diverse voices if they must conform to present values and practices. Necessarily, those values and practices already exclude these diverse voices.[12] There is no reformation in the reproduction the present. We must admit the unserious, unattractive, unprofessional, and unproductive to realize a pluralistic and multivocal design field.

10. See "What is Queer Design?" in *Queer Things,* page 92.

11 Stefano Harney & Frank Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013), 126.

12. See "The Politics of Non-Representation" in *Queer Space,* page 4.

SYLLABI

ADAM FEIN
& ADIE FEIN
DECEMBER 2020–FEBRUARY 2022

At RISD, I was fortunate enough to teach two courses. Additionally, I designed a proposed course. Those syllabi are included on the following pages. As much as my visual work and my essayistic writing, the syllabi reflect my understanding of graphic design: its operations, tools, values, purpose. The syllabi also demonstrate an evolving understanding of teaching. For example, after a summer spent teaching design to highschoolers through DownCity Design, I began to incorporate community building activities into my lesson plans.

More importantly and radically, I hope that these syllabi might be of use to future graphic design graduate students at RISD. It is usual for graduate students teaching during wintersession to fully create a course during their winter break. Previous syllabi might be provided by the department, with a course description and learning outcomes, but these lacked a calendar, projects, resources or any of the material that constitute a course. The result was a lot of graduate student labor during a period meant for necessary rest and recovery. And, very often, that labor was uninformed, as many were teaching for the first time. Please take and use these, so that graduate students can produce better courses with less work.

Access the syllabi online at ajfein.com/syllabi

Rhode Island School of Design

Introduction to Graphic Design

GRAPH-W336-01

Wintersession 2021
Online

Mon, Tues, and
alternate Weds:
1 – 6 pm

INSTRUCTOR

Adam Fein
afein@risd.edu

Office Hours
Fri: 3 pm & 7 pm
Sign up

PLATFORMS

Canvas

Slack

Zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This making-focused course will teach foundational graphic design software, skills, and concepts. Students will become familiar with in Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign though in-class exercises. Readings and lectures supplement hands-on learning, introducing history, modern issues, and contemporary practitioner, as well as core concepts like layout, typography, and color theory. Students will complete four projects: a logo, a poster, a booklet, and a visual identity system. At the conclusion of the semester, students will be positioned for advanced study in graphic design or sufficiently equipped to design materials that support their professional and academic careers in other fields.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To introduce you to the field of graphic design, its history and contemporary practice.

- To develop a fluency with the tools of graphic design and learn the Adobe Creative Suite so that you can feel confident in your capacity to use them during and after this class.

- To learn how type and image can be used to communicate abstract ideas as well as complex information.

- To learn how to develop a design process rooted in strong ideas, using sketching and iterations to arrive at a well-researched final design.

- To cultivate curiosity and excitement about the field of graphic design and its possibilities for you.

- To work hard, take risks, have fun, and create excellent graphic design work.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

This is an online studio course with lectures, tutorials, and exercises, supplemented with optional short readings that provide historical context.

This course balances in-person (synchronous) and not in-person (asynchronous) activities. Synchronous elements include student presentations and critique. Asynchronous elements include lecture and tutorials.

Students will complete four projects, corresponding to the software and graphic design skills learned each week. Every project will end with an open critique. The final project will consist of designing a visual identity system. The student will receive small group and individual feedback as they progress on projects.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Students are required to attend class regularly and on time in accordance with RISD's attendance policy. Students will be responsible for completing outside work and managing the deadlines for projects. In class, students are required to participate in discussions and critiques.

Students are expected to respect the ideas of their classmates and engage constructively with the work of others. Students should feel welcome to express themselves while also respecting their classmates identities, pronouns, boundaries, etc.

I have provided readings to help you with critique in the readings folder.

An "A" student will be on time, present in class, and ready to engage in the subject matter. They will challenge themselves during class time and in-class exercises. Their attention in class along with personal commitment to the subject matter and making will be noticeable in their presented work. Ultimately, they will present a final project that displays an understanding of class concepts and be prepared to discuss their work knowledgeably.

GRADING

A exceptional work and participation in crits, 100% attendance

B very good and strong overall work, with room for improvement

C meets standards with average, acceptable results

D failing to engage with projects, little to no contributions in class

F more that 1 unexcused absence, no participation in class, incomplete work

50%   Participation and attendance: involvement in class activities, peer evaluation, contribution in critiques, weekly progress on projects.

       Absence or lateness to class for any reason will affect grades.

       (see attendance policy on the next page of this syllabus)

50%   Completed projects and their documentation.

       (keep sketches, save often, back-up frequently)

ACADEMIC POLICIES & STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Your participation and projects must abide by the following:

RISD Academic Code of Conduct:
https://policies.risd.edu/academic/academic-code-of-conduct/

RISD Code of Student Conduct:
https://policies.risd.edu/student-life/code-of-student-conduct/

Policies as detailed in the current RISD course announcement:
http://departments.risd.edu/registrar/web/index.html

An Installation Site Permit is necessary for any projects that require the use of non-classroom space or that could potentially pose a safety risk. A form is available here with further details:
http://info.risd.edu/environmental-health-safety/

Projects may not pose hazards that threaten or cause physical harm to yourself or others. Projects may not cause damage to studio, shop, and lab equipment or school facilities.

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

The passing off of someone else's ideas, writing, or work as one's own is plagiarism. Appropriate methods and forms of attribution vary by discipline. Some courses will include instruction in appropriate conventions for citation and attribution within the field. Students are expected to seek out relevant guidelines on their own (the RISD Writing Center offers resources and guidance), to ask faculty when in doubt about standards, and to recognize that they are ultimately responsible for proper citation.

You must know what constitutes plagiarism and avoid it. Attribute and cite your sources. All student work is expected to follow RISD's Academic Code of Conduct.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is mandatory. There is not an allowed number of absences. Prompt (on-time) arrival to class is expected. Arriving to class late (tardiness) is not acceptable. Three late arrivals will be considered an unexcused absence. If you must miss a class for any reason, notify faculty in advance and as soon as possible. Should you miss a class, you are responsible for gathering missed material and getting back on track.

Please be aware that if you have 2 or more unexcused absences you may be withdrawn from class. If you are not withdrawn due to absences, you can expect grade reductions. An unexcused absence will result in a 25% reduction in your final grade. This equates to a full drop in letter grade on a 4.0 scale. Please see the full RISD Class Attendance policy at:

https://policies.risd.edu/academic/class-attendance/

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

The RISD community is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the development of integrity. In order to thrive and excel, this community must preserve the freedom of thought and expression of all its members. A culture of respect that honors the rights, safety, dignity, and worth of every individual is essential to preserve such freedom. We affirm our respect for the rights and well-being of all members.

If you would like to make anonymous comments to the instructor, please use this form:

https://forms.gle/uZZSxxydm8DNpX9t8

DISABILITY SUPPORT

Disability Support Services (DSS) creates an accessible community at RISD that provides all students with the support needed to succeed academically. The office works to accommodate students with cognitive (learning), psychological and/or physical disabilities. Please see this link for more information:

https://www.risd.edu/student-life/wellness/

CLASS CALENDAR

Alternative class calendar view

Class 1
Mon, Jan 11

	Introductions & Syllabus		Link to Class Homework
Lecture	History of Graphic Design Gestalt Principles		Link to Class Readings
HW	Expressive Composition GD is GD Everywhere		Link to Sharing is Caring

Class 2
Tues, Jan 12

Lecture	Formal Considerations	Due	Expressive Composition GD is GD Everywhere
Tutorial	Photoshop		
HW	Remix	Reading	Link

Class 3
Weds, Jan 13

| Tutorial | Illustrator | Due | Remix |
| HW | Logotype | Reading | Link |

Class 4
Tues, Jan 19

Lecture	Formal (Re)considerations Choosing Fonts	Due	Logotype
		Reading	Link
Tutorial	InDesign: Type		
HW	Poster Exhibition Catalogue (EC): part 1	S is C	Cameron Nayeri Sophie Feng

Class 5
Mon, Jan 25

Lecture	The book & page Exhibition Catalogues	Due	Poster EC: part 1
Tutorial	InDesign: Image	Reading	Link
HW	EC: part 2	S is C	Nicole Ban Alina Spatz

Class 6
Tues, Jan 26

		Worktime & Check-ins	*Due*	EC: part 2
Lecture	Visual Identity Systems		*S is C*	Giana Marie Decicco
				Kara Park (R)
HW	EC: part 3			
	Visual Identity System (VIS): part 1			

Class 7
Weds, Jan 27

		Worktime & Check-ins	*Due*	EC: part 3
				VIS: part 1
Tutorial	After Effects		*S is C*	Jeffrey McCready
				Shiruo (Sara) Zhang (R)
HW	Final Exhibition Catalogue			

Class 8
Mon, Feb 1

	Worktime & Check-ins	*Due*	Exhibition Catalogue
		S is C	Gina Kang
			Lily Joiner

Class 9
Tues, Feb 2

		Worktime & Check-ins	*Due*	VIS: part 2
Tutorial	After Effects		*S is C*	Angelina Yoon
				Tianle Xi (R)

Class 10
Mon, Feb 8

		Worktime & Check-ins	*Due*	VIS: part 3
Lecture	Presentations		*S is C*	Tiffany Cheung
HW	Final Visual Identity System			

Class 11
Tues, Feb 9

	Worktime & Check-ins	

Class 12
Weds, Feb 10

	Final Critique	*Due*	Visual Identity System

Final documentation due by Sunday, Feb 14, 11:59 PM Eastern

READING & RESOURCES

Entries marked by the fleuron ❦ are popular & commonly used resources.

