*Loosely Bound*

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Masters of Fine Arts
in Design / Visual Communications at
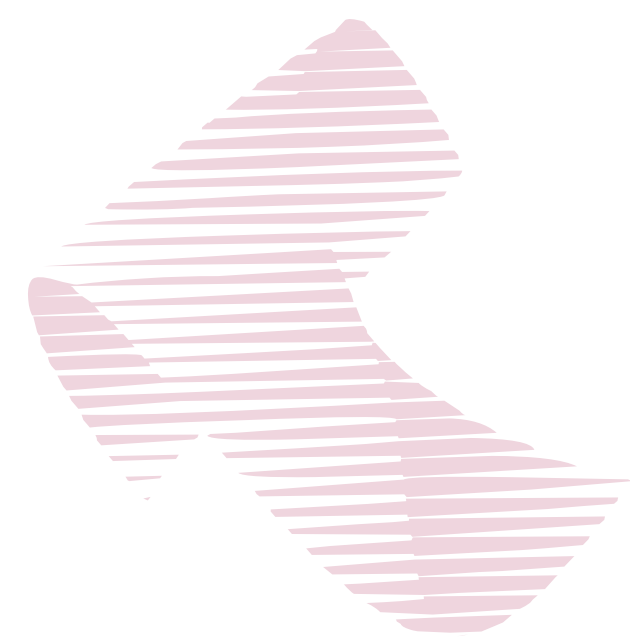Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Alexander Martin
McGill University
BA, English Literature
Montréal, Québec 2011

Main Advisor: Nicole Killian
Assistant Professor,
Department of Graphic Design
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May, 2016
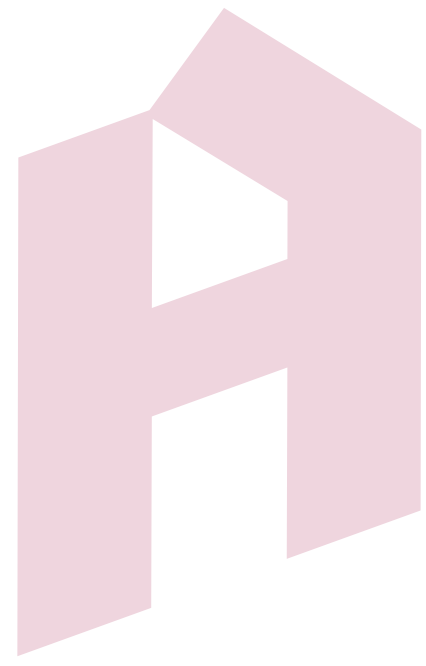
ABSTRACT

I take a poetic approach to graphic design practice. It is a subjectivist approach, which recognizes our human right to willful interpretation. Designers navigate form, culture, and history like poets through language. We are subjective, exploratory engines drawing formal inspiration from figural and analogical associations. Subjectivity in graphic design practice is complex, however. Subjectivity privileges the interaction between object and individual. When we designers interpret the literal world with the poet's omni-directional sensitivity, we intentionally and intuitively create objects that accrete inexhaustible, extra-literal value for their audience.

Graphic design is
uniquely situated at
the intersection of two
energies: the explanatory
and the evocative.

ASSO—CIATIVE,

BUT NOT

FREE
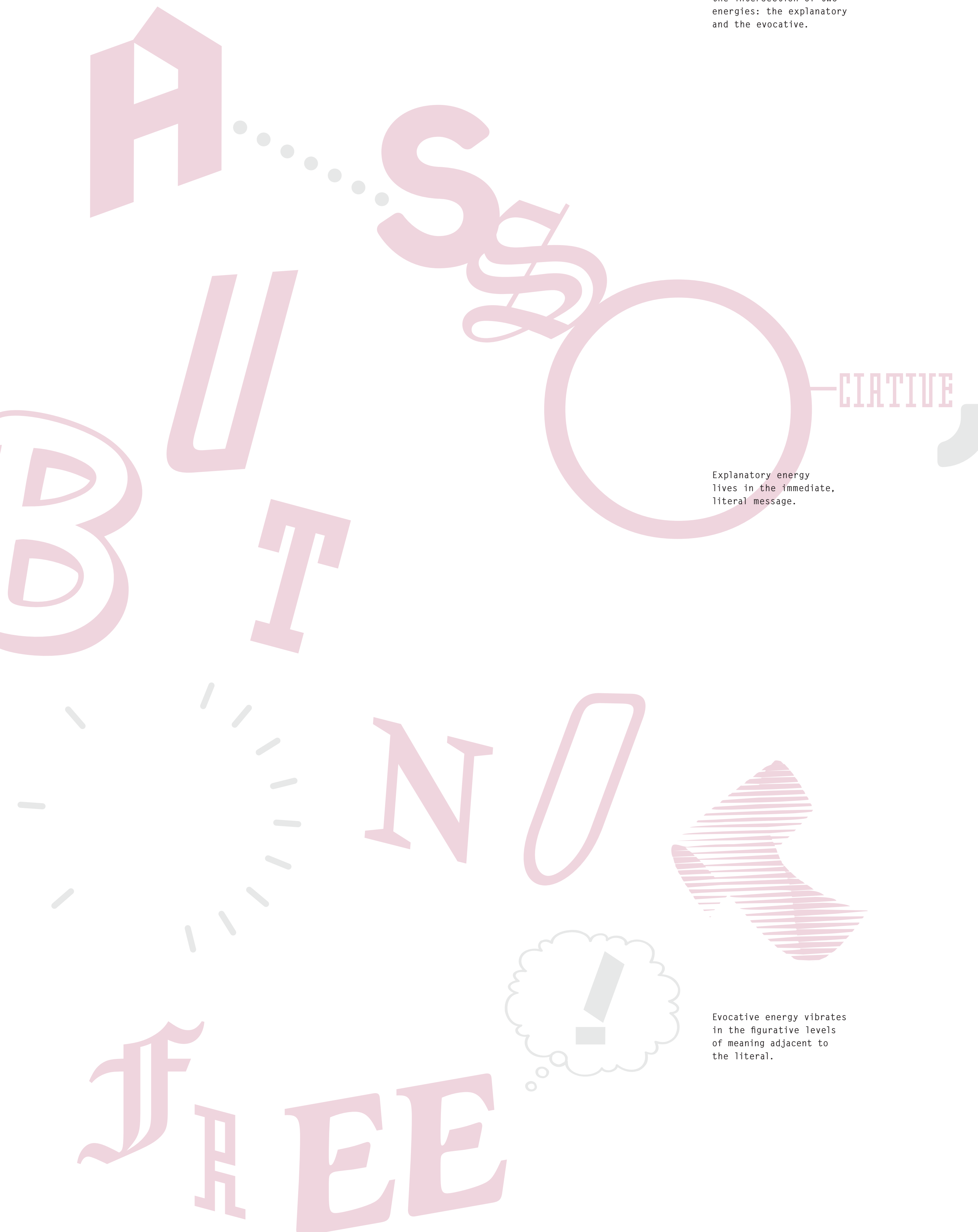
Explanatory energy
lives in the immediate,
literal message.

Evocative energy vibrates
in the figurative levels
of meaning adjacent to
the literal.

Nicole Killian, Main Advisor
Faculty, Assistant Professor, Department of Graphic Design

David Shields, Secondary Advisor
Faculty, Associate Professor, Department Chair,
Department of Graphic Design

João Doria, External Advisor
'14 MFA Graphic Design, Yale University School of Art
Oslo, Norway

Steven Hoskins, Graduate Program Director
Faculty, Associate Professor, Department of Graphic Design

Graphic design is uniquely situated at the intersection of two energies: the explanatory and the evocative.
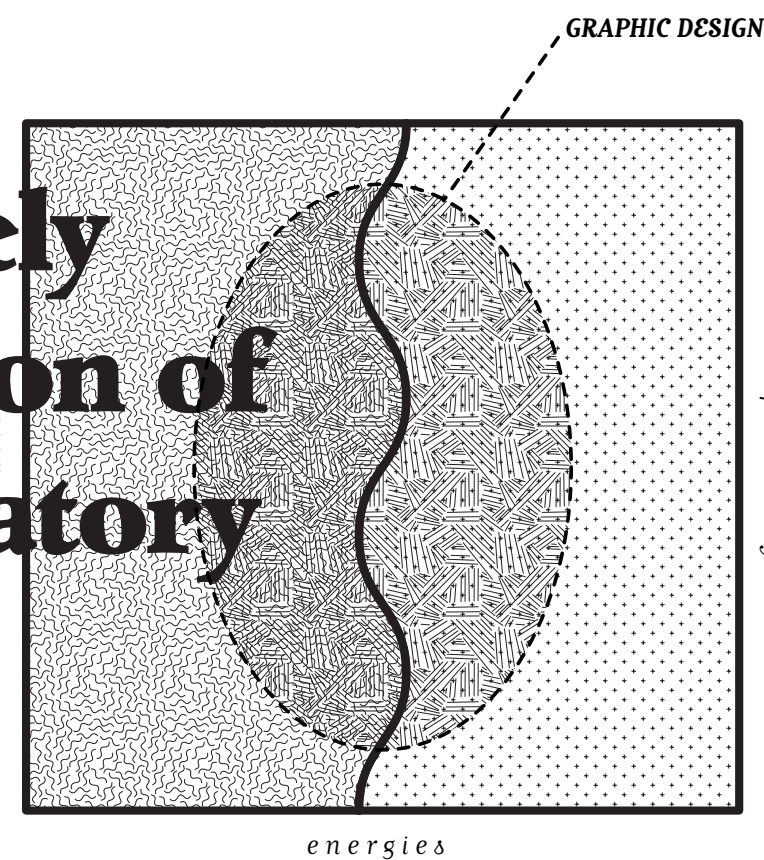
Explanatory energy lives in the immediate, literal message.

Evocative energy vibrates in the figurative levels of meaning adjacent to the literal. These are the rhetorical spaces and analogical connections our minds recognize and investigate.

Designers use the tenets of art to solve practical problems. The graphic designer is a point of contact and transmission.

figurative: of the nature of, or involving, a figure of speech, especially a metaphor; metaphorical, and not literal

No-New thin moves withou stray reason.

Nietzsche

"keeping things whole"
by mark strand

in a field
i am the absence
of field.
this is
always the case.
wherever i am
i am what is missing.

when i walk
i part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.

we all have reasons
for moving.
i move
to keep things whole.[1]

Nothing moves without a reason, says Newton.

isaac Newton's First Law states that an object will remain at rest or in uniform motion unless acted upon by an external force.

Nothing moves without a reason, echoes Nietzsche. Dionysian and Apollonian intensities reverberate through us, propel us towards activity.

to Frederich Nietzsche, proper nouns—Presocratics, Romans, Jews, Christ, Borgia, Julius Caesar—were not intended to represent things nor persons, but designations of intensity inscribed upon a body.[2]

Nothing moves without a reason, says Strand.