Learning Adobe Programs

Photoshop video tutorials from Adobe
helpx.adobe.com/photoshop/tutorials.html

Illustrator video tutorials from Adobe
helpx.adobe.com/illustrator/tutorials.html

InDesign video tutorials from Adobe
helpx.adobe.com/indesign/tutorials.html

How to download fonts from Adobe Fonts
linkedin.com/learning/learning-adobe-fonts-formerly-typekit/expand-your-font-library-with-adobe-fonts?u=57686553

Books: Introductions to Graphic Design

About Design by Gordon Salchow

Graphic Design Manual by Armin Hoffman

Graphic Design: The New Basics by Ellen Lupton & Jennifer Cole Phillips ❦

Design Elements: A Graphic Style Manual by Timothy Samara

Books: History of Graphic Design

Graphic Design: A Concise History by Richard Hollis

Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide by Johanna Drucker

A History of Arab Graphic Design Paperback by Bahia Shehab and Haytham Nawar

The History of Graphic Design. Vols. 1 & 2 by by Jens Müller and Julius Wiedemann

Meggs' History of Graphic Design by Philip Meggs ❦

Pioneers of Spanish Graphic Design by Emilio Gil

Women in Graphic Design: 1890–2012 edited by Gerda Breuer

Books: Typography

The Anatomy of Type by Stephen Coles

The Elements of Typographic Style by Robert Bringhurst 🌸

Inside Paragraphs by Cyrus Highsmith

Thinking with Type by Ellen Lupton 🌸

A Type Primer by John Kane

Typographie by Emil Ruder

Books: Publishers

Draw Down Books

Onomatopee

Phaidon

Unit Editions

Viction:ary

Films & TV

Abstract: The Art of Design, episode on Christoph Niemann

Abstract: The Art of Design, episode on Paula Scher

Artist Series by Hillman Curtis
https://www.aiga.org/artist-series-videos

Helvetica 🌸

Linotype: The Film

The Machine That Made Us
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQ88yC35NjI

Magazines

Communication Arts

Eye

Graphis

Print (out of print)

Podcasts

Breaking the Surface

Design Matters with Debbie Millman 🌸

Revision Path

Websites: Graphic Design

Design is History
designishistory.com

Design Observer
designobserver.com

Eye on Design
eyeondesign.aiga.org

Letterform Archive
letterformarchive.org

Design Readings 🌸
Readings.design

Image Of The Studio
imageofthestudio.com

Its Nice That
Itsnicethat.com

Women Of Graphic Design
Womenofgraphicdesign.org

Websites: Typography

Femme Type
femme-type.com

Fonts In Use 🌸
fontsinuse.com

I Love Typography
ilovetypography.com

Practical Typography
Practicaltypography.com

Typographica
typographica.org

Websites: Web Design

Hallointer
Hallointer.net

Hoverstates
Hoverstat.es

Httpster
httpster.net

Awwwards
awwwards.com

Libre & Open Source Fonts (a.k.a. legal, free fonts)

Adobe Fonts ❧
fonts.adobe.com

Beautiful Web Type
beautifulwebtype.com

Free Fonts by Womxn
design-research.be/by-womxn

Free Font Library
typotheque.luuse.io

Google Fonts ❧
fonts.google.com

League of Moveable Type
theleagueofmoveabletype.com

Open Foundry
open-foundry.com

Velvetyne
velvetyne.fr

Collletttivo
collletttivo.it

Items marked with a fleuron ❧ are popular & commonly used resources.

QUEER TYPOGRAPHY.
LETTERS AS LIBERATORY PRACTICE

Adam Fein
afein@risd.edu

Rhode Island School of Design
Department of Graphic Design

Fall 2021, Thursday, 11–4 pm
GRAPH-3327, 3 Credits

Design Center
Room 206

QUEER TYPOGRAPHY

05

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What values underlie "good" graphic design? How does graphic design maintain unjust systems and unfair power structures? Can typography invert, subvert, and supplant these?

This course pairs readings in queer theory and typography with type-focused projects in order to trouble classical principals of graphic design. Lecture, discussion, and readings prompt critical engagement with topics such as legibility, hierarchy, accessibility, and beauty. Students will read and discuss texts by authors such as Judith Butler, Andrea Long Chu, José Esteban Muñoz, and view work by graphic designers such as Be Oakley, Nat Pyper, and Dan Rhatigan.

Students in the course will be introduced to typography fundamentals and classical type design exercises—with an eye toward their subversion. Close analysis of traditional and experimental typefaces will reveal cultural significations and associations. In the culminating projects, students will design their own queer typeface, with atypical, experimental, and exploratory forms as a significant consideration.

Fall 2021
Thursday, 11– 4 pm

Design Center
Room 206

GRAPH-3327
3 Credits

Open to juniors and above;
non-majors and Brown students with Instructor permission

COURSE GOALS

To learn typography and queer theory

To explore typography and its relationship to language, culture, and politics

To apply critical theories to graphic design

To challenge normative values embedded in traditional graphic design, and;

To speculate alternative values, systems, or practices that could replace those values

COURSE OUTCOMES

Learn typographic and type design fundamentals like hierarchy, legibility, and type anatomy
5% of grade

Exercise typography in a range of forms
20% of grade

Survey historical and contemporary queer theory
5% of grade

Critically analyze typefaces and typography
10% of grade

Articulate a perspective on typography in discussion and writing
15% of grade

Apply experimental form making to traditional applications and systems
20% of grade

25% of grade is attendance and participation. See page 07.

EXPECTATIONS

'MY' EXPECTATIONS

Students are required to attend class regularly and on time in accordance with RISD's attendance policy. Students will be responsible for completing outside work and managing the deadlines for projects. In class, students are required to participate in discussions and critiques.

Instructors and students are expected to respect the ideas of their peers and engage constructively with the work of others. Students should feel welcome to express themselves while also respecting their classmates' identities, pronouns, boundaries, etc. There are readings to help with critique in the readings folder.

In this course, good communication is highly valued. The instructor is expected to clearly state deadlines, requirements, schedules, and so on. Students are expected to communicate any concerns, confusions, conflicts, and so on. We will only be successful if we understand and appreciate our mutual goals.

An "A" student will be on time, present in class, and ready to engage in the subject matter. They will challenge themselves during class time and in-class exercises. Their attention in class along with personal commitment to the subject matter and making will be noticeable in their presented work. Ultimately, they will present a final project that displays an understanding of class concepts and be prepared to discuss their work knowledgeably.

An "A" instructor will be on time and enthusiastically facilitating students' learning. They will effectively respond to student concern and modify the course where appropriate to address students' needs. They will grade objectively and consistently. They will accommodate differences in students' learning.

'OUR' EXPECTATIONS

On the first day of class, we will spend time develope a 'code of conduct:' expectations, goals, ways of communications, or other rules that we want to guide our behavior—faculty and student—in the classroom.

This is an opportunity to expand or challenge the expectations provided on the left. You can locate the 'code of conduct' here: bit.ly/3ygbSTs

GRADING

PERCENTAGES

10% Reading and skill-based learning.

25% Participation and attendance: involvement in class activities, peer evaluation, contribution in critiques, weekly progress on projects. Absence or lateness to class will affect grades.

25% Completion of research projects: reading reflections, presentations, project proposals, inquiry supporting studio work.

40% Studio projects: presentation, documentation of process and final outcome.

DESCRIPTION

A Excellent in all areas. Deliberate sincere work, process demonstrates risk taking and experimentation, receptive to criticism, articulates individual perspective, contributes to classroom community, good communication, identifies and progresses toward personal goals, full attendance and participation.

B Good, proficient. Positive attitude toward learning and classroom community. Work meets requirements and is good, proficient—occasionally exceptional—but may be lack refinement such that the final outcome does not adequately represent its ideas, intentions, or ambitions.

C Acceptable, gets by. Meets project requirements but work shows minimal experimentation, complexity, refinement, or quality of craft.

D Poor, inadequate. Fails to grasp the basics, does not meet all project requirements, or struggles to complete work, attend class, or participate.

F Failing. Incomplete and missing work, multiple absences, limited participation.

COURSE GRADING RUBRIC

	A exceptional	B, C good, acceptable	D, F inadequate, failing
PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT			
ATTENDANCE	No unexcused absences. Typically on time and prepared.	At most one unexcused absent. At most late to class twice. Occasionally unprepared for class.	Frequently late or absent without excuse. Frequently unprepared for class.
CRITIQUE	Actively participates, including during peers' critique. Asks meaningful questions. Provides relevant references. Offers descriptive impressions.	Occasionally speaks during critique. Occasionally appears distracted.	Rarely speaks during class. Rarely participates in non-verbal critique. Seems distracted during peers' critique.
DISCUSSION	Actively participates. Contributes perspective and outside experiences. Asks for clarification; poses compelling questions. Demonstrates respect for peers.	Occasionally participates. Rarely introduces outside resources, references, or perspectives.	Rarely speaks during class. Does not post reading questions. Frequently interrupts or is otherwise rude to peers.
RESEARCH & INQUIRY			
SLIDE PRESENTATION	Presentation is clear and informative. Analysis is thoughtful and organized. Visuals are well-made and support content.	Presentation is clear but missing sections. Analysis is thoughtful but minimal; or analysis thoughtful but narrow. Good but few or helpful but low-quality visuals.	Presentation demonstrates minimal research and little analysis of subject. Visuals are minimal, low quality, or poorly made.
WRITING	Meets or exceeds word count requirements. Writing demonstrates curiosity and contemplation. The reading or questions relevant to the student's work are addressed. Writing asks thought provoking or clarifying questions.	Meets or exceeds word count requirements. Writing is inconsistent, only occasionally engaging the reading or considering questions relevant to the student's work.	Below minimum word count. Writing feels flat and routine. Writing does not demonstrate serious engagement with the reading.
PROJECTS			
PROCESS	Process demonstrates experimentation and evolution. Concept is richer than at start. Evidence of sketching or other possible forms. Research is thorough and goes beyond material presented in class.	Process shows too narrow focus: much formal iteration but little research and conceptual exploration; or a well-developed concept with no supporting sketching.	Process shows little or no conceptual or visual evolution from beginning concept. Process shows little or no experimentation or iteration. No or minimal research is pursued.
PRESENTATION OF WORK	Presentation of work is well-paced, structured, clear. Presentation explains motivations, references, goals, process, etc. of work. Presentation illustrates concept (its importance and resolution). Audience follows conceptual leaps.	Presentation is compelling but misses crucial points. Overall concept is clear but details or conceptual leaps are confusing. One or multiple of the following are not explained fully: process, references, concept, final product.	Presentation is minimal: narrative is weak, process is absent; if slide show, few or poor images, too much or too little text. Framing is irrelevant to assignment themes or goals. Audience does not understand concept.
FINAL PRODUCT	Meets the project requirements. Outcome is well made, showing care for craft. Outcome is visually exciting and formally interesting. Outcome is grounded in a well-developed concept.	Meets the project requirements. Outcome is sloppy or lacking finish. Outcome is competent but visually uninspired and likely does not demonstrate a response to critique.	Does not meet project requirements. Outcome does not show understanding or proficiency with tools and techniques. Outcome is sloppy, poorly executed, or incomplete. Outcome is ill-considered or irrelevant.

CRITIQUE STATEMENT

Critique is a valuable learning for both the critic and the designer. The designer receiving feedback must communicate their ideas, defend their choices, receive and process judgments. The critic providing feedback must articulate impressions, ask relevant questions, imagine alternate choices. Both critic and designer must consider the professional and educational contexts of critique: their trends, vocabularies, stakes, goals. Critique is this course is designed to advance students work, of course, and also designed to exercise the various analytical and communication skills that typify good feedback.

This course will include a variety of critique structures; informal and formal; group and individual; faculty and guest. Compared to faculty, other students may have equal (or even better!) understanding and analysis of the work, and so peer critique will be prominent in this course. Peer critique will be structured to support different types of engagement, such as written and visual feedback rather than just verbal. Critique will often directly address the skills being practiced at that moment; in which case, models and guides will direct students in giving and receiving feedback.

Presenting work for critique is a vulnerable act. Students display their thinking, goals, and skils!—and comment on these can feel personal. Risk taking in the classroom is good, but risk implies possible failure; students must feel safe to present unfinished or unresolved projects. Positive experiences in critique require trust, and therefore my goal is to create a comfortable and safe environment that enables good criticism. This begins in the classroom, where we build a community that is committed to one another's success. This extends to the feedback process, where students should feel respected, seen, and heard, even when disagreeing. Students will absorb meaningful yet adverse feedback if they understand it is made in good faith, and the critic will give better feedback if they understand and appreciate the project. Community is a pathway to insight.

09

REFERENCES

HowToCrit.com

On Feedback Giving: bit.ly/3GrWYgG

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Rhode Island School of Design is built on what is now called College Hill, part of the ancestral homelands of the Narragansett Nation. Indigenous people from many nations—near and far—live, study and work in Providence today. The amplification of Native voices and histories is crucial to rectifying the many violent legacies of colonialism, and we gratefully acknowledge the ongoing critical contributions of Indigenous people across our state, region and nation.

You are encouraged to read "Regarding Indigenous Land Acknowledgments at Brown University" by Sherenté Mishitashin Harris, Niantic/Narragansett, and Dr. Mack Scott, Narragansett. The authors discuss the history of the Narragansett on the area Brown University now occupies, the role of Narragansett in the construction of Brown University, and the purpose of land acknowledgements.

This course seeks to consider the social structures enforced and reinforced by graphic design. As a class, we shall consider the social structures we are perpetuating through the institution, this class, ourselves. How did RISD and you come to occupy this space? What is the RISD community and who does it include or exclude? How might the institution and this course be perpetuating the inequalities that make Indigenous people generally and the Narragansett specifically marginal higher education? How might this course be perpetuating graphic design concepts that make non-Western forms of communication less visible or less valuable?

You are encouraged to visit the Tomaquag Museum (tomaquagmuseum.org) to consider the historical and present issues and achievements of Rhode Island's Indigenous peoples. You are also encouraged to explore the work of contemporary indigenous artists working in Providence, like Yani Smith and Deborah Spears Moorehead. For a list of Indigenous artists working in this region, see the Northeast Indigenous Arts Alliance.

Many of us do not consider Providence home. Please look out this in-progress global map of Native lands by Native Land Digital, an Indigenous-led, Canadian non-profit, with an Indigenous Executive Director and Board of Directors.

REFERENCES

TomaquagMuseum.org

neIndigenousArts.org

Native-Land.ca

"Regarding Indigenous Land...": bit.ly/33nhWPy

Resource List: bit.ly/3dHWp6c

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

ACADEMIC POLICIES & STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Your participation and projects must abide by the following:

RISD Academic Code of Conduct:
https://policies.risd.edu/academic/academic-code-of-conduct/

RISD Code of Student Conduct:
https://policies.risd.edu/student-life/code-of-student-conduct/

Policies as detailed in the current RISD course announcement:
http://departments.risd.edu/registrar/web/index.html

An Installation Site Permit is necessary for any projects that require the use of non-classroom space or that could potentially pose a safety risk. A form is available here with further details:
http://info.risd.edu/environmental-health-safety/

Projects may not pose hazards that threaten or cause physical harm to yourself or others. Projects may not cause damage to studio, shop, and lab equipment or school facilities.

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

The passing off of someone else's ideas, writing, or work as one's own is plagiarism. Appropriate methods and forms of attribution vary by discipline. Some courses will include instruction in appropriate conventions for citation and attribution within the field. Students are expected to seek out relevant guidelines on their own (the RISD Writing Center offers resources and guidance), to ask faculty when in doubt about standards, and to recognize that they are ultimately responsible for proper citation.

You must know what constitutes plagiarism and avoid it. Attribute and cite your sources. All student work is expected to follow RISD's Academic Code of Conduct.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is mandatory. There is not an allowed number of absences. Prompt (on-time) arrival to class is expected. Arriving to class late (tardiness) is not acceptable. Three late arrivals will be considered an unexcused absence. If you must miss a class for any reason, notify faculty in advance and as soon as possible. Should you miss a class, you are responsible for gathering missed material and getting back on track.

Please be aware that if you have 2 or more unexcused absences you may be withdrawn from class. If you are not withdrawn due to absences, you can expect grade reductions. An unexcused absence will result in a 25% reduction in your final grade. This equates to a full drop in letter grade on a 4.0 scale. Please see the full RISD Class Attendance policy at:
https://policies.risd.edu/academic/class-attendance/

DISABILITY SUPPORT

Disability Support Services (DSS) creates an accessible community at RISD that provides all students with the support needed to succeed academically. The office works to accommodate students with cognitive (learning), psychological and/or physical disabilities. See this link for more information:
https://www.risd.edu/student-life/wellness/

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The Anatomy of Type: A Graphic Guide to 100 Typefaces, Stephen Coles

Elements of Typographic Style, Robert Bringhurst

Thinking with Type, Ellen Lupton

Queer Theory Now, Hannah McCann & Whitney Monaghan

The Routledge Queer Studies Reader, ed. Donald E. Hall & Annamarie Jagose

Transgender Studies Reader, ed. Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle

CLASS READINGS FOLDER

Required: bit.ly/3s1CNIE

Supplemental: bit.ly/31SVSvk

MATERIALS

Materials required for exercises will be required in class. Required software includes Adobe InDesign and Illustrator, which can be downloaded through your Creative Cloud account.

Glyphs is a required program for this course. RISD provides a site license, which can be accessed here: bit.ly/3dHJIrS

Glyphs only runs on macOS. If you need an Apple laptop, you can borrow one for the semester from Media Resources: mrc.risd.edu

LIBRE & OPEN SOURCE FONTS (A.K.A. LEGAL, FREE FONTS)

Adobe Fonts (with Creative Cloud subscription)
fonts.adobe.com

Beautiful Web Type
beautifulwebtype.com

Free Fonts by Womxn
design-research.be/by-womxn

Free Font Library
typotheque.iuuse.io

Google Fonts
fonts.google.com

League of Moveable Type
theleagueofmoveabletype.com

Open Foundry
open-foundry.com

Velvetyne
velvetyne.fr

Collletttivo
colllettivo.it

ASKING FOR HELP

Critique is the dominant model for providing feedback in art and design schools. This can sometimes deceive us into thinking the only way of asking for help in the classroom is to seek out criticism. This is not true. The following are a few appropriate ways of asking for help:

I am feeling overwhelmed by this project. Help!

I am frustrated! Help!

I do not think I can finish in the time allotted. Help!

I have not slept in three days. Help!

I do not how to achieve an effect in this program. How do I do it?

I want to achieve this effect in my physical object. How do I do it?

This tool does not give the expected outcome. Why? How do I do it?

This method/process is taking a long time. Are there other ways to do it?

I want to use this image/font/program/tool/etc., but I cannot afford/locate it. What are other options?

I do not understand this word. What does it mean?

I do not know this reference. What is it?

I do not know the difference between these two things. What are they?

I do not know with the pieces of a book/website/brand/etc. What are they?

CLASS CALENDAR

Emerging Outcomes: Learn typography fundamentals; Survey historical & contemporary queer theory

	ACTIVITIES		ASSIGNED

CLASS 01 SEP 09

Cmty.	History of Your Name	HW	Something Old, Something New (SOSN)
	Link to alternative class calendar view		
	Introduction to course syllabus	HW	Seeing Type
	Link to Homework Calendar		
	'Code of Conduct' in small groups	Reading	History of Type & Gender: Meggs, Bringhurst, Mientjes; Foucault, Stryker
	Link to Presentation Schedules		
Lecture	Reading and Writing Systems		

CLASS 02 SEP 16

Due Seeing Type

Cmty.	What's in a Name	P1	Writing Bodies *due Sep 23*
	Seeing Type share		
Lecture	Type Anatomy	Reading	Anatomy & Bodies: Coles, Yow; Fausto–Sterling, Kafer
Exercise	Troubling Letterforms		
Tutorial	Adobe Illustrator		

CLASS 03 SEP 23

Due P1: Writing Bodies

Cmty.	Visualizing Commonalities	P2	Body (As) Text *due Oct 7*
Crit.	Gallery–style rotations		
	Critique Project 1 + self–reflection on P1	Reading	Gender & Signifiers: Boulanger, Rushton, Sowersby; Rubin, Sedgewick + *reading reflection*
	SOSN Presentation		
Lecture	Type Pairing		
Tutorial	Adobe InDesign		

CLASS 04 SEP 30

Due Reading reflection

Cmty.	Visualizing Yourself
Crit.	Small group review
	SOSN Presentation
	Reading Discussion
Tutorial	Adobe InDesign 2

Developing Outcomes: Exercise typography skills in a range of forms; critically analyze typography

CLASS 05 OCT 07

Due P2: Body (As) Text

Cmty.	Home	P3	Tangible Type *due Nov 4*
Crit.	Non-verbal initial critique in small groups, then full class critique		
	Critique Project 2 + self–reflection on P2	Reading	Race & Legibility: Ruder, Kane, Friedman; Edelman, Munoz, Anzaldúa + *reading reflection*
	SOSN Presentation		
	Reading Discussion		

CLASS 06 OCT 14

Due Reading reflection

Cmty.	Style Envy	HW	Parsing (Written) Language (PWL)
Crit.	Peer–to–peer critique		
	SOSN presentation	Reading	Performance: Cinelli, Lupton; Austin, Butler, Halberstam + *reading reflection*
	Reading discussion		
Tutorial	Glyphs		
Wkshp.	Binding Techniques		

CLASS 07 OCT 21

Due Reading reflection

Cmty.	Life Via Clothing
Crit.	Questions only in small group
	Mid–term evaluations
	SOSN presentation
	Reading discussion
Tutorial	Glyphs 2

CLASS 08 OCT 28

Cmty.	Dream Activity
Crit.	One–on–one
	Check ins
	Work time

CLASS 07 NOV 04

Due P3: Tangible Type

Crit. Peer-to-peer critique

Cmty. My History
Critique Project 3
+ self-reflection on P3
PWL Presentation

P4 Queer Typography
due Dec 09

Reading Tradition & Normativity:
Bringhurst, Shaw, Soulellis;
Berlant, Rich
+ reading reflection

CLASS 08 NOV 11   Advanced Outcomes: articulate a unique perspective on typography; apply experimental form making to traditional applications and systems.

Due Reading reflection

Crit. Self-directed in small group

Cmty. Goals
PWL Presentation
Reading discussion
Review P4 proposals

Reading Trans* & Variability:
Hooker, Senger;
Stryker, Chu, Keegan
+ reading reflection

CLASS 09 NOV 18

Due Reading reflection

Crit. Peer review in small group

Cmty. Holiday
PWL presentation
Reading discussion
Work time

CLASS ØØ NOV 25

Fall break
No class
Get plenty of rest ☺

CLASS 10 DEC 02

Crit. Optional one-on-one

Cmty. Accomplishment
PWL presentation
Class evaluation & self evaluation
Check ins
Work time

CLASS 11 DEC 09

Due P4: Queer Typography

Crit. Semester review, project presentation,
and self-directed feedback in full class

Critique Project 4
+ self-reflection on P4

FINAL DOCUMENTATION DUE DEC 14

MID-TERM FEEDBACK

COURSE GOALS

To learn typography and queer theory.

To explore typography and its relationship to language, culture, and politics.

To apply critical theories to graphic design.

To challenge normative values embedded in traditional graphic design, and

To speculate alternative values, systems, or practices that could replace those values.

SCALED QUESTIONS

Rate all of the following statements.
1 means you strongly disagree. 5 means you strongly agree.

The instructor is approachable with comments and concerns.

1   2   3   4   5

The skill building exercises are relevant and of appropriate difficulty.

1   2   3   4   5

The discussions are engaging and help me to understand key concepts.

1   2   3   4   5

The readings are interesting and relevant to my studio work.

1   2   3   4   5

This course has challenged me to consider new ideas or ways of thinking.

1   2   3   4   5

The work that I am making in the course is interesting and meaningful to me.