1. Mark Strand. *Reasons For Moving, Darker & The Sargentville Notebook. (New York: Knopf, 2003), 40.*
2. David B Allison. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 146.*

2
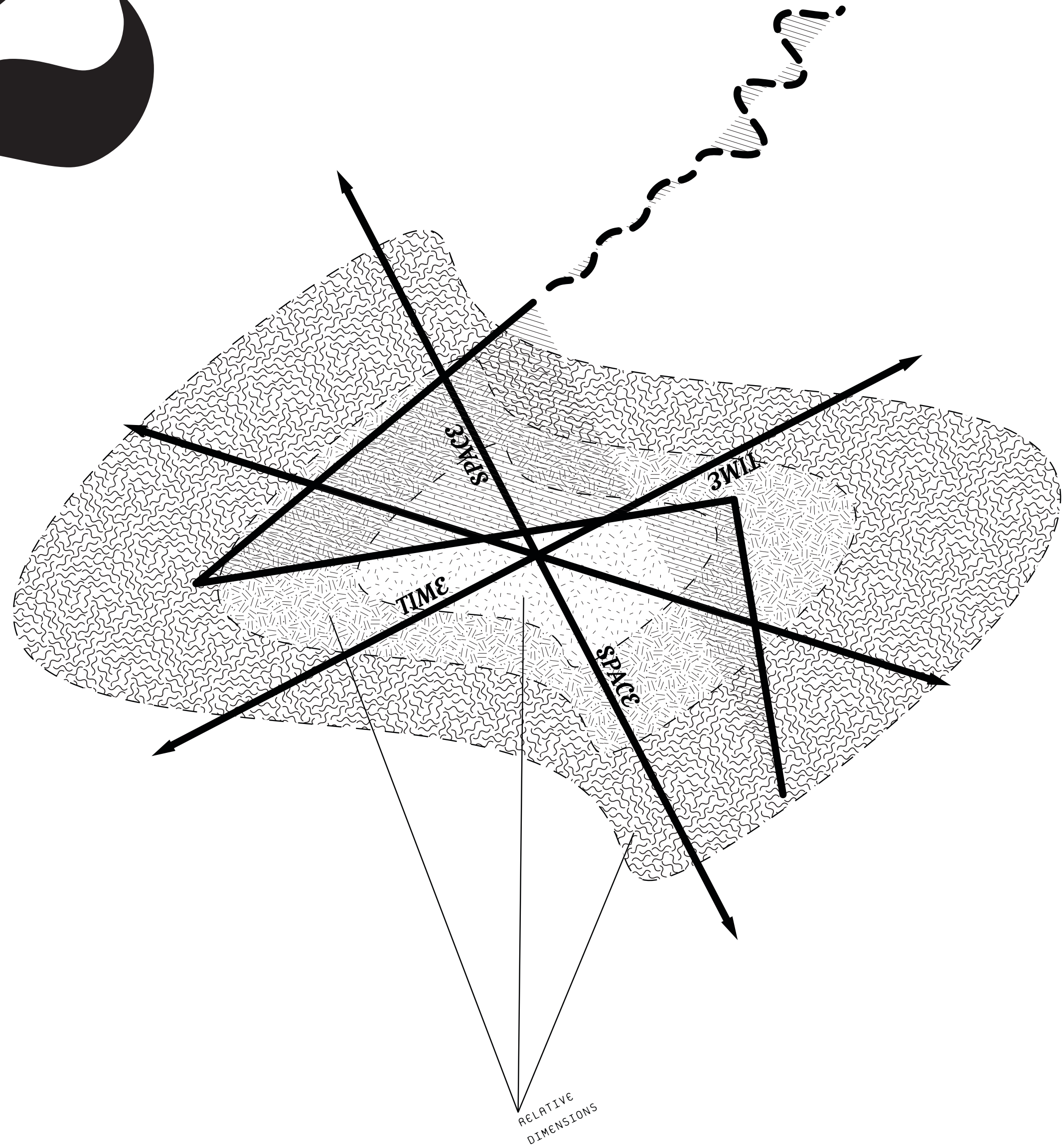
I aim at graphic design like a poet might. I started with words, after all. I was a poet. I still have words, but today I use them differently. I also have images, icons, brushes, ascenders, tooth and wire, long inks and short ones. I am a graphic designer.

p(W)

poetic arrangement of words

radiance of meaning   r(M)

12
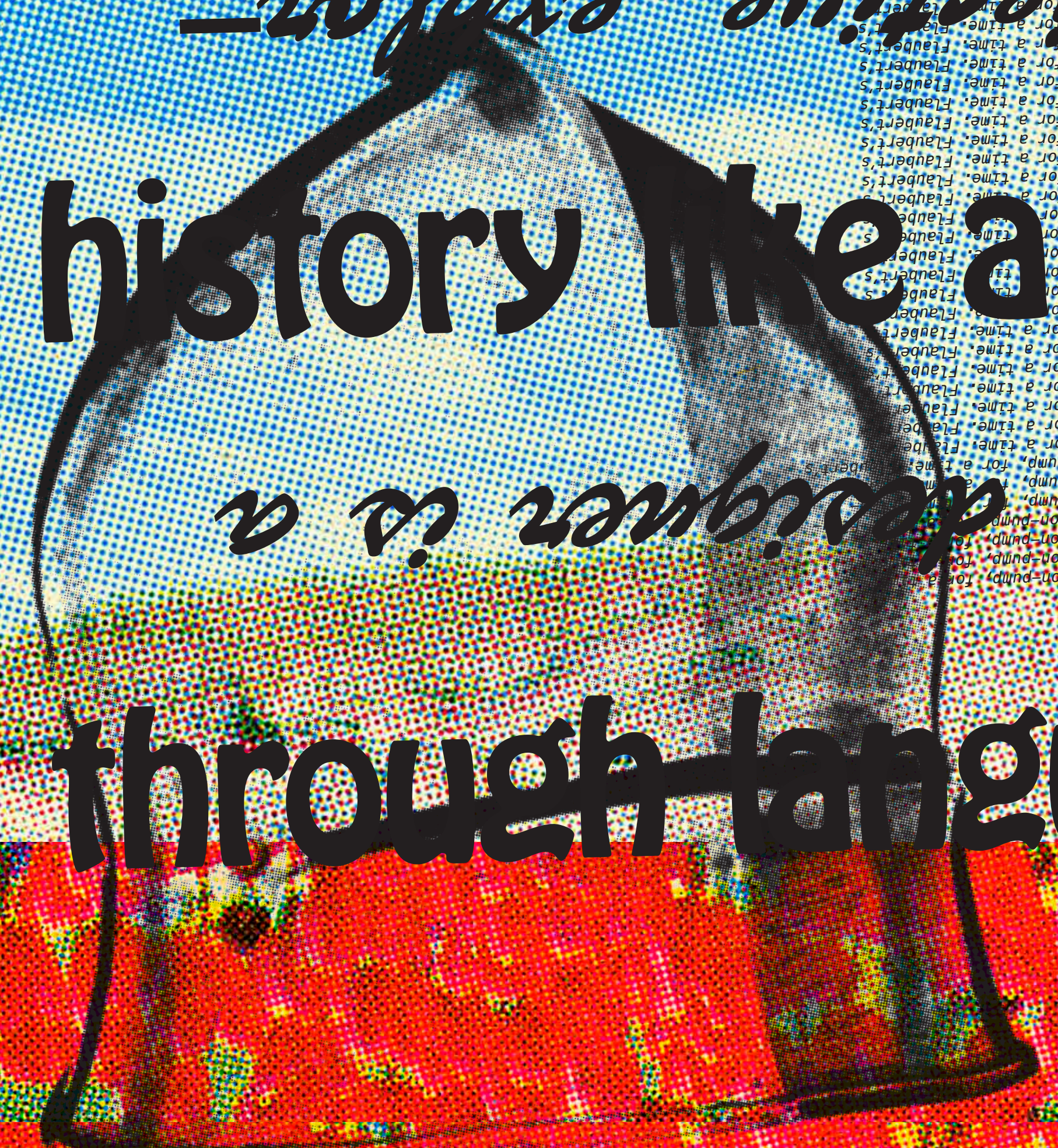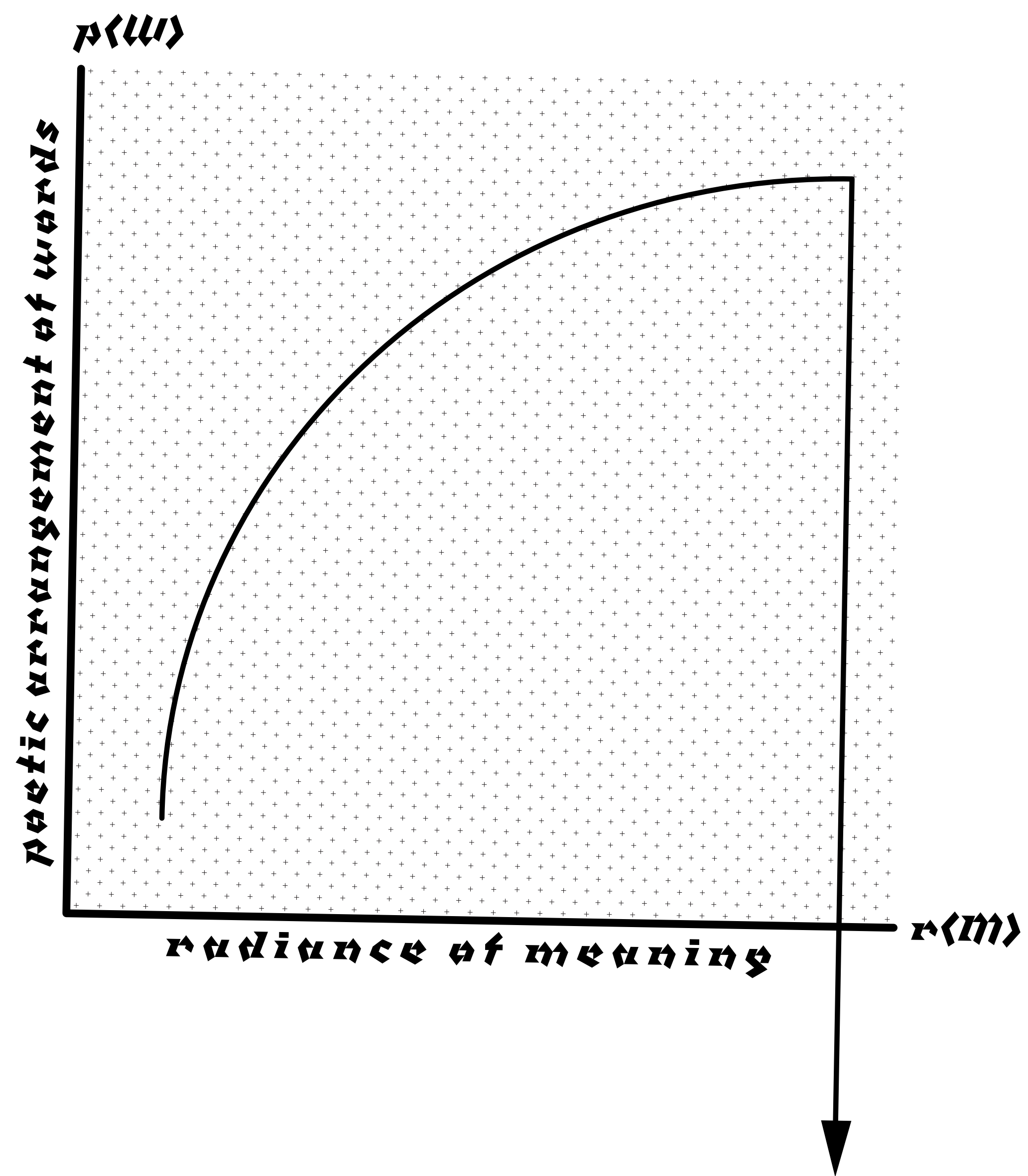
When a poet writes a poem, she looses language's evocative energy.
Meaning radiates from her words in soft, concentric waves.