1   2   3   4   5

OPEN QUESTIONS

What are the most helpful or useful aspects of this class? What areas could use improvement (lecture, discussion, critique, exercises, readings, projects)?

How is the course's workload? Are you being asked to do too much or too little? Do you feel overwhelmed or bored? What could be added or removed to improve the workload?

Has the feedback the professor provided on assignments been helpful? Do you have a clear sense of your strengths or what to do to improve?

Evaluate your own work in this course. What have you done well? What could you improve? What are your goals for the remainder of the course?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Student Signature _____

WRITING BODIES

PROJECT 1: DUE SEPTEMBER 23

Writing systems vary, but a good page is not hard to learn to recognize, whether it comes from Tang Dynasty China, the Egyptian New Kingdom or Renaissance Italy. The principles that unite these distant schools of design are based on the structure and scale of the human body – the eye, the hand and the forearm in particular.
— Robert Bringhurst, The Elements of Typographic Style

To understand gender as a historical category, however, is to accept that gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open to a continual remaking, and that "anatomy" and "sex" are not without cultural framing.
—Judith Butler, Undoing Gender

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The human body is deeply entwined with out writing systems. The English names the drawn components of the Latin alphabet are named after body parts: legs, arms, ears, feet, shoulders. The letters in the Korean alphabet, Hangul, are drawn to resemble the shape of the mouth when speaking. A Humanist* typeface is one that visually expresses calligraphy—and so the physical human hand engaged in writing – in contrast to the mathematical and mechanical designs of the 20th century. Since at least the 1500s, type designers have attempted to make letters that correspond to ideal human proportions; the letter T should resemble a man with his arms outstretched.

However, in what ways does the concept of an ideal human limit the design of typography? And what values are perpetuated when an ideal human underlies our writing systems? Who and what has been excluded from the category of ideal human body? Caroline Criado Perez in *Invisible Women*, for example, writes that world is designed for the male body and so harms women, such that seat belts are significantly less likely to prevent injury to women. Tactile writing systems, like Braille, were not invented until the early 1800s, nearly four centuries after the invention of the printing press. What other identities, bodies, or senses could be centered in our writing systems?

For this project, you will design and produce a writing system that cites the body. You must produce at least 10 glyphs. The glyphs do not need to be the letters of the Latin alphabet—or even based on any existing system. Document and present your writing system in an appropriate format. This is a short, experimental project. Your approach should be agile and exploratory but also thoughtful.

Your work might consider anatomy, beauty, identity, universality, standardization, and more. Does the writing system reference a body part, the whole body, a bodily function, a bodily (dis)ability, a category of body? How individual or universal should your writing system be? Could your work be anti-system that deliberately works (or does not work) against the body? Does the writing system need to emphasize the human body?

Humanism has many (related) meanings in typography. It is also describes to a specific style of letter that originated in Venice in the early 1400s. Humanism also refers to a philosophical tradition that emphasized human agency which emerged at the same time in Italy.

Takenobu Igarashi, Environmental Alphabets

DELIVERABLES

Writing system of at least 10 glyphs

Documentation of process
demonstrate conceptual and methodological connection to a body

Meaningful format with which to present your work
poster, presentation, tool, video, etc.

PROJECT GOALS

To begin drawing letterforms

To consider letters as a system

To consider the visual relationship of components in a system

To apply historical context and critical thinking toward letterforms

To relate letterforms, writing tools, and writing systems to the body

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Exploration of varied methods for producing glyphs
30% of project grade

Documentation and presentation of process and final work
20% of project grade

Research, conception, and production of a final visual piece that connects typography and the body
50% of project grade

Anthon Beeke, Body Type

ASSESSMENT

BASIC COMPETENCY

All components are completed: at least 10 glyphs, documentation, and presentation.

ADVANCED COMPETENCY

Process demonstrates risk taking and experimentation

Final work operates as a system

System exhibits conceptual concern and a particular perspective on bodies
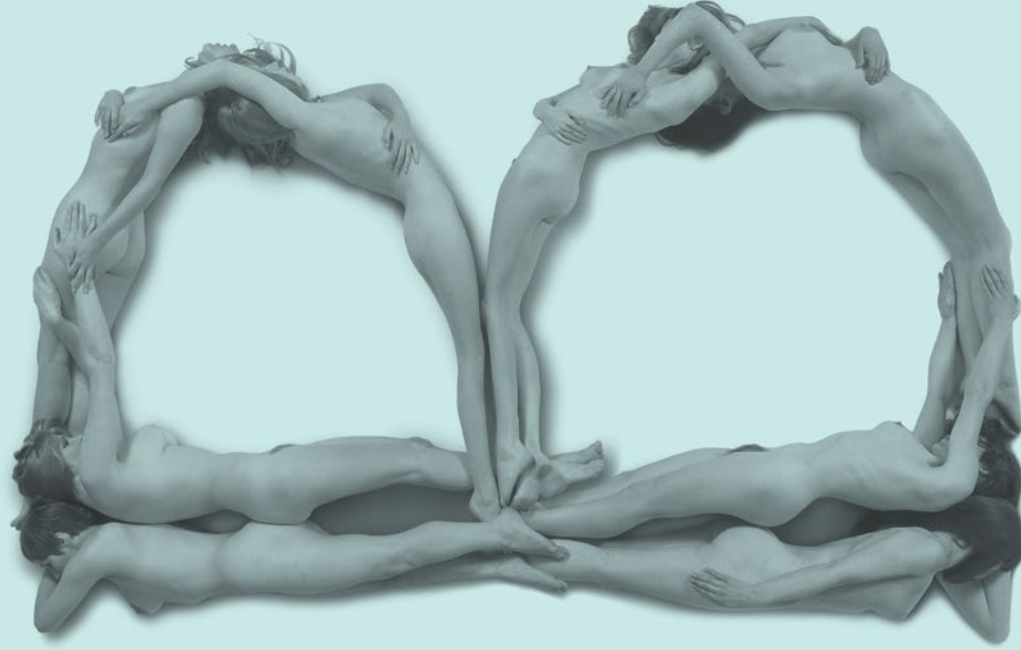
VISUAL REFERENCES

LETTERFORM AS BODY

Type anatomy

BODY AS SOURCE & SITE

Humanist letters

Yantra tattoos

First female tattoo artist, Maud Wagner

Takenobu Igarashi, Environmental Alphabets

BODY AS BRUSH

Yves Klein, Anthropometries

Jarret Key, Hair Painting

Andy Warhol, Oxidation

Helen Chadwick, Piss Flowers

BODY AS SYSTEM

Geoffroy Tory, Champ Fleury

Mouth shapes in Hangul

Corbusier, contemporary modular

BODY AS LETTERFORM

Village People, YMCA

Stefan G. Bucher, Letterheads

Rowland Scherman, Love Letters

Emory Douglas, Reparations

TEXTUAL REFERENCES

Jeanie Dean, A New Alphabet: Embodiment, Language, and Digital Literacy
https://variants.artbase.rhizome.org/Q3177/localweb/alphabetbodyhtm.htm

The Funambulist, A Subversive Approach to the Ideal Normatized Body
https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/architectural-theories-a-subversive-approach-to-the-ideal-normatized-body

Sair Goetz, Letterforms/Humanforms
https://letterformarchive.org/news/view/letterforms-humanforms

Gordon Hall, "Why I Don't Talk About 'The Body': A Polemic
https://monday-journal.com/why-i-dont-talk-about-the-body-a-polemic/

The Public Domain Review, The Human Alphabet collection
https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-human-alphabet

Frank Zöllner, Anthropomorphism: From Human Measurement to the Module of Fascism
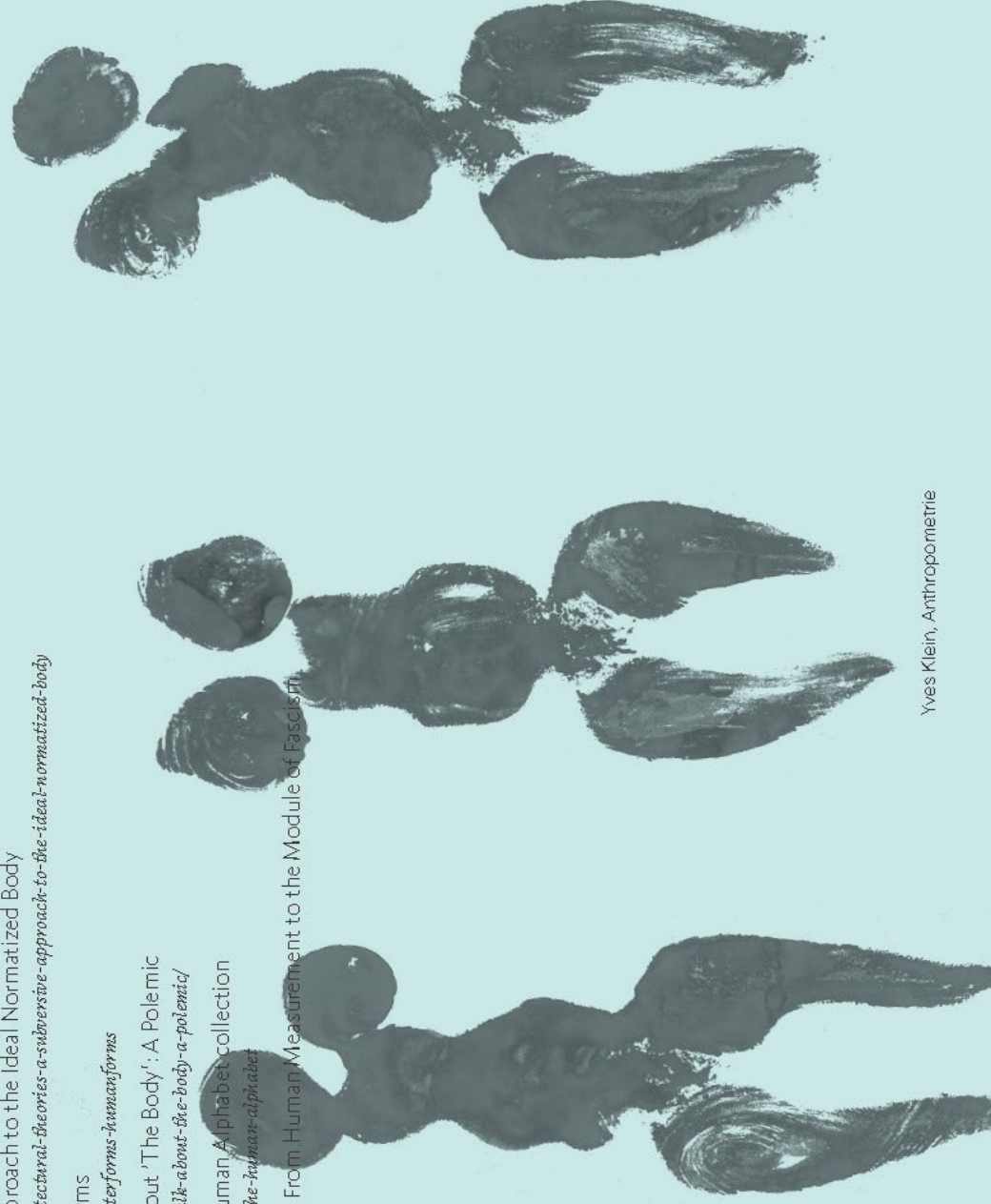
Yves Klein, Anthropometrie

typo gra phy phy .elec tive

DOING THINGS WITH LETTERS

GRAPH-W322-01

GRAPH-W322-01

Wintersession 2022
3 Credits

Design Center,
Rm 210

Mon, Tues, and
alternate Weds:
1 – 6 pm

Est. Cost: $60

ADIE FEIN

afein@risd.edu
630-408-4650

Office Hours
Sat & Sun: 4 pm
Zoom, Design Center,
or Grad GD Studio

Sign up

PLATFORMS

Canvas

Google Drive

Slack

Zoom

table of contents

Michael Beirut

course

DESCRIPTION

The objective of this course is to introduce the student to the basic concepts, skills and processes of typographical design. Design problems will be assigned to investigate fundamental aspects of typography (organization; proportion; composition; space; texture; rhythm and meaning). Projects may include the design of such objects as letterhead, packaging and poster.

GOALS

To appreciate typography: the design of letters; the artful or "good" application of fonts; their use in the world

To understand the mechanics and mores of "good" typography

To use type to support your unique, individual practice

OUTCOMES

5%	Develop a typographic vocabulary: anatomy, classification, history
5%	Recognize historical and contemporary type and their applications
10%	Understand fundamental typographic concepts: hierarchy, legibility, color, etc.
10%	Gain proficiency in the type tools within Adobe Illustrator and InDesign
5%	Locate and use fonts that meet the design(er)'s needs
20%	Use type competently and skillfully in a variety of forms
5%	Use a variety of tools and methods to produce typographic work
15%	Create typographic systems that operate through a series of pages/items

TOOLS

Laptop with WiFi

Adobe Creative Suite: Illustrator, InDesign

Google Drive Suite: Docs, Sheets, Slides

Zoom for first three days and for office hours upon request

Slack for correspondence and documentation

Printer for test prints and critique pin-up

feed back

CRITIQUE STATEMENT

Critique is a valuable learning for both the critic and the designer. The designer receiving feedback will communicate ideas, defend choices, receive and process judgments. The critic providing feedback will articulate impressions, ask relevant questions, imagine alternate choices. Both critic and designer will consider the professional and educational contexts of critique: their trends, vocabularies, stakes, goals. Critique is this course is designed to advance students work, of course, and also designed to exercise the various analytical and communication skills that typify good feedback.

This course will include a variety of critique structures: informal and formal; group and individual; faculty and guest. Compared to faculty, other students may have equal (or even better!) understanding and analysis of the work, and so peer critique will be prominent in this course. Peer critique will be structured to support different types of engagement, such as written and visual feedback rather than just verbal. Critique will often directly address the skills being practiced at that moment; in which case, models and guides will direct students in giving and receiving feedback.

Presenting work for critique is a vulnerable act. Students display their thinking, goals, skills—and comment on these can feel personal. Risk taking in the classroom is good, but risk implies possible failure; students will feel safe to present unfinished or unresolved projects. Positive experiences in critique require trust, and therefore my goal is to create a comfortable and safe environment that enables good criticism. This begins in the classroom, where we build a community that is committed to one another's success. This extends to the feedback process, where students will feel respected, seen, and heard, even when disagreeing. Students will absorb meaningful yet adverse feedback if they understand it is made in good faith, and the critic will give better feedback if they understand and appreciate the project. Community is a pathway to insight.

ASKING FOR HELP

Critique is the dominant model for feedback in art and design schools. This can deceive us into thinking the only way of asking for help in the classroom is to seek out criticism. This is not true. The following are a few appropriate ways of asking for help:

I am feeling overwhelmed/frustrated by this project/exercise. Help!
I do not think I can finish in the time allotted. Help!
I have not slept in three days. Help!

I do not how to achieve an effect with this tool/program. How do I do it?
This tool/program/process is not producing the expected outcome. How do I do it?
My method/process/tool it is taking a long time. Are there other ways to do it?
I cannot afford/locate this image/font/program/tool/etc., What are other options?

I do not know this word/concept/reference. What does it mean?
I am unfamiliar with all of the parts of a book/website/brand/etc. What are they?

eval uation

GRADE PERCENTAGES

25% Participation and attendance: involvement in class activities, peer evaluation, contribution in critiques, weekly progress on projects. Absence or lateness to class will affect grades.

25% Research and process: presentations, proposals, inquiry supporting studio work.

50% Studio projects: documentation of process and final outcome uploaded to Google Drive; presentation of final outcome in class.

GRADE DESCRIPTION

A Excellent in all areas. Deliberate sincere work, process demonstrates risk taking and experimentation, receptive to criticism, articulates individual perspective, contributes to classroom community, good communication, identifies and progresses toward personal goals, full attendance and participation.

B Good, proficient. Positive attitude toward learning and classroom community. Work meets requirements and is good, proficient—occasionally exceptional—but may be lack refinement such that the final outcome does not adequately represent its ideas, intentions, or ambitions.

C Acceptable, gets by. Meets project requirements but work shows minimal experimentation, complexity, refinement, or quality of craft.

D Poor, inadequate. Fails to grasp the basics, does not meet all project requirements, or struggles to complete work, attend class, or participate.

F Failing. Incomplete and missing work, multiple absences, limited participation.

RUBRIC

See next page.

SUBMISSION

Projects can be revised throughout the semester. Final work must be uploaded to the `Student Work folder on Google Drive` by 6 PM, February 10. Any work not uploaded will receive a failing grade.

NOTE For Wintersession 2022, RISD will use a Pass/No Credit system (P/NC). P/NC grading does not impact a student's Grade Point Average. Pass grades count in earned credits towards degree requirements. ('D' is the lowest passing grade.) NC grades do not count towards any earned credits.

However, students will still receive grades on projects, at mid-terms, etc. Grades are one method of communicating students' improvement, and are an important supplement to other forms of feedback, like critique.

03

	A exceptional	B,C good, acceptable	D,F Inadequate, failing

PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

	A exceptional	B,C good, acceptable	D,F Inadequate, failing
Attendance	No unexcused absences. Typically on time and prepared.	At most one unexcused absent. At most late to class twice. Occasionally unprepared for class.	Frequently late or absent without excuse. Frequently unprepared for class.
Critique	Actively participates, including during others' critique. Asks meaningful questions. Provides relevant references. Offers descriptive impressions.	Occasionally speaks during or participates in critique. Occasionally appears distracted.	Rarely speaks during class. Rarely participates in non-verbal or peer critique. Distracted during others' critique.
Exercises & Demos	Actively participates. Asks for clarification; asks questions relevant to their needs. Demonstrates respect for peers.	Occasionally participates. Occasionally asks questions.	Rarely participates. Rarely ask questions when lost, in need of help, etc. Frequently interrupts or is otherwise rude to peers.

RESEARCH & INQUIRY

	A exceptional	B,C good, acceptable	D,F Inadequate, failing
Slide presentation(s)	Presentation is clear and informative. Verbal explanation is thoughtful and organized. Visuals are well-made and support content.	Presentation is clear but missing sections. Verbal explanation is thoughtful but minimal; or does not offer more information than apparent from slides. Good but too few visuals; or helpful but low-quality visuals.	Presentation demonstrates minimal research and little explanation of subject. Visuals are minimal, low quality, or poorly made.
Process	Process demonstrates experimentation and evolution. Concept is richer than at start. Evidence of sketching or other possible forms. Research is thorough and goes beyond material presented in class.	Process shows too narrow focus: much formal iteration but little research and conceptual exploration; or a well-developed concept with no supporting sketching.	Process shows little or no conceptual or visual evolution from beginning concept. Process shows little or no experimentation or iteration. No or minimal research is pursued.

PROJECTS & FINAL PRODUCT

	A exceptional	B,C good, acceptable	D,F Inadequate, failing
Presentation of work	Presentation of work is well-paced, structured, and clear. Presentation explains motivations, references, goals, process, etc. of work. Presentation illustrates concept behind work (its importance and resolution). Audience follows conceptual leaps.	Presentation is compelling but misses important points. Overall concept is clear but details or conceptual leaps are confusing. One or multiple of the following are not explained fully: process, references, concept, final product.	Presentation is minimal: narrative is weak, process is absent; if slide show, few or poor images, too much or too little text. Framing of work is irrelevant to assignment themes or goals. Audience does not understand concept.
Final product	Meets the project requirements. Outcome is well made, showing care for craft. Outcome is visually exciting and formally interesting. Outcome is grounded in a well-developed concept.	Meets the project requirements. Outcome is sloppy or lacking finish. Outcome is competent but visually uninspired and likely does not demonstrate a response to critique.	Does not meet project requirements. Outcome does not show understanding or proficiency with tools and techniques. Outcome is sloppy, poorly executed, or incomplete. Outcome is ill-considered or irrelevant.

A exceptional	B,C good, acceptable	D,F Inadequate, failing

expect ations FACULTY

Students are required to attend class regularly and on time in accordance with RISD's attendance policy. Students will be responsible for completing outside work and managing the deadlines for projects. In class, students are required to participate in discussions and critiques.

Instructors and students are expected to respect the ideas of their peers and engage constructively with the work of others. Students should feel welcome to express themselves while also respecting their classmates' identities, pronouns, boundaries, etc. There are readings to help with critique in the readings folder.

In this course, good communication is highly valued. The instructor is expected to clearly state deadlines, requirements, schedules, and so on. Students are expected to communicate any concerns, confusions, conflicts, and so on. We will only be successful if we understand and appreciate our mutual goals.

An "A" student will be on time, present in class, and ready to engage in the subject matter. They will challenge themselves during class time and in-class exercises. Their attention in class along with personal commitment to the subject matter and making will be noticeable in their presented work. Ultimately, they will present a final project that displays an understanding of class concepts and be prepared to discuss their work knowledgeably.

An "A" instructor will be on time and enthusiastically facilitating students' learning. They will effectively respond to student concern and modify the course where appropriate to address students' needs. They will grade objectively and consistently. They will accommodate differences in students' learning.

COMMUNITY AGREEMENT

On the first day of class, we will spend time develope a 'code of conduct:' expectations, goals, ways of communications, or other rules that we want to guide our behavior— faculty and student—in the classroom. This is an opportunity to expand or challenge the expectations provided above.

You can locate the Community Agreement here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jNpE9YvivlbqLChiIJ-iLxb1mfWQW-sAU7_bCHfJg-gI/edit?usp=sharing

land acknow ledge ment STATEMENT & RESOURCES

Rhode Island School of Design is built on what is now called College Hill, part of the ancestral homelands of the Narragansett Nation. Indigenous people from many nations—near and far—live, study and work in Providence today. The amplification of Native voices and histories is crucial to rectifying the many violent legacies of colonialism, and we gratefully acknowledge the ongoing critical contributions of Indigenous people across our state, region and nation.

You are encouraged to read Regarding Indigenous Land Acknowledgments at Brown University by Sherenté Mishitashin Harris, Niantic/Narragansett, and Dr. Mack Scott, Narragansett. The authors discuss the history of the Narragansett on the area Brown University now occupies, the role of Narragansett in the construction of Brown University, and the purpose of land acknowledgements.

This course is an introduction to typography that seeks to empower the students to achieve their personal goals—that is, written language has power. We should reflect, then, upon the power of written language to communicate, to commune, and to disrupt, to colonize. Many indigenous, ethnic, and regional languages have been supplanted by English and the Latin alphabet. Many have been excluded from or altered by digital typographic systems, like Unicode. You can locate lists of historical and living writing systems online.