In contrast to the pulsing complexity of a poem's meaning are the prosaic typographic conventions to which poets routinely revert. For the most part, poetry defaults to stout lines of text set in typefaces so unobtrusively legible they're diaphanous. Self-restrained modules stack neatly to avoid stumbling into a configuration whose superficial appearance might syphon attention from deeper meaning.

Endowed with speech, your typical poetic typography would probably say, "I try to take an objective stance. As the physical form of the poem, I stand in between the poet and reader. I feel it's never productive for me to add my own vision on top of things."

dipped in beatrice warde's goblet

"As the designer of the message, you stand in between the sender and receiver. And when I claim to be afraid to put myself in between them, that is because I feel it's never productive for me to add a vision of my own on top of it."[1]

— W. Crouwel
b. 1928

poetic typography, it turns out, sounds a lot like wim crouwel

crouwelphabets!

Sublimation — formal deference — is beautiful, effective, necessary. My invocation of Crouwel is not as some uptight prude. I mean, have you seen him in a turtleneck? He is a humanist formalist. A rare breed. Formal restrictions can be expanded to fit a situation, Crouwel said to Jan Van Toorn.[2] Hell, he didn't even use graph paper until the early sixties![3]

eve fowler

allen ruppersberg

Crouwel is enamored of the visual potential of letterbodies — he is simply less concerned with their rhetorical potential as language.

On the other side of the spectrum is the work of Eve Fowler, or Allen Ruppersberg. Their typographic form is relatively subdued. This restraint shifts focus to the rhetorical power of the letterforms as words, and the words as language.

1. Wim Crouwel and Jan Van Toorn. The Debate. (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015), 26.

2. Crouwel. The Debate, 24.

3. Kees Broos and David Quay. Wim Crouwel Alphabets. (Amsterdam: BIS, 2003), 34.

GIVING

SHAPE

CONTEXT

INTERTEXTUAL
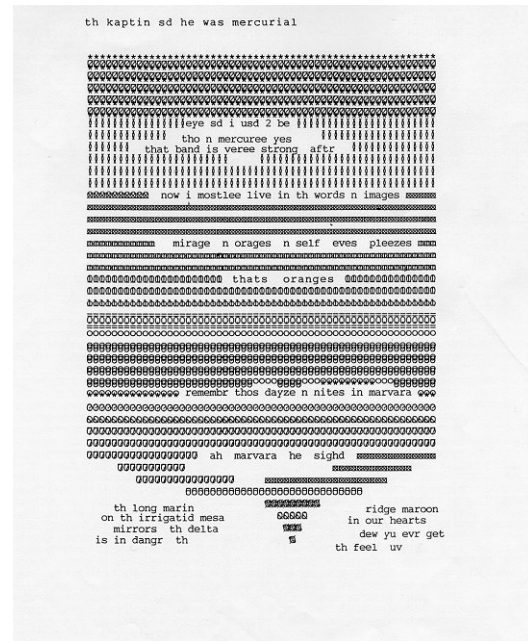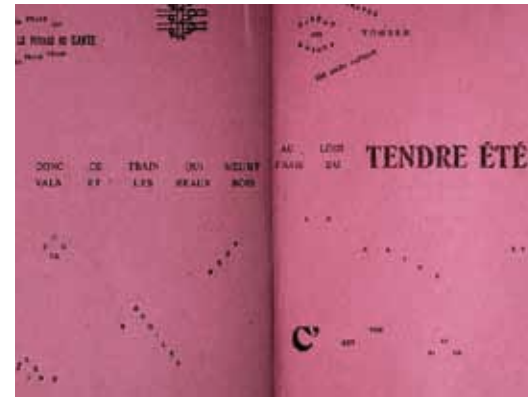
HISTORICAL

EMOTIONAL

FIGURAL

CULTURAL

time

T

T

b.
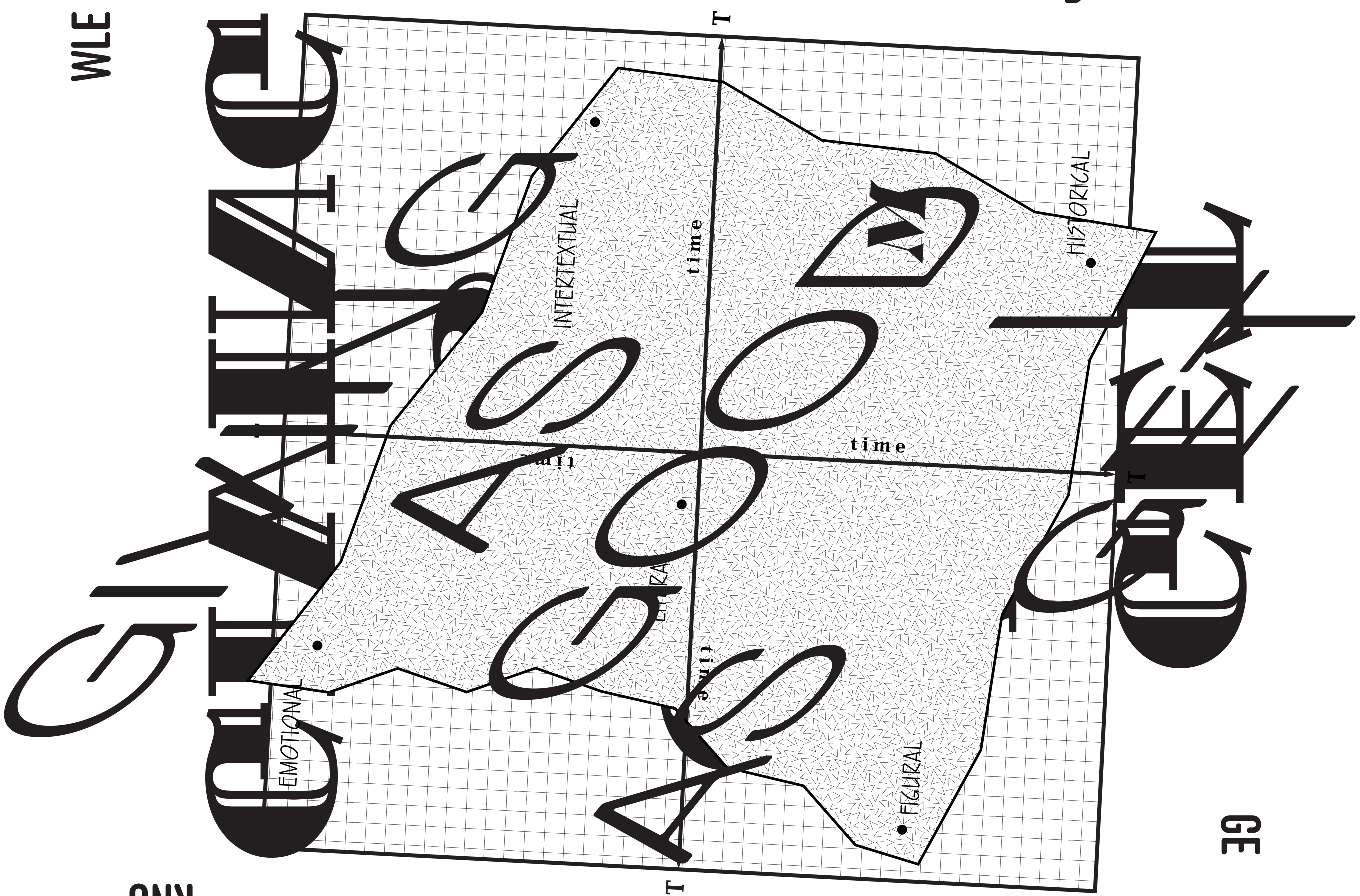
c.

m o
.n o
n. m
o o
o n.
o m
o o
m n.

d.

this connection between design and literature crops up organically enough: in Donis Dondis's discussion of gestalt: "all that we see has the grammatical quality of being...the noun or the adjective."[1]
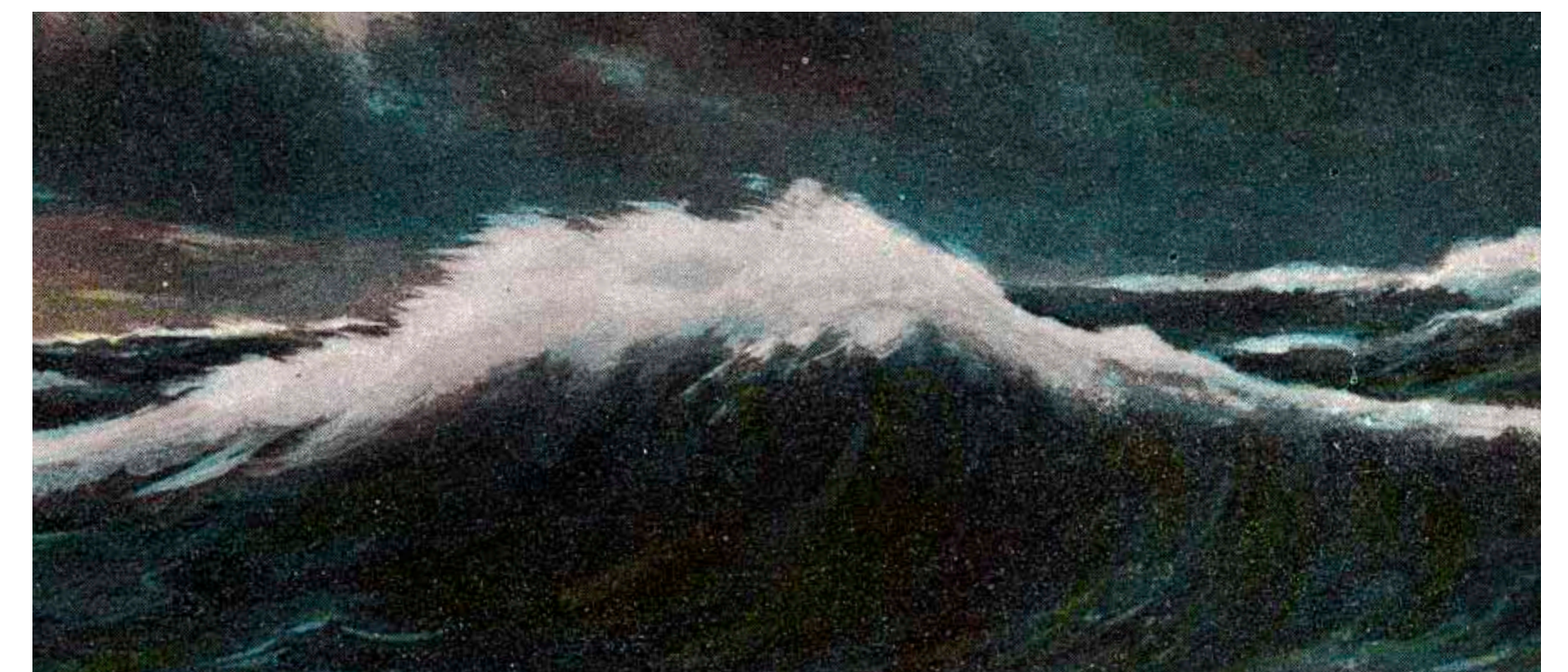
In sheila levrant de bretteville discussing her process: "I interpret places as if they were texts..."[2]

Some poets (like Apollonaire, bill bissett, Steve McCaffery, Johanna Drucker) urge language towards a posture that reflects some facet of its meaning. They sculpt the written word into a physical counterpart to its immaterial spirit.