Further, we should reflect on graphic design's historical ambition of producing clear, immediate, far-reaching, and universal communication. Why does communication need to be logical, understandable, or even readable? Which writing system should be universal, and who, historically and currently, makes that decision? What is lost and gained when local culture is made accessible, global? What does it mean to translate between writing systems? What forms of ownership, community, or knowledge does writing privilege? How might this course or this institution be promoting communication methods that make non-Western forms of communication less visible or less valuable?

You are encouraged to visit the Tomaquag Museum to consider the historical and present issues and achievements of Rhode Island's Indigenous peoples. You are also encouraged to explore the work of contemporary indigenous artists working in Providence, like Yani Smith and Deborah Spears Moorehead. For a list of Indigenous artists working in this region, see the Northeast Indigenous Arts Alliance.

Many of us do not consider Providence home. Please look out this in-progress global map of Native lands. This is a project of Native Land Digital, an Indigenous-led, Canadian non-profit, with an Indigenous Executive Director and Board of Directors.

LINKS flylib.com/books/en/1.536.1.46/1/
worldswritingsystems.org
tomaquagmuseum.org
neindigenousarts.org
native-land.ca

insti tutional poli cies

ACADEMIC POLICIES & STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Your participation and projects must abide by the following:

RISD Academic Code of Conduct:
policies.risd.edu/academic/academic-code-of-conduct/

RISD Code of Student Conduct:
policies.risd.edu/student-life/code-of-student-conduct/

Policies as detailed in the current RISD course announcement:
risdregistrar.wordpress.com/course-announcement/

An Installation Site Permit is necessary for any projects that use non-classroom space or that could pose a safety risk. A form is available here with further details:
info.risd.edu/environmental-health-safety/

Projects may not pose hazards that threaten or cause physical harm to yourself or others. Projects may not cause damage to studio, shop, lab equipment, or school facilities.

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

The passing off of someone else's ideas, writing, or work as one's own is plagiarism. Plagiarism may result in immediate failure of the course.

Appropriate methods and forms of attribution vary by discipline. Graphic designers routinely work with material that comes from others, like book text or corporate logos. Within this course, the use of others' material*, with attribution, is reasonable and expected. In the professional field, graphic designers frequently reference, parody, and appropriate other designers' work. It is normal to be influenced by and to influence others. For more, see John Caserta's It's probably not plagiarism. The unaltered, direct use of another's text or images without attribution, however, is clear-cut plagiarism.

You must know what constitutes plagiarism and avoid it. Attribute and cite your sources. All student work is expected to follow RISD's Academic Code of Conduct. Students are expected to seek out relevant guidelines on their own (the RISD Writing Center offers resources and guidance), to ask faculty when in doubt about standards, and to recognize that they are ultimately responsible for proper citation.

BACK UP STATEMENT

You are strongly encouraged to set up a regular backup and archiving strategy for your work. Consider using both cloud storage (Dropbox, Google Drive, iCloud, etc.) and an external hard drive.

**** For educational purposes, most material can be used freely. This is called fair use. However, be aware that certain items—like some typefaces—may have license agreements that limit their applications.

insti tutional poli cies

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is mandatory. There is not an allowed number of absences. Prompt (on-time) arrival to class is expected. Arriving to class late (tardiness) is not acceptable. Three late arrivals will be considered an unexcused absence. If you must miss a class for any reason, notify faculty in advance and as soon as possible. Should you miss a class, you are responsible for gathering missed material and getting back on track.

Please be aware that if you have 2 or more unexcused absences you may be withdrawn from class. If you are not withdrawn due to absences, you can expect grade reductions. An unexcused absence will result in a 25% reduction in your final grade. This equates to a full drop in letter grade on a 4.0 scale. Please see the full RISD Class Attendance policy at:
policies.risd.edu/academic/class-attendance/

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The RISD community is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the development of integrity. In order to thrive and excel, this community must preserve the freedom of thought and expression of all its members. A culture of respect that honors the rights, safety, dignity, and worth of every individual is essential to preserve such freedom. We affirm our respect for the rights and well-being of all members.

Because of power differentials between instructor and student—or within the environment of the classroom—it can often be challenging to speak about perceived bias, intentional offense, or other harms that might affect students. This course may address political or contentious topics. Students should feel safe to discuss their own identities, beliefs, and experiences. If anything in class is preventing your full participation or causing discomfort or harm, and you do not feel comfortable disclosing your identity, you can make anonymous comments to the instructor using this form:
forms.gle/6fpsUpAfQoNqnccx5

DISABILITY SUPPORT

Disability Support Services (DSS) creates an accessible community at RISD that provides all students with the support needed to succeed academically. The office works to accommodate students with cognitive (learning), psychological and/or physical disabilities. Please see this link for more information:
info.risd.edu/disability-support-services-dss/

calen dar

MON, JAN 10

Syllabus review

Community Agreement

lect. History of Type

HW *Seeing Type & Grids*

TUE, JAN 11

DUE *Seeing Type & Grids*

lect. What is Type

demo Illustrator 1

ex. Digitize Letters

lect. Form in Type

demo Illustrator 2

ex. Expressive Type

HW *Just My Type (JMT)*

WED, JAN 11

DUE *Expressive Type*

lect. Type Classification & Pairing

ex. Type Pairing

crit Expressive Type

demo InDesign 1

lect. Grids

ex. Type in Grids

HW *Project 1: Typographic Poster (P1)*

MON, JAN 17

MLK DAY: NO CLASS

TUE, JAN 18

DUE *Project 1: Typographic Poster*

crit. P1: Silent Critique

lect. Hierachy

demo InDesign 2

ex. Postcards

lect. The Book & Page

Field Trip

HW *Project 2: Class Zine (P2)*

Emil Ruder

NOTE One, schedule may change. Two, most days will begin with a community building activity; let Adie know if you have an idea for one or would like to lead one.

09

calen dar

MON, JAN 24

DUE *JMT: Andrew, Kyle*

crit. P2 progress

demo InDesign 3

ex. Loooong Text

lect. Typographic Systems

Visit Type Shop

HW *Project 3: Type System (P3)*

TUE, JAN 25

DUE *JMT: Ash, Jiihyeon*

crit. P2 progress

Mid-Semester review

lect. Fine Type

demo InDesign 4

ex. Detail in type

WED, JAN 26

DUE *JMT: Esther, Fawz*
P3 Proposals

Crit P2 process
P3 proposals

Lect. Craft

MON, JAN 31

DUE *JMT: Elisa, Selena*
Project 2: Class Zine

crit. P2 with Guest Critic

TUE, FEB 1

DUE *JMT: Darrian, Olivia*

crit. P3 process

MON, FEB 7

DUE *JMT: Nerukessa, Daehee*

crit. P3 process

TUE, FEB 8

DUE *JMT: Jamie, Natalia*

Course Reviews

crit. Optional meetings

WED, FEB 9

DUE *Project 3*

crit. P3 with Guest Critic

Reflection

Walk about

Conclusion

NOTE One, schedule may change. Two, most days will begin with a community building activity; let Adie know if you have an idea for one or would like to lead one.

10

home work

LINKS

Class Folder
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pJQSImnZdX_IzD8EPG4yOCuS-REM_FtQL?usp=sharing

Student Work*
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11V-Mlw6KdLy18pt8cMx_OMVswqs-4bCen?usp=sharing

Homework folder
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1M-PkkfqZ4obnb5uLD9qd0Gt_7Xn-L6aK_?usp=sharing

In-class exercises
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kLBt_qU52tJgCtiNLs31zkESHH-F1X2Pn?usp=sharing

Lectures
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1m81xq3N5E3mo3b4FY9lzRWzd-MQSd-FYV?usp=sharing

Reading list†
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Mzdime-Bh4js34YwDvvh7rOAUrXTS_pIiKJIUm0VEJs/edit?usp=sharing

Marian Bantjes

****   Final documentation of projects, exercises, and presentations must be in this folder by 6 PM, Feb 10.

††††††   Readings are not required. They are supplementary to in-class lectures and exercises. You will know more about typography if you do all the readings—but that may be more knowledge than you need ☺

11

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home work just my type

DESCRIPTION

Select one type foundry or a type designer.* Create a 5–10 minute presentation on your subject. Choose o subject that excites or intrigues you!

Your presentation should cover basic history, show at least two typefaces, and show the typefaces in use. You presentation should include a title slide, some body text, and captions—set in at least two fonts. Your presentation should include at least 10 high-quality images. Images might be of type designers, inspiration, typefaces, process sketches, etc. We would especially benefit from seeing the typeface in use, like the font in a book or on a poster.† Images should be captioned with an image title or description, if known, the author and date.

You should talk about the history of your subject while presenting, but you do not need to do exhaustive research. You will not be graded on writing or speaking skill. *The goal is to present new typefaces to the class and to contextualize them.* Who made it? What machines were the typefaces made for, like the computer or letterpress? What purpose were the typefaces made for, like telephone directories or posters? Most important of all, though, is to show the class original, interesting work and demonstrate enthusiasm for your subject.

This is a typography course, so you will be graded on the design of the presentation. Consider your type system (font choice, size, hierarchy, etc.) and its relation to the subject you have selected; consider how your type interacts with images. Your system should support, not distract from, the items you are presenting.

You will present to the class on a pre-scheduled day, see page 13. If you need help choosing a subject, see page 14. To avoid duplicates, record your designer or foundry on this sheet.

REQUIREMENTS

Due: see schedule on page 13.

5–10 minute slide presentation on one foundry and at least three of their typefaces.

Minimum 10 images with captions.

Minimum use of at least two typefaces in the presentation design.

Minimum use of the following textual elements in the presentation design: title slide; captions; and body text.

****   The subject does not need to be a full-time type designer. However, they must have created complete typefaces that are used by others, whether given away online or made for a company's private use. A person who creates one-off lettering or calligraphy—like Jessica Hische or Marian Bantjes—is not allowed. We want to see fonts that can be located and used.

††††††   This means 'locate the font in use in the real world;' not 'make a poster using the font.' See Resources.

12

home work just my type

GOALS (WHY?)

To explore individual interests and their intersection with typography

To become familiar with one type designer or foundry and their catalogue

To consider the historical, technological, and/or commercial context(s) that inform type design

To practice talking about type and letters

LEARNING OUTCOMES (WHAT?)

Create a small typographic system

Develop a functional type hierarchy

Produce an effective presentation

RESOURCES (HELP!)

FontsInUse.com

FontInLogo.com

Typewolf.com

Behance.com*

SCHEDULE

Jan 24   Andrew, Kyle

Jan 25   Ash, Jihyeon

Jan 26   Esther, Fawz

Jan 31   Elisa, Selena

Feb 1   Darrian, Olivia

Feb 7   Nerukessa, Daehee

Feb 8   Jamie, Natalia

Marquette
Assyrtiko ✓
Nerkarat
Garnatxa
Merzling ✓
Sylvaner

Klim Type Foundry

**** Confirm (through visual comparison) that the actual font is being used.

13

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home work just my type

TYPE DESIGNERS

Adrian Frutiger	Hermann Zapf	Paul Renner
Agyei Archer	James Goggin	Peter Bil'ak
Aldo Novarese	Joshua Darden	Richard Lipton
Alice Savoie	Louis Filli	Robin Mientjes
Carol Twombly	Lucas de Groot	Shiva Nallaperumal
David Jonathan Ross	Lynne Yun	Stephen Coles
David Rudnick	Martin Majoor	Tes Seals
Ed Benguiat	Masahiro Naruse	Tobias Frere-Jones
Eliott Grunewald	Matthew Carter	Veronika Burian
Frederic Goudy	Nick Sherman	William Dwiggins
Gerard Unger	Nina Strossinger	Zuzana Licko

TYPE FOUNDRIES

205TF	Grilli Type	R-Typography
A Is For Fonts	Hex Type Company	RP Type Foundry
Benoit Bodhuin	Hoefler & Co.	Sharp Type
Black Foundry	House Industries	Storm Type Foundry
Colophon Foundry	Indian Type Foundry	Swiss Typefaces
Commercial Type	Klim Type Foundry	TypeTogether
Coppers and Brasses	Letters from Sweden	Undercase Type
Darden Studio	Milieu Grotesque	Underware
Dinamo Typefaces	Occupant Fonts	URW++
Emigre Fonts	Pangram Pangram	Velvetyne
Font Bureau	Production Type	VJ Type

Type Foundries Archive, list of 362 foundries
type-foundries-archive.com

14

home
work
p1: type poster

DESCRIPTION

You must develop three posters to advertise a chosen topic. Your posters must be created in Adobe Illustrator and 11" × 17".

The primary goal of the assignment is to practice the tools learned this week and to use typography expressively, so that it communicates a quality of your subject. Therefore, your posters must be composed primarily of type, but you may use one image or illustration in each poster.*

You should go through an iterative process, in which you experiment very quickly with different concepts and forms. (See Behind the Cover by the New York Times Magazine for examples of an iterative process.†) Your three posters should show three entirely distinct conceptual or formal directions. To help find entry into the poster design process, you will use a grid. One poster must use a uniform grid, and one poster must use a found grid.

Your three posters must be visually unique from one another.‡ Your posters may share similar ideas and common elements (you can re-use the same text and image/illustration across the posters, for example) but there should be differences in execution. A few of these categories should change between each poster: image choice; font choices; typographic treatments and arrangements; composition; color; scale.

REQUIREMENTS

Due: Tuesday, Jan 18

Three distinct typographic posters.

Each poster can have at most one image/illustration

Each poster must use at least one typeface

Minimum content: Title, Date, Time, Location

One poster must use a uniform grid, and one poster must use a found grid

**** You can do your own lettering (draw letters, calligraphy) which will not count as your one image or illustration. However, you must use at least one typeface. A logo, like the RISD seal, will not count as an image/illustration. Primitive forms (a circle) and color (blue background) also do not count.

†††††† The following are good examples, most have two or more conceptual directions and all have iterations: Tech & Design; Quarantine Journal; Voting; Voyages; Trump & the GOP; Sweatpants Forever; Deutsche Bank; Nowhere; Consumer Protection.

‡‡‡‡‡ Adie will determine if the posters are different enough from one another. You may be asked to redo the assignment if they are too similar.

Ralph Schraivoge

15

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home
work
p1: type poster

POSSIBLE CONTENT

Use whatever content interests you. The below is free content for if you need help.

RISD GD Speaker Series
Bahia Shebab. September 23, 2021. 12 PM. GD Commons, RISD, Providence, RI.
Deem Journal. October 26, 2021. 12 PM. GD Commons, RISD, Providence, RI.
Lynne Yun. November 18, 2021. 12 PM. GD Commons, RISD, Providence, RI.
risd.gd

Frederick Law Olmsted Lecture
Jamaica Kincaid. October 14, 2021. 6:30 PM. Gund Hall, Harvard, Cambridge, MA.
gsd.harvard.edu/event/jamaica-kincaid

Lollapalooza
Various Artists. July 28–31, 2022. Various times. Grand Park, Chicago, IL.
lollapalooza.com/schedule

GOALS (WHY?)

To practice using type and Adobe Illustrator

To practice formal typographic skills, like scale

To use typography in an expressive way

To use a grid

LEARNING OUTCOMES (WHAT?)

Apply type as a visual, formal element

Experimentation with type: voice, form, etc.

Use hierarchy to clarify complex information

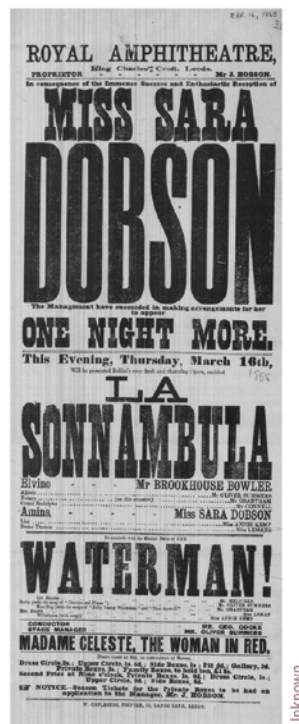Use a grid to organize a page and its content

RESOURCES (HELP!)

instagram.com/Typosters

TypographicPosters.com

Poster Layout Using The Grid
youtube.com/watch?v=WA9VPyS2dWE

How to Create Grids, Guides in Illustrator:
youtube.com/watch?v=0eQ951lhJLI

16

home work

p2: class zine

DESCRIPTION

Stephen Duncombe defines zines as non-commercial, non-professional, small circulation, self-published magazines. Because zines are typically made by an individual (or small group) with low-cost material and printing tools, they have served as a refuge for political dissidents, marginal groups, and peripheral aesthetic movements—as well as those with niche interests, like sci-fi nerds or wargame bros. As such, zines are motivated by a desire to express oneself, to share knowledge, to create community. We are going to make a collective zine: each student will make pages, and we will spiral bind the pages into a full book.

The only design constraint is the page size (7.75" × 10") and some design requirements, like 300+ words and three images (see Requirements below). The content can be whatever you'd like: an essay; a comic; poems; lyrics; love letters; quotations; a film transcript. Zines are well-known for using appropriation as an artistic strategy; so you can write the text (and make the images) that go on the pages yourself—or you can take them from another source.* *The primary goal for the project is to develop a complex typographic voice that supports the selected content.*

Our class zine could have a theme or other common elements to unify the works throughout the book—but only if the majority of students want that. We could choose a broad theme (like love, illusion, friendship, or the color blue) or a narrower theme (like sushi, Star Wars, Taylor Swift, or Providence). We could choose to use: a similar style of image; uniform placement of page numbers; uniform title pages; uniform margins; limit the color palette (e.g. black, white, and red only). Of course, we could choose to have individual responses, no commonality across works.

Note that we may have a guest critic for the final review of this project.

REQUIREMENTS

Due: Monday, Jan 31

Page size is 7.75" × 10". Minimum eight pages; you can do more, but there must be an even number pages (e.g. 10, 16, 28, 32).

First page is Title Page. Last page is blank page.

Minimum content: Your name, (if relevant, author of text,) colophon; three images; plus 300 words

Use at least three typefaces set using at least two paragraph styles

Running head, page numbers, and grid set on parent page

**** Talk to Adie if you feel lost choosing content, and we can figure something our together. Or, if you just want a prompt: One, write a letter to your future self using Letters To The Future as a reference. Two, interview a classmate using The Proust Questionnaire; the content will be a transcript of your conversation.

17

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home work

p2: class zine

GOALS (WHY?)

To practice type tools and Adobe InDesign

To set long-form type across a series of pages

To create a system and typographic voice that supports content

To pair typefaces meaningfully

LEARNING OUTCOMES (WHAT?)

A visual concept that operates through a sequence of pages

Organizational principles that support efficiency, consistency, and legibility

Effective composition of text, images, and supporting type (like page numbers)

RESOURCES (HELP!)

Queer Zine Archive
archive.qzap.org/

POC Zine Project
poczineproject.tumblr.com/

DC Punk Archive
digdc.dclibrary.org/islandora/object/dcplislandora%3A38043

Indigenous zine resources
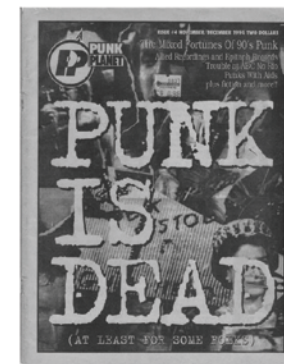guides.library.ubc.ca/indigenousnewmedia/zines

Architecture zine exhibition
gavin-browning.com/afewzines

Comic Zine Archive
poopsheetfoundation.com

Quarantine Public Library
quarantinepubliclibrary.com/

Zines on Archive.org
archive.org/details/zines

RISD Zine Collection
digitalcommons.risd.edu/specialcollections_zinecollection/

18

home work

p3: type system for a com pound work

DESCRIPTION

A type system is a set of standards that apply typography consistently across wide-ranging applications. A type system determines in advance how each kind of text will be styled: titles, headings, body text, captions, footnotes, pull quotes, etc. Each will be assigned a particular size, weight, spacing, color, and so on. And then wherever that kind of text is encountered it is treated consistently.

A compound work is a thing made up of many diverse pieces. A book is composed of many pages. A website is composed of many webpages. An online advertising campaign may be composed of banner ads, pop-up ads, social media ads, and pre-roll video ads. An application package may be composed of a portfolio, a resume, a cover letter, and a business card. A stationary set may include letterhead, envelopes, postcards, and business cards.

For this project, your goal is to create a type system and apply it to a compound work. This prompt is abstract as possible to accommodate whatever you are interested in, to support whatever you need to work on. You will propose two concepts to the class on Wednesday, Jan 26, and the project is due on Wednesday, Feb 9.

Here are some possibilities: magazine; tarot deck; portfolio; calendar; a wayfinding system; iPhone app; website; product packaging; film trailer; greeting card series; interpretive signage; application package; blueprint with explanatory writing; animated title sequence; weekly planner; restaurant menus; schematic with technical writing; a choose-your-own adventure; festival program; bar coasters; t-shirt series; gift set; photography monograph; invoices; album with liner notes; information graphics; advent calendar; postcard series; an exhibition with interpretive text; a board game; a syllabus; medication label; temporary tattoos; a presentation deck.

Note that we may have a guest critic for the final review of this project.

REQUIREMENTS

Due: Proposals on Jan 26; Final on Wednesday, Feb 9.

You must propose a project of significant enough typographic complexity that it is clearly a capstone project. Whatever object you choose will suggest its own requirements. Adie and you will determine individual goals for your project.

Two guidelines for the assignment: Use a significant amount of text (at least 900 words); That is sophisticated enough to demand many styles (at least five styles).

**** Talk to Adie if you feel lost choosing content. There are two prepared prompts: Conduct and typeset a long interview on a personally meaningful research topic; Design a recipe book using premade content.

81 Museum of Natural History
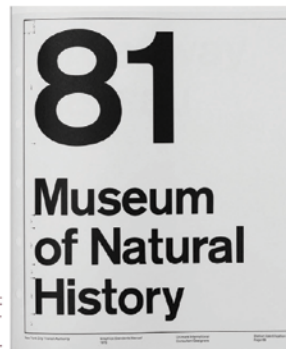
Unimark

home work

p3: type system for a com pound work

GOALS (WHY?)