The impulse to manipulate language's physical appearance in order to affect its communicative potential is certainly endemic to graphic design.

I feel it. I watch as you feel it.

echo chambers amplifying, looping, and distorting the frequencies reverberating within them.

1. Donis Dondis. *A Primer of Visual Literacy.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 35.
2. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville. "Sheila Levrant de Bretteville" in *Critical Reflection and the practice of visual Communication Notebook.* Ed. J. van Toorn (Maastricht: Jan Van Eyck Academie, 1998), 118.

What should I do when I'm done being literal?

What is the inverse of a poet with a graphic approach to visual language?
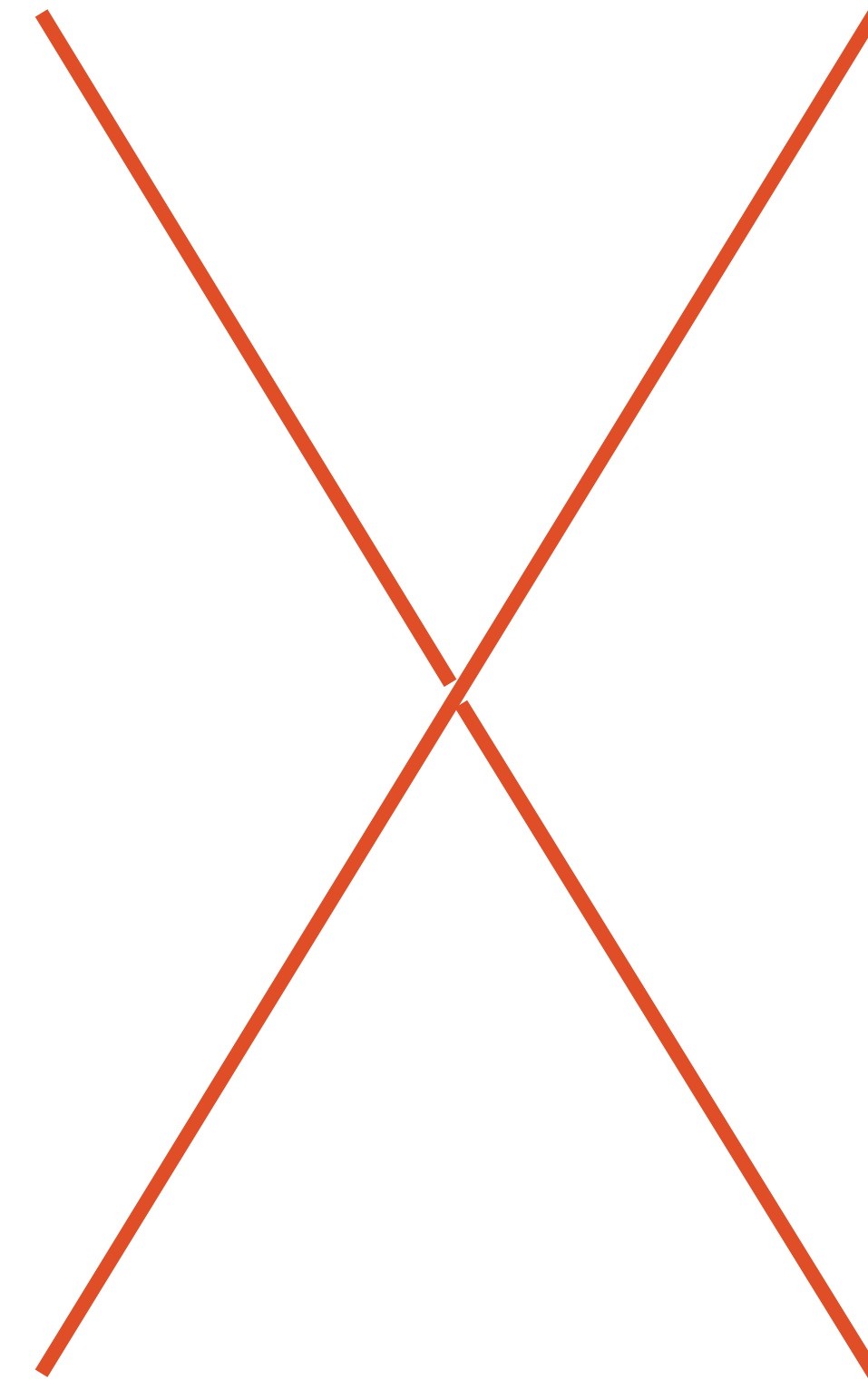
A graphic designer with a poetic approach to content.

In attempting to figure out my relationship to these two "in-tensities," I found it immensely helpful to redefine them.

Nietzsche might call them

subjectivity: a focus on those subjected to design (oneself included).

objectivity: a focus on the ob-ject or objective (the product or the goal) of the design process.

These two catalogs are each for the same artist, Jan Dibbets. Wim Crouwel designed one (L); Jan Van Toorn, the other (R).

The object that Crouwel de-signed looks very much like a catalog. His formal treatment of the content incorporates certain conventions that com-municate quite clearly, "we are

(the designer as audience zero)

"when definitions don't give you what need...

make up new ones. quotes, too."

— unknown

a catalog, specifically one for the work of Jan Dibbets."

The booklet's layout reveals the designer's presistent focus on catalog-creation (the objective of his process).

Furthermore, he has taken care to ensure that the designed object, the catalog, is easily recognizable as such.

What Van Toorn created is fundamentally different. These largely vacant spreads don't really attempt to catalog the work they display.

Instead, they provide a formal reflection of the emotional impact of Dibbets's art. Van Toorn's layout transposes into catalog form the sensation one gets from experiencing Dibbets's work.

Van Toorn's catalog is the formal outcome of the interaction between Van Toorn, as audience, and Dibbets, as artist.

(the designer as audience zero)

subjectivism: a focus on those subjected to design (oneself included)

objectivism: a focus on the object or objective (the product or goal) of the design process

24

25

FOCUS ON
(THE ...
THE OBJECT
(AND)
OBJECTIVE
OR ... ON
THE PRODUCT
... LENS
OR GOAL) OF
... ALSO
THE DESIGN
NO SHADE
PROCESS

My practice is a subjectivist one: it recognizes our human right to willful interpretation; it encourages the projection-through-form of a personal interaction with a given idea. I believe designers navigate form, culture, and history like poets through language. *(Flaubert's great entrail-suction-pumps, for a time.)* We are subjective, exploratory engines. We draw formal inspiration from figural and analogical associations.

Subjectivity in graphic design practice is complex, however. *(There's a Chinese proverb about an ideal conversation being like a half-filled water pitcher.)* Subjectivity privileges the interaction between object and individual. A true subjectivist designer is responsible for producing work with which her audience can interact meaningfully. *(Without the pitcher, what holds the conversation?)* She cannot simply present her audience with some idiosyncratic artifact without considering what that object can provide them. When a designer interprets the literal world with the poet's omni-directional sensitivity, she intentionally and intuitively makes work in which her audience find inexhaustible, extraliteral value.

1. Nicolas Bourriaud. "Introduction" in *Postproduction*. (New York: Sternberg Press, 2007), 18-19.
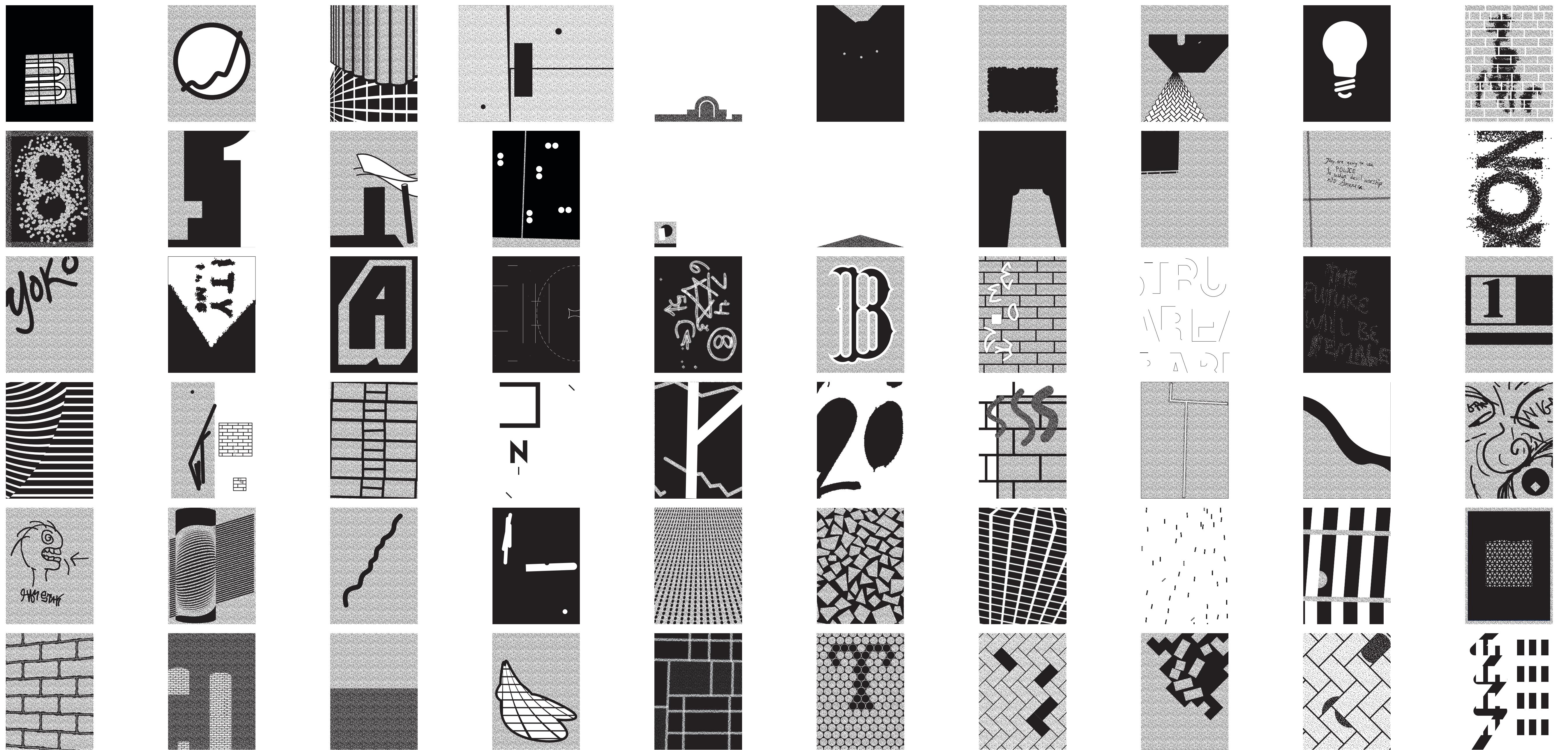
This untitled project began as a personal exploration of form and communication. It was a subjective experiment in the narrowest sense. *(As in: pertaining to or characteristic of an individual; personal.)*

I walked through Richmond, snapping thousands of photographs. Eventually, these became 60 graphic interpretations filtered through an intentionally limited formal vocabulary. By this point, I had made for myself a collection with which I could interact meaningfully.

As a narrowly subjective experiment, I considered this a success. It was not until I had new, working definitions of "subjectivity" and "objectivity" that I came to recognize that this project needed to go further: to evolve into a format that can deliver to any audience the potential for a meaningful interaction.

In his Introduction to *Postproduction*, Nicolas Bourriaud describes "semionauts" as people who "produce individual pathways through signs," people who imagine "the likely relations between disparate sites."

French video and installation artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster believes that "what matters is introducing a sort of equality...between me - at the origins of an arrangement...and others, allowing them to organize their own story in response to what they have just seen, with their own references." Semionauts sample and recombine disparate moments into novel configurations through which others can carve their own pathways.[1]

fraternité, egalité,
et liberté?
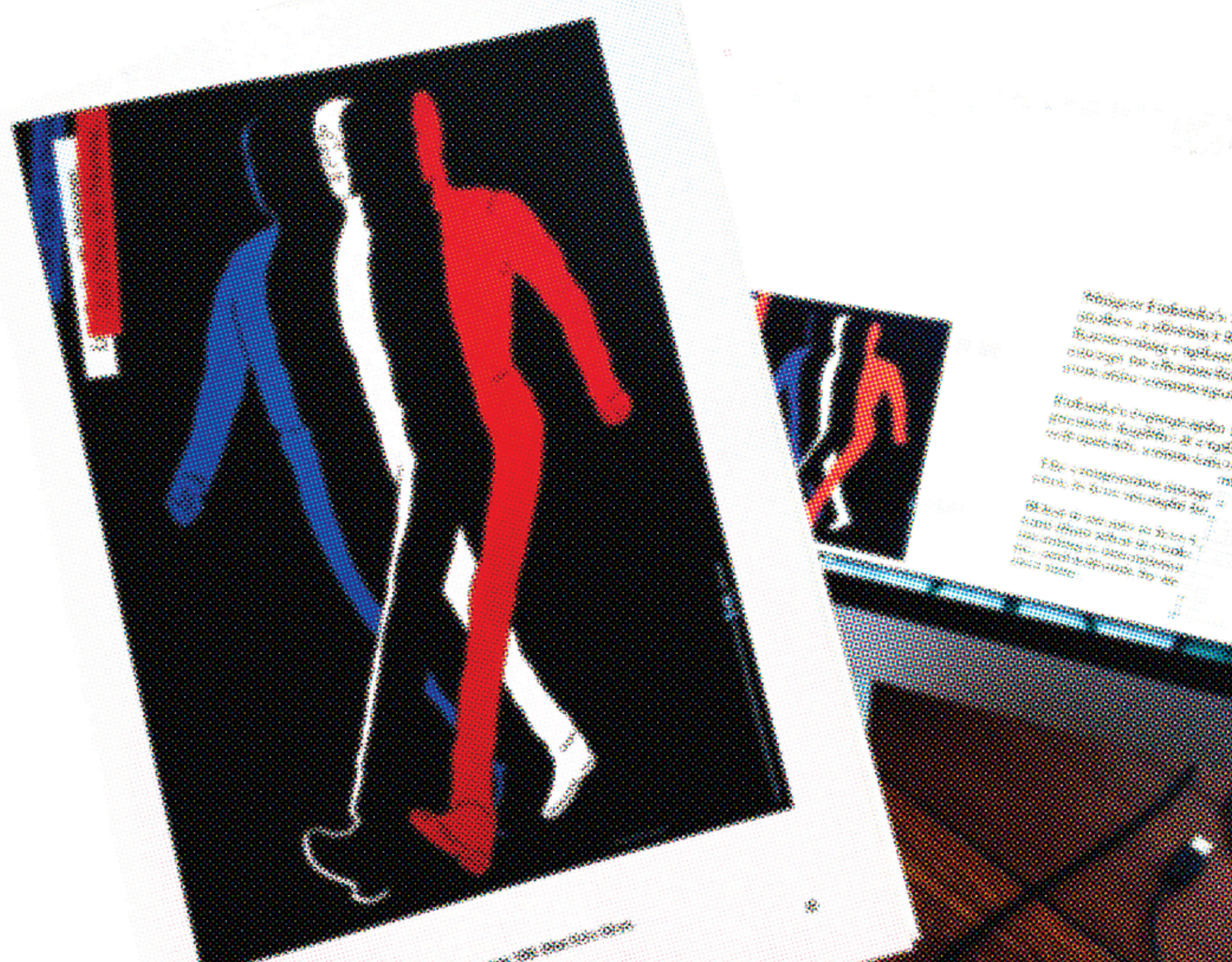
ou bluets, brie,
et bordenax?

Shigeo Fukuda's work often makes a distinct leap from harnessing explanatory energy to channeling its evocative counterpart.

Fukuda's typography is supremely legible; it explains itself quickly, enunciates clearly.

The companion imagery, however, is less straight forward.

What it means is less important than what it evokes. Its meaning is intentionally plastic, and will only be unpacked over time.

4
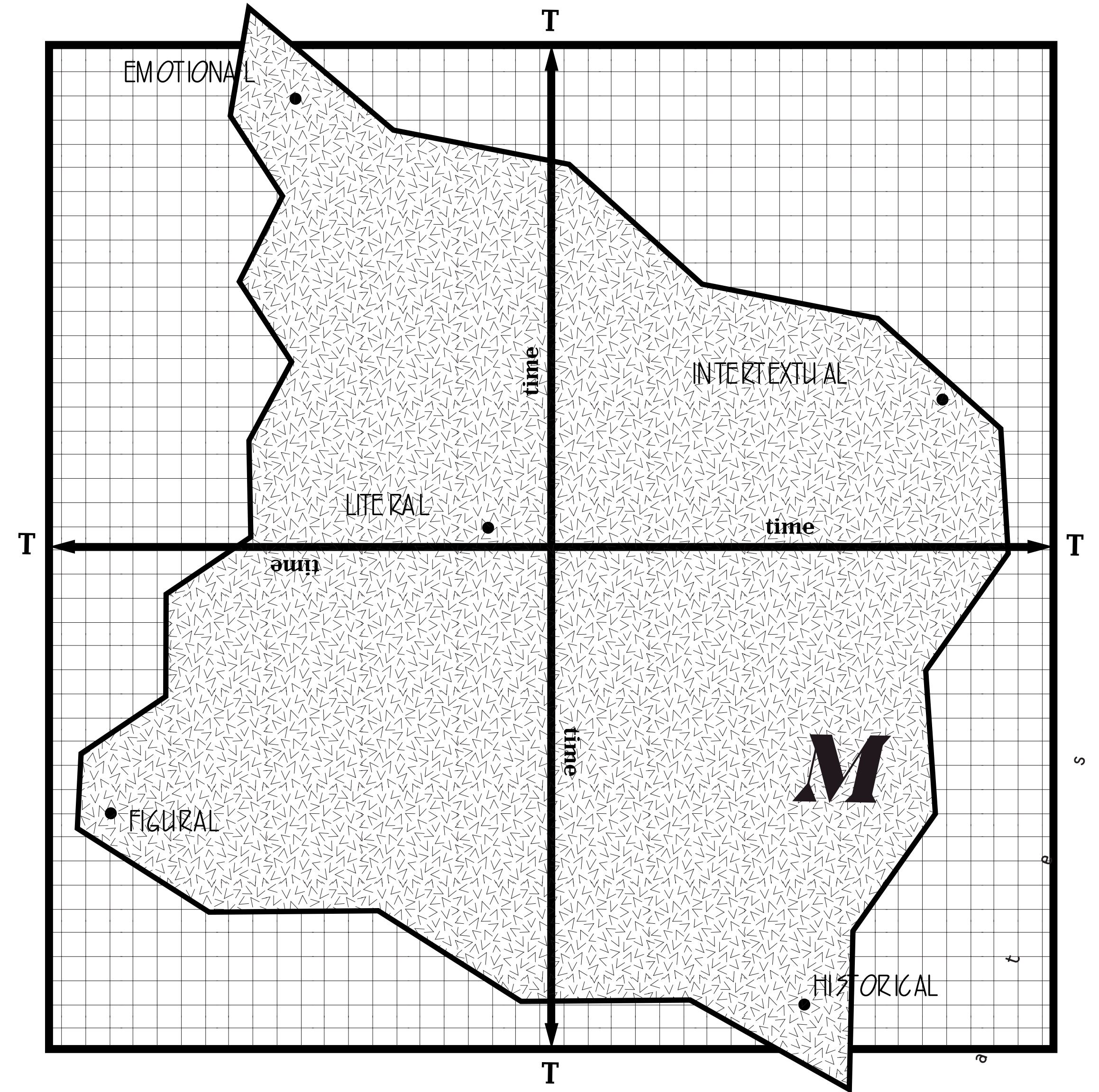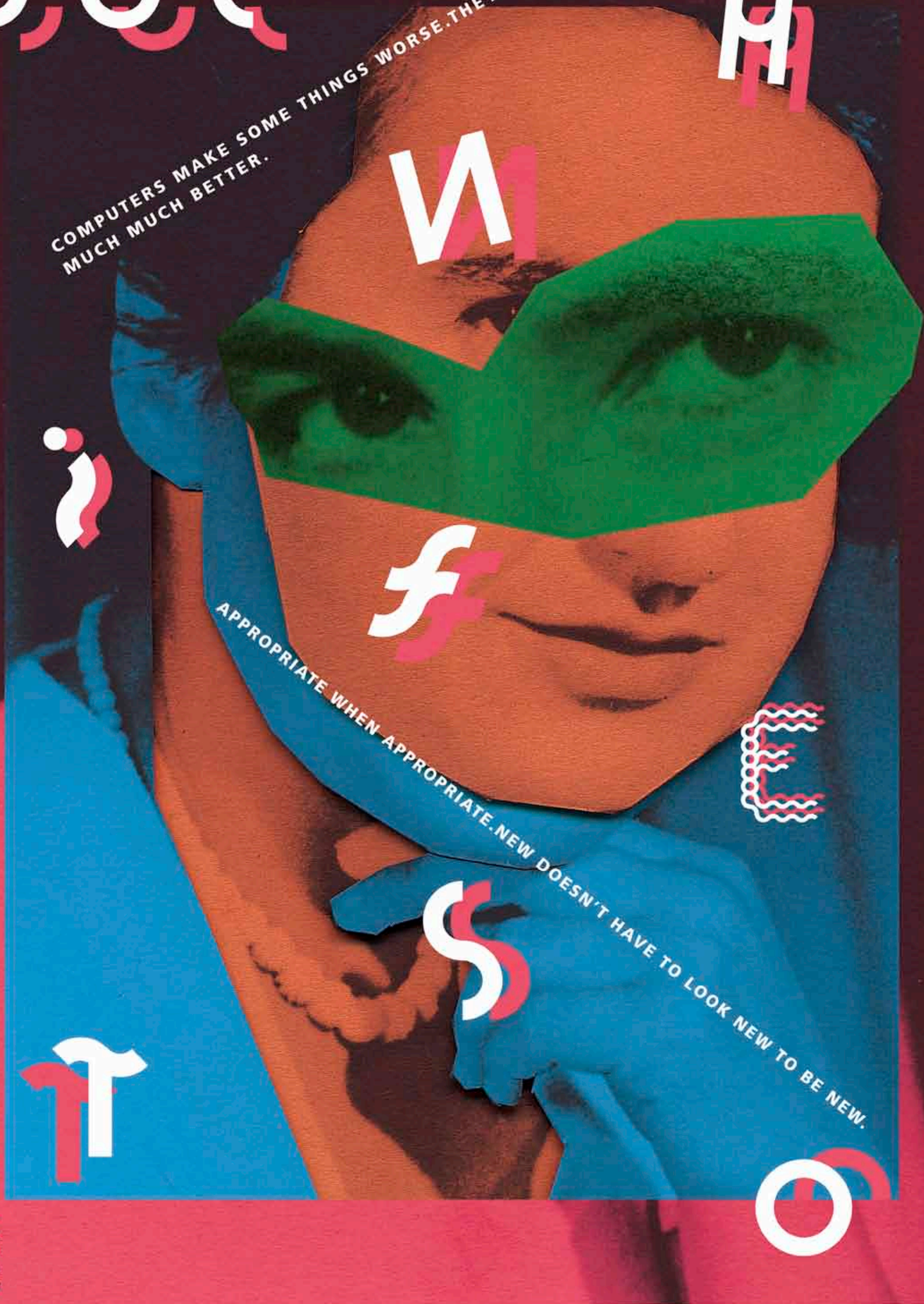
when a graphic designer operates with a poet's omni-directional sensitivity, she intentionally and intuitively makes work in which her audience finds inexhaustible, extraliteral value. This work that continues to evoke new meaning long after any original, literal message has been delivered, digested, and discarded.

ABOVE: over time, a robust colony of meaning spreads to new levels of significance and association.

Paul Rand's 1990 UCLA poster features a cut paper orange-on-the-vine capped with viscid blobs of snow.

The white and orange shapes connote winter and summer with equal brilliance. Held in counterpoint, these forms embody the oxymoronic tension of winter in California. The poster couples its literal message with the connotations of a paradox in paradise.

Through his combination of type and image, Rand transmits a literal message in such a way that it becomes figuratve, emotional, and intertextual.

After all, Rand's paper orange locates the expressiveness of Ezra Pound's wet, black bough

in the very fruit Bruno Munari once labeled a chief accomplishment of Nature's own design practice.

Now, I am not arguing that Rand intentionally stuffed these particular references into his poster. No.

What I do believe, however, is that he chose to juxtapose a denotative message with a connotative image. In doing so, Rand created for me (the audience) an opportunity to reconcile these two layers of communication: the literal and the extraliteral.

After a literal message is no longer useful, and after we have appraised a work's formal qualities, there remain causal gaps between type and image to be investigated.

This investigation becomes work for the audience. Good work. It keeps us engaged. It keeps us employed. Gainfully.

My interpretation of Rand's imagery led me to Pound, to Munari. Yours likely leads somewhere else. This difference is beautiful. It is proof positive of an evocative energy that compels each of us towards new quanities of extraliteral meaning.

YO DAWG I HEARD YOU LIKED ASSOCIATIVE MEANING SO I ASSOCIATED SOME MEANING WITH YOUR MEANING

sometimes you want to tell the story in a way that lets people fill in the blanks with whatever would make them the happiest

— scott adams, cartoonist, reason.tv interview 3/19/16

A moment ago, someone chose to do something. They did not decide to do that thing.

Deciding is purely computational; a machine can easily be taught to decide.

Choice is the product of judgment, not calculation.

5

1 MIT professor emeritus who, in 1965-6, created ELIZA, the first "chatterbot," an early example of primitive natural language processing (early 21J)

to act in accordance with preset instructions

it is the capacity to choose that ultimately makes us human. human judgment encompasses complex non-mathematical factors, such as emotions and the value they play in our emotional society."1

in computer power and human rea-son, Joseph Weizenbaum, makes a distinction between deciding and choosing. krystal south explains:

39

Containing apparent traces of the designer's will or spirit, the designed object frames graphic design as more than a one-way visual transmission between object and observer.

These objects compel us to see graphic design as an interpersonal act of visual communication taking place through the conduit of a designed object.

We, the public, recognize these formal aberrations as evidence of a fellow human mind making a uniquely human judgment.

stedelijk
van abbemuseum
eindhoven

fernand leger

dagelijks geopend
van 10-17 uur
zondag
van 13-17 uur
dinsdag- en
donderdagavond
van 20-22 uur

2 februari tot
10 maart 1957

Broos: The 'E' and the 'G' are connected by this extremely long horizontal line.

Crouwel: It had to be a kind of continuous figure, like a signature. In addition, the rhythm of the parts is important. But why the details came to be the way they are, I cannot say.

Broos: ...because why should the arch here on the 'R' not be connected to the stem, whereas there it is...

Crouwel: It would otherwise have become a great black blob, of course.[1]

Interviewing Wim Crouwel about his 1957 Fernand Léger poster, Kees Broos asked specifically about one section of the logotype.

This is not a lengthy interview (only seven questions), and I find it fascinating that there, able to ask Crouwel anything, Broos asks about a moment that seemingly defies the logic undergirding the logotype as a whole. Broos asks about a choice sticking out against a backdrop of decisions.

1. Kees Broos and David Quay. *Wim Crouwel Alphabets. (Amsterdam: BIS, 2003), 34.*

Watches are complex little machines with straight-forward jobs: they measure and identify time.

Generally speaking, a watchface is responsible for marking 24 hoursworth of time. Watches filter time through geometry. They create space-time, and display it for us in a familiar way.
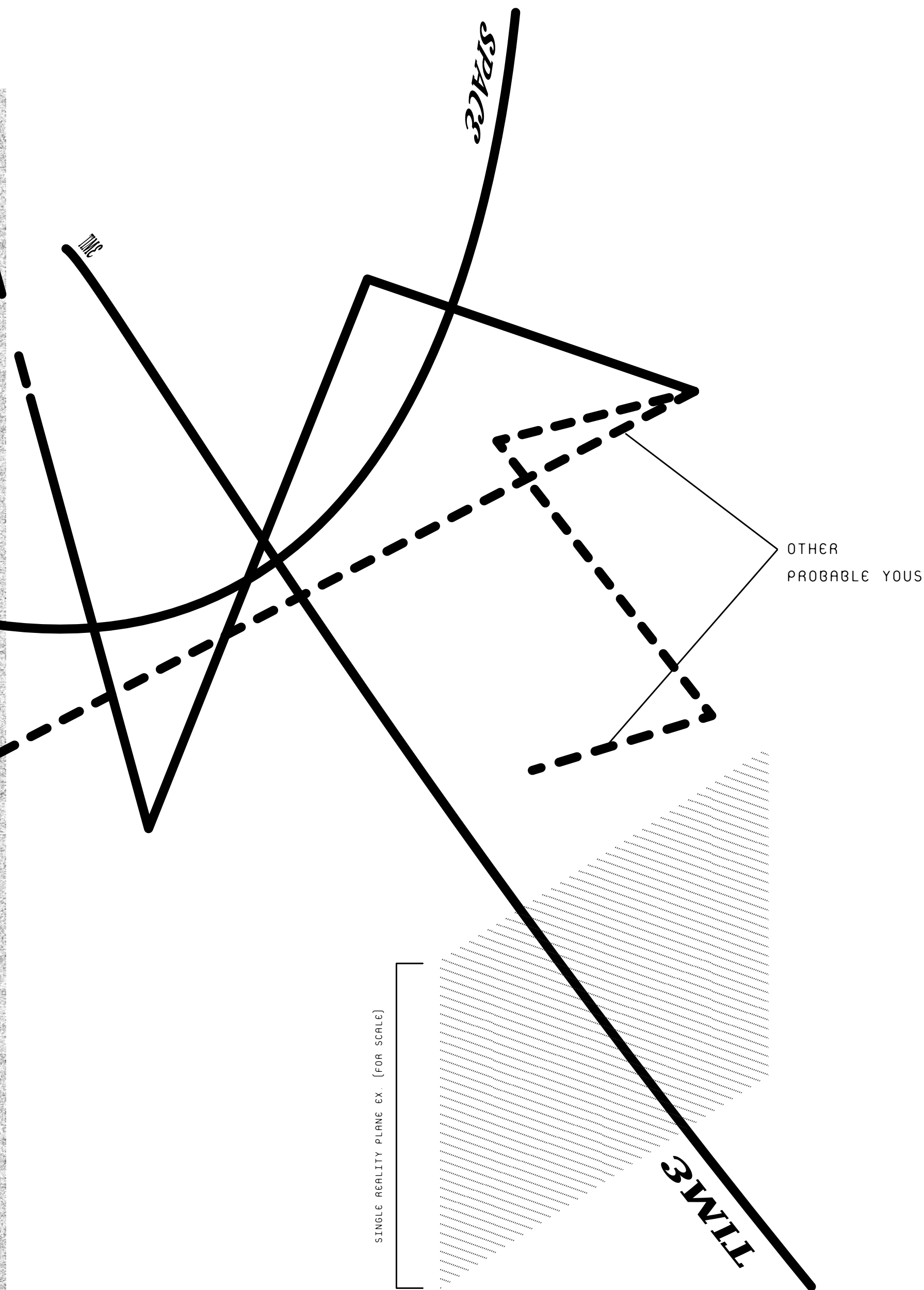
The words "difficult" and "equivocal" are not likely virtues of a watchface. The machine's inner workings (its springs and balances) all but decide where the numerals must be placed.

M & Co.'s choices (to blur the face, to rearrange it) make the act of reading time slightly more complex, more challenging, and more interesting.
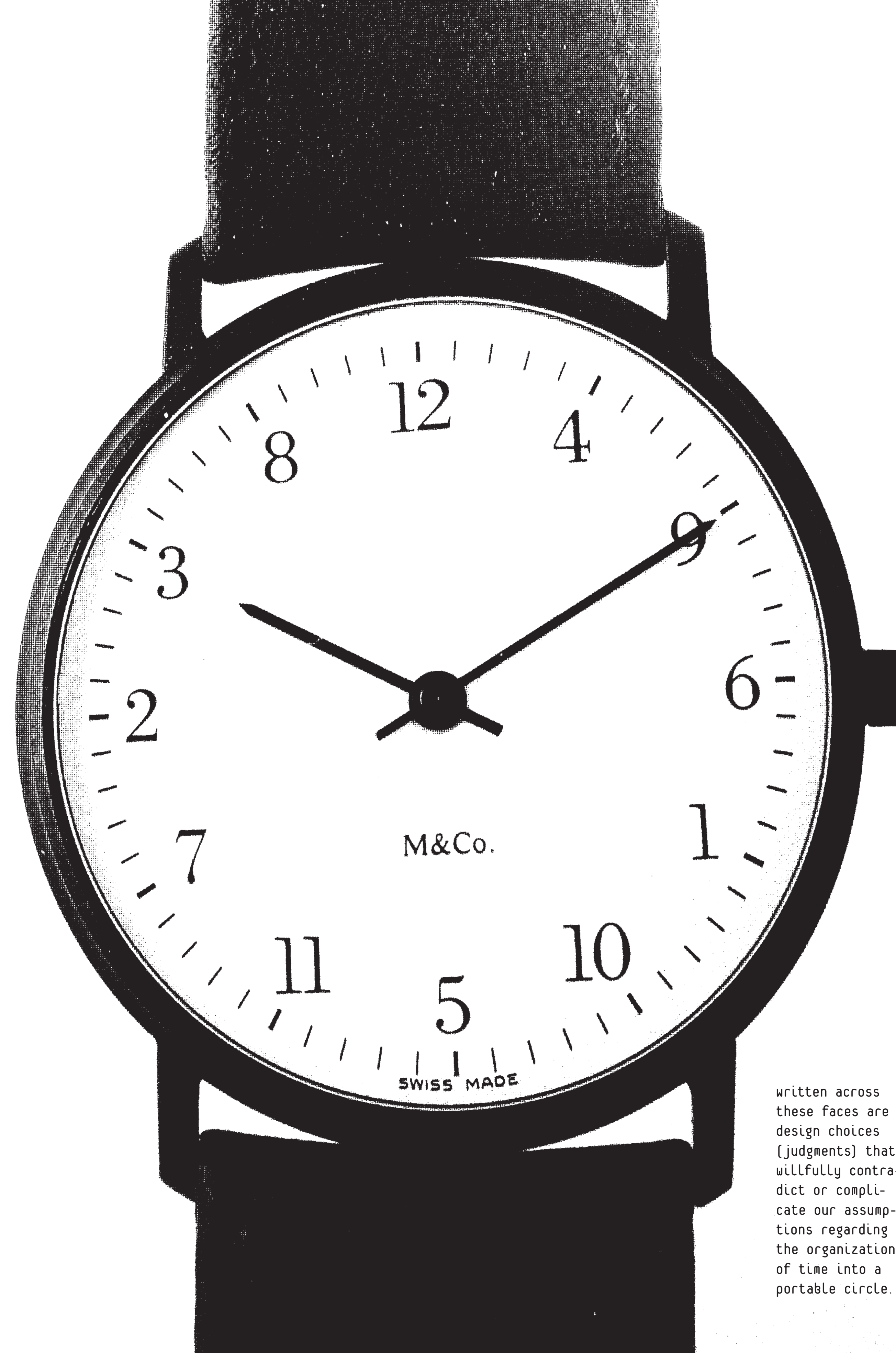
Objects that hold choices in tension with decisions gain power—agency—as artifacts of human willfullness.

written across these faces are design choices (judgments) that willfully contradict or complicate our assumptions regarding the organization of time into a portable circle.

PRE-DICTED IMMINENT MOVEMENT INDEX

SPACE

SPACE

TIME

OTHER
PROBABLE YOUS

SINGLE REALITY PLANE EX. (FOR SCALE)

A poetic approach towards graphic design devotes equal sensitivity to the denotative and connotative (the explanatory and the evocative) powers of the language, typefaces, images, emblems, substrates, processes, everything we designers use.

This attitude visits upon content the unique scrutiny of the interpretive human mind; it extrapolates from our subjective appraisal of content the inspiration for formal gestures.

These design choices are honest manifestations of our identities, and identity is central to human experience, an essential feature of all human contact, argues Jan Van Toorn, "including the communicaiton of any message."[1]

6

1. Wim Crouwel and Jan Van Toorn. The Debate. (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015), 25.

E E Cummings was a romantic individ-
ualist who believed that systematic,
analytical thinking was antitheti-
cal to humanity's lithe, intuitive
spirit. Cummings composed his poems
on a typewriter, however: a machine
designed for dependably monotonous
repetition. In *No Thanks*, monospaced

```
<div class="line">
<!--m00n 0ver t0wns m00n-->
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">m</p></div><div class=
<div class="caps"><p class="moon">o</p></div><div class="
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">t</p></div><div class=
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">m</p></div><div class
</div>

<div class="line" id="change1">
<!--whisper-->
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">w</p></div><div class
</div>

<div class="line">
<!--less creature huge gr0-->
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">l</p></div><div class
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">c</p></div><div class
"minip">e</p></div><div class="spaces"> </div>
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">h</p></div><div class
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">g</p></div><div class
</div>

<div class="line">
<!--pingness-->
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">p</p></div><div class
"minip">s</p></div>
<div class="spaces"> </div><div class="spaces">&nbsp
<div class="descend"><p class="descendp">g</p></div>
<div class="spaces"> </div><div class="spaces">&nbsp
<div class="descend"><p class="descendp">g</p></div>
</div>

<div class="line" style="margin-right:800px;">
<!--break-->
<div class="descend"><p class="descendp">p</p></div><div
</div>

<div class="line">

<!--wh0 perfectly wh0-->
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">w</p></div><div class
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">p</p></div><div class
"minip">l</p></div><div class="minis"><p class="minip">y<
<div class="minis"><p class="minip">w</p></div><div class
</div>

<div class="line">
<!--fl0at-->
```
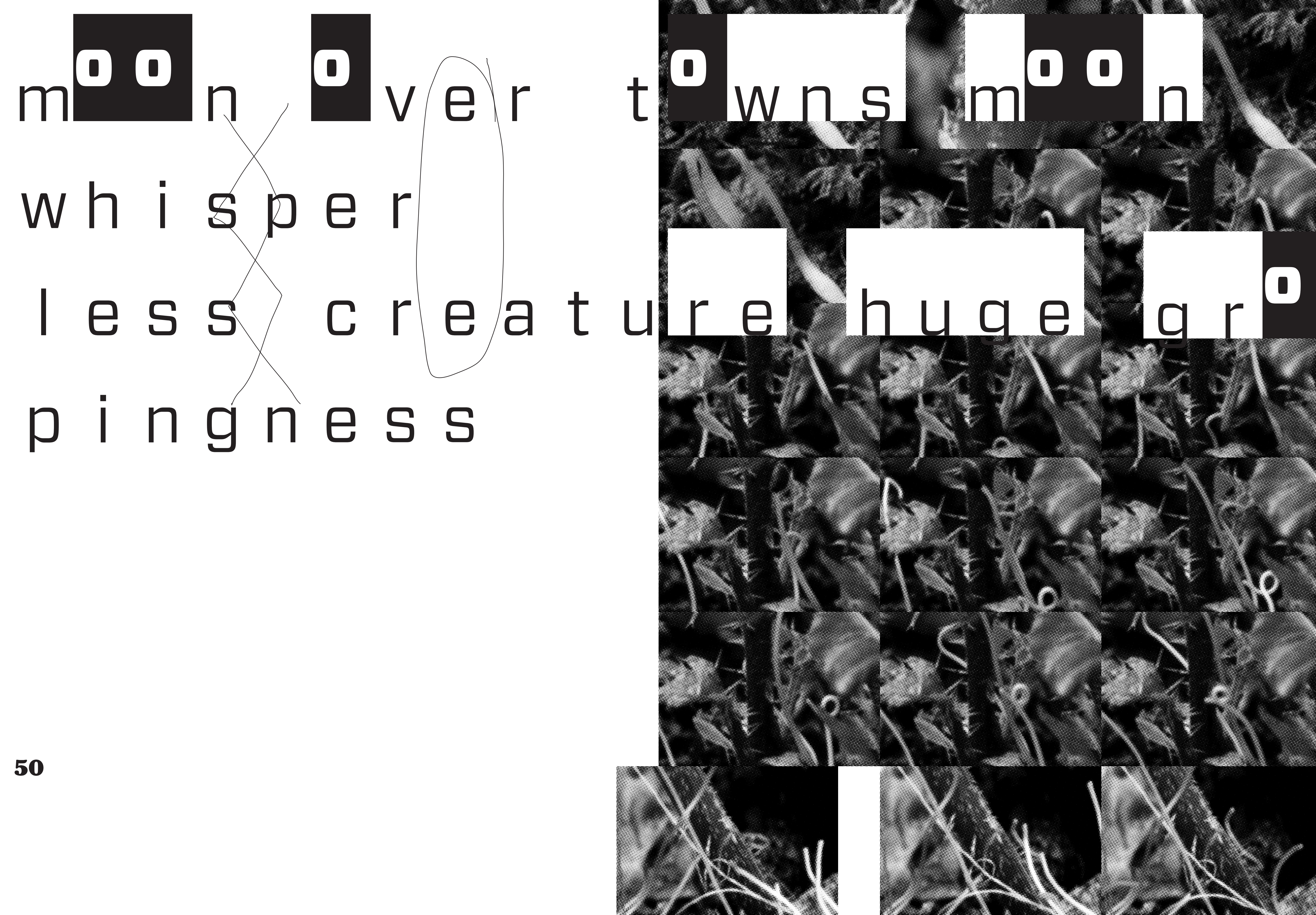
consistency undergirds extremely
exuberant typographic choices: the
mechanical realities of the poet's
chosen tool leave traces of them-
selves in the poetry: enduring for-
mal evidence of a tool connotes the
relationship between itself and its
user. *(Italo Calvino wrote about how
every line presupposes a pen, and
every pen, a hand.)*
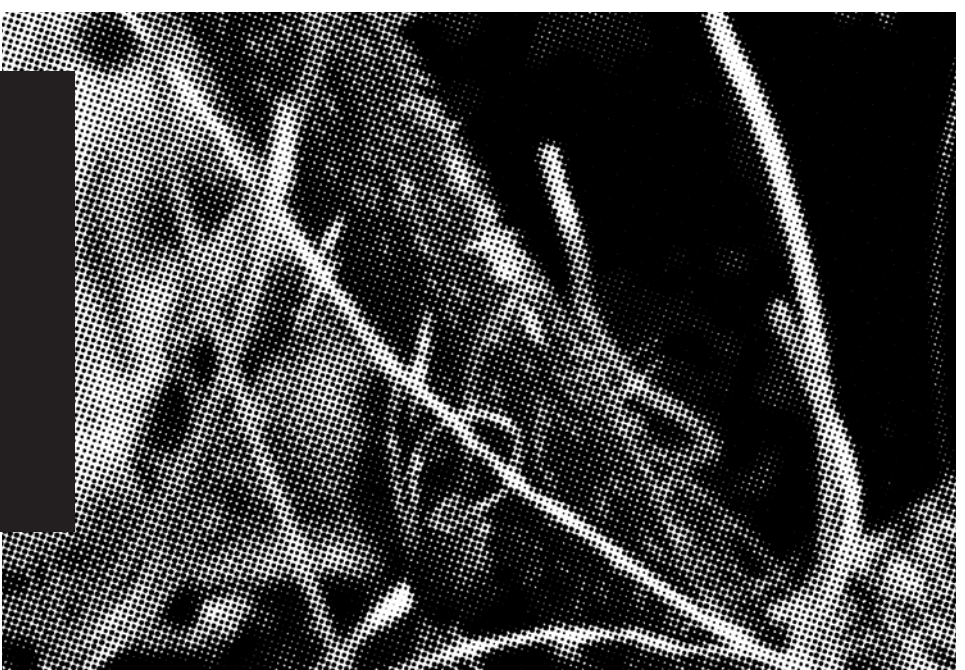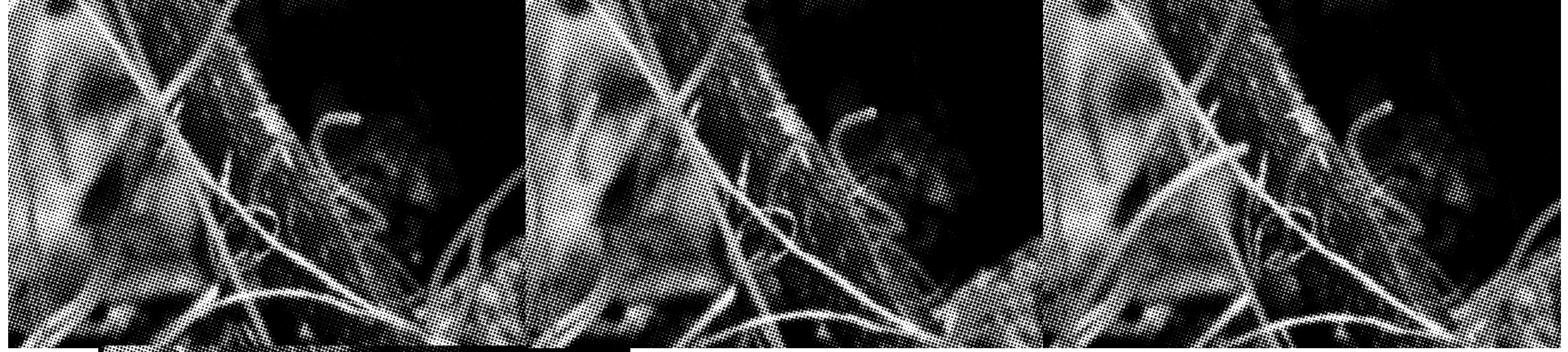
48

love is a place
& through this place of
love move
with brightness of pea
all places
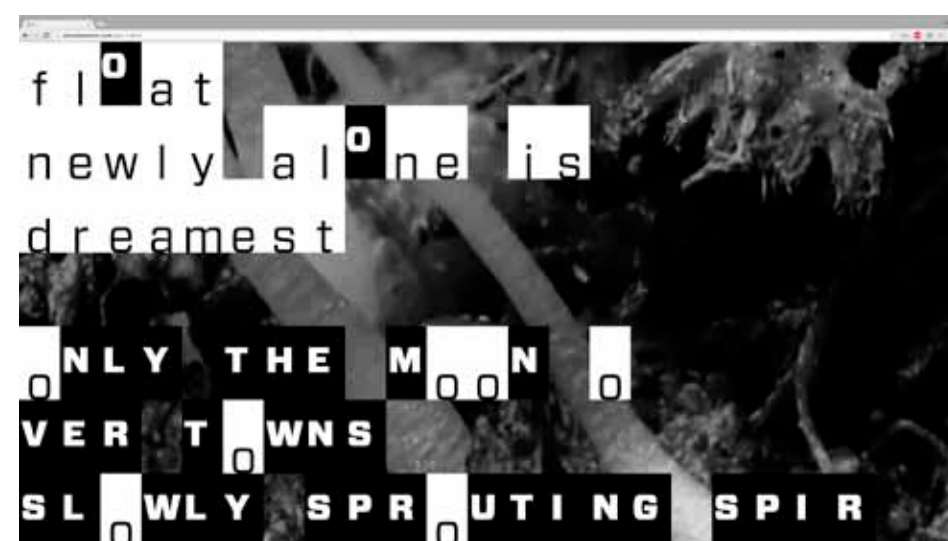
It seemed fitting to turn E E Cum-
mings's *No Thanks* into a series of
webpages, to filter the poet's natu-
ral romantic spirit through a rigor-
ous digital sieve. Without the aid of
programming or automation (for bet-
ter or worse), I moved each letter,
punctuation mark, and blank space
into its own corresponding <div>.

float
newly alone is
dreamest
ONLY THE MOON
VER TOWNS
SLOWLY SPROUTING SPIR

w

p

be of love a little
more careful
than of everything
guard her perhaps only
a trifle less

This repetitive process forced me to
engage with each letterform, or ab-
sence thereof, as its own individual
presence. Over time, my HTML code
evolved to reflect this autonomy
through its syntax. Cut/paste/copy
led me to recognize patterns in Cum-
ming's selection and arrangement of
letters. *(Enduring formal evidence /
mechanical realities.)*

moon over towns moon

whisper

less creature huge gro

pingness

who perfectly who

float

newly al   is

dreamest

53

ONLY THE MOON O
OVER IT OWNS
O
O
SLOWLY SPROUTING SPIR
O
IT

h

s p

s

p

Look at your heroes
from multiple
perspectives
simultaneously–
that's how we
accurately determine
the dimensions and
velocity of planets,
after all: by parallax

In 1992, Paul Rand resigned from Yale with an open-letter-hissy-fit originally published in the <u>AIGA Journal of Graphic Design</u>, Volume 10, Number 1.

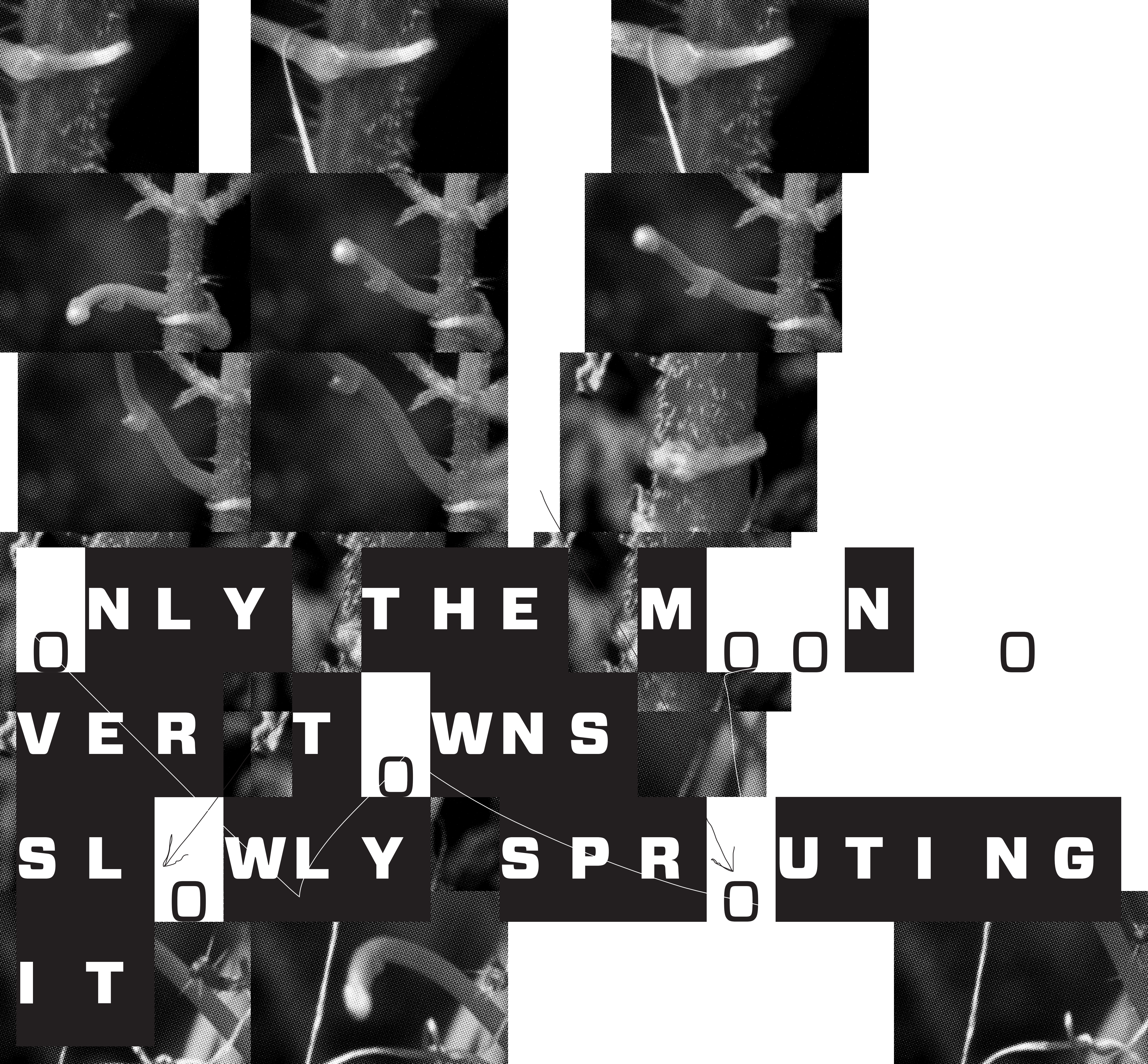