Utilize the typographic principles learned throughout the semester

Use your developed typographic vocabulary to explain and justify your typographic choices

Thoughtful combination of typography's and your discipline's customs

Consider how typography might fit into your practice or support the presentation of your work

LEARNING OUTCOMES (WHAT?)

A complex typographic system using multiple paragraph and character styles that operate across a variety of items, media, and/or uses

Effective compositions of text, image, and material that meaningfully support your project's goals

RESOURCES (HELP!)

boot-boyz.biz

andren.tumblr.com

instagram.com/typescarf

underconsideration.com/artofthemenu/

Portfolio of Under Consideration. Look particularly at the conference identities. underconsideration.com/category/favorite_things_weve_made/

Wayfinding systems are designed guides that lead people through an environment tumblr.com/tagged/wayfinding

The works of these artists:

Adam Pendleton	Guerrilla Girls	Mel Bochner
Adrian Piper	Jenny Holzer	Shirin Neshat
Barbara Kruger	Kameelah Janan Rasheed	Steve Powers
Ben Eine	Kay Rosen	Ulises Carrión
Bruce Nauman	Lalla A. Essaydi	Xu Bing
Christopher Wool	Laurence Weiner	
Ed Ruscha	Mar Arza	

Boot Boyz Biz

reading & resour ces

LEARNING ADOBE PROGRAMS

Illustrator video tutorials from Adobe
helpx.adobe.com/illustrator/tutorials.html

InDesign video tutorials from Adobe
helpx.adobe.com/indesign/tutorials.html

How to download fonts from Adobe Fonts
https://www.linkedin.com/learning/learning-adobe-fonts-formerly-ty-
pekit/expand-your-font-library-with-adobe-fonts?autoAdvance=true&au-
toSkip=false&autoplay=true&resume=true&u=57686553

BOOKS: TYPOGRAPHY

The Anatomy of Type by Stephen Coles

➤ The Elements of Typographic Style by Robert Bringhurst

Inside Paragraphs by Cyrus Highsmith

➤ Thinking with Type by Ellen Lupton

A Type Primer by John Kane

Typographie by Emil Ruder

BOOKS: HISTORY

Baseline Shift: Untold Stories of Women in Graphic Design History by Briar Levit

How Many Female Type Designers Do You Know?: I Know Many and Talked to Some by Yulia Popova

Just My Type: A Book About Fonts by Simon Garfield

New Aesthetic 2: A Collection of Independent Type Design by Sophia Brinkgerd and Leonhard Laupichler

➤ The Visual History of Type: A visual survey of 320 typefaces by Paul McNeil

Women in Graphic Design: 1890-2012 by Gerda Breuer

NOTE Entries marked by a right feathered arrow ➤ are popular & commonly used resources.

reading & resour ces

FILMS & TV

Abstract: The Art of Design, episode on Paula Scher

Artist Series by Hillman Curtis
https://www.aiga.org/artist-series-videos

Graphic Means: A History of Graphic Design Production

➤ Helvetica

Linotype: The Film

The Machine That Made Us
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQ88yC35NjI

WEBSITES

Alphabettes
alphabettes.org

Femme Type
femme-type.com

➤ Fonts In Use
fontsinuse.com

I Love Typography
ilovetypography.com

Letterform Archive
letterformarchive.org

Practical Typography
Practicaltypography.com

Typewolf
typewolf.com

Typographica
typographica.org

Women in Type
women-in-type.com

Act As Though You Are Free!
You Might Get Lucky!
You Might Be Free Who Knows!
Act That Way It's Worth Trying!

Boot Boyz Biz

NOTE Entries marked by a right feathered arrow ➤ are popular & commonly used resources.

reading & resour ces

LIBRE & OPEN-SOURCE FONTS*

➡ **Adobe Fonts**
fonts.adobe.com

Beautiful Web Type
beautifulwebtype.com

Free Fonts by Womxn
design-research.be/by-womxn

Free Font Library
typotheque.luuse.io

Adobe Fonts by Women
fonts.adobe.com/collections/fonts-by-women

➡ **Google Fonts**
fonts.google.com

League of Moveable Type
theleagueofmoveabletype.com

Open Foundry
open-foundry.com

Velvetyne
velvetyne.fr

Collletttivo
collletttivo.it

William Leavenworth

**** a.k.a. legal, free fonts
NOTE Entries marked by a right feathered arrow ➤ are popular & commonly used resources.

23

reading & resour ces

TYPE FOUNDRIES

Type Foundries Archive, list of 362 foundries
type-foundries-archive.com

205TF
205.tf

A if for Apple
aisforfonts.com

Benoit Bodhuin
bb-bureau.fr

Colophon
colophon-foundry.org

Commercial Type
commercialtype.com

Dinamo
abcdinamo.com

David Jonathan Ross
djr.com

Grilli Type
grillitype.com

Klim Type Foundry
klim.co.nz

Occupant Fonts
occupantfonts.com

Ohno
ohnotype.co

Radim Pesko
radimpesko.com

R-Typography
r-typography.com

Sharp Type
sharptype.co

Underware
underware.nl

Velvetyne
velvetyne.fr/

Wolfgang Weingart

24

CHEER NOTE

On Finally Feeling Healthy and Happy in Graduate School

ADIE FEIN
JUNE 2022

Be cheerful, sir. Our revels now are ended.

PROSPERO, THE TEMPEST[1]

I want to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.

PABLO NERUDA, XIV (EVERY DAY YOU PLAY)[2]

Dear Adam of Yesterday,

At the moment of writing, I am—Adie—is happy.

An authentic happiness: I travel down Congdon Street on the daily walk to studio. It is newly lined with cherry blossoms and green ivy enlivened by spring, and I peek through the gaps between houses at the sweeping views of Providence in its bustling bloom. Most days you cry while doing this. You cry with gratitude for the trees, flowers, cars, high-rises, hills, the world that kept you through the last three years. Thank you all.

This spring has brought resolution to winter's tragedies: It has been over a year since your farther's tumor was removed, and his courses of radiation and chemo ended. Dad is healthy and well. You and Kylie has your own ending, of your eight-year relationship, which seems to have been for the best. We had been discussing the separation for nearly 10 months. That process was emotional and laborious. I hope never to experience the same again; yet, I am incredibly proud of our commitment to one another and the personal growth this process incited. Because of our protracted conversations, the death of the relationship was mutually desired. We could bury and memorialize it together. Our relationship with one another now—non-romantic—seems happier and healthier. You started hormone replacement therapy in the fall, first spironolactone in August and then estradiol in December. The effect on your mood, personality, and sense of self has been unexpectedly positive. The mood swings progressed into a near-daily sense of elation, beauty, and gratitude. Like the flowers in Providence, I am also blooming this spring.

Dear Adam of Yesterday: We are not only different in mind and body. As much as changing life circumstances, your current joy is the reward of new values. You are a far different person now than a year ago and further still from the person who entered this program. The spring of

Of course, there were also new challenges. You were mugged in August. That was fucked. You are much better now, though you still get anxious around groups of young men and still jump when surprised from behind. When you visited New York in December, you realized you were not ready to live there yet: Too many people, too many surprises.

1. William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. (1993.) The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, shakespeare. mit.edu/tempest/full.html.

2. Pablo Neruda. "XIV (Every Day You Play)" in *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda,* trans. W. S. Merwin, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003,) 15.

2022, your final semester at RISD, is the more cheerful you have ever been in graduate school (and perhaps in your life.) It has been marked by minimal investment in your education. I spent less time working on and caring about graphic design than I have in seven years. Which caused the other: inattention bred joy; or joy bred inattention? Regardless, labor, productivity, and professional esteem are less central to your life now. In fact, you have worked with your therapist to actively do less and care less for the last 18 months—and you've gotten pretty good at it. You prioritized friends, adventure, exercise, dates, travel, books, games. You allowed yourself to fail. You allowed yourself to ask for help, permission, and forgiveness. You allowed yourself to grow.

Some might call this goofing off. Some might call this wasting the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of graduate school.[3] Some might call this undercutting the graduate conclusion—the thesis, as a magnum opus or climactic articulation of the self.[4] You, Adam, may have found those arguments convincing, but I, Adie, do not. Instead, this semester has been the performance of self-actualization. bell hooks said that if we "are wounded, damaged individuals, people who are not self-actualized, then they will seek asylum in the academy rather than seek to make the academy a place of challenge, dialectical interchange, and growth."[5] This semester you have rejected labor and productivity as the exclusive source of meaning. And further, you have refused graphic design as an isolated field that can be the solution for anything. Neither graphic design nor professional practice nor academic effort in isolation will bring about cheer or resolve social problems. Always resist the monolith.

Your joy is also the product of a different practice: You have spent so much time in communion with others. Teaching has been a central activity, which has been energizing, collective, fun, and challenging. The work you have pursued has been collaborative—with Nick Larson, with Ásta Þrastardóttir, with Will Mianecki—and that has been incredibly rewarding. The richness of collaboration is the deepening relationships as much as the design outcomes. You chose not to write for a semester because a critic said you were "hiding behind your words" and that was bad advice. But it did help you realize one thing: that you can think as well in conversation as writing. (Or maybe writing is just a way of having a conversation with yourself? What do you think, Adam?) "This could be what a conversation is—simply the outline of a becoming."[6]

Paul Soullelis gifted me a metaphor earlier this spring: thesis as the end of a relationship. Imagine the thesis book neither as summative proj-

ect nor portfolio piece but the resolution of my association to this educational institution. This has been the only vision of the thesis to resonate in my final semester. I see this thesis as a break-up. It captures three years of negotiating an end. As before, as it must always be, these negotiations have been painful and taxing. This cheer note is a final love letter to my darlings: the graphic design department, the Rhode Island School of Design, Kylie, and most importantly you, Adam. We have been growing apart. Have you seen me dreaming of other lovers? I believe this exit is mutually desired.

"Now the Spring is inaugurated / Now the seed is aware of its own growing."[7] In the essay "Sorrow Note,"[8] you concluded, "One must imagine Adam happy." Is it sad that Adam never was happy, but that Adie is? Or is that the way of eternal becoming? This essay is a response to "Sorrow Note." This writing is not repudiation; it is not renunciation. That sorrow was real and deep and terrible—and the arguments I made in that text still feel true today. They have been the guide to our current cheer. I am only as happy as I am because I focused more on the body, on my emotions, on community. These two notes are harmonious bookends: birth and re-birth; spring and spring again. Adam, I have so much gratitude that you endured to bring me here. bell hooks argues that the "will to know" is connected with the "will to become."[9] School has been the garden in which we have become something much better. Perhaps ourselves have always been the project? But this moment has reached its resolution, and it is spring again.

I will leave myself in Providence! And carry you always with me.
Sincerely yours,
Cheers,
Adie

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3. See "Neither Sustain Nor Disavow" in Queer Things, page 6.

4. See "Doing Double Work" in this volume, page 10.

5. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 165.

6. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 2.

7. Pablo Neruda. "Spring" in *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda,* trans. Alastair Reid, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003,) 629–630.

8. In this volume, page 4.

9. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress, 19.*

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of the Rhode Island School of Design,
Providence, Rhode Island,*

by Adie Fein [for now].

*It has been approved by their peers, without whom
this degree would have been unachievable:*

FOROUGH ABADIAN
PEER

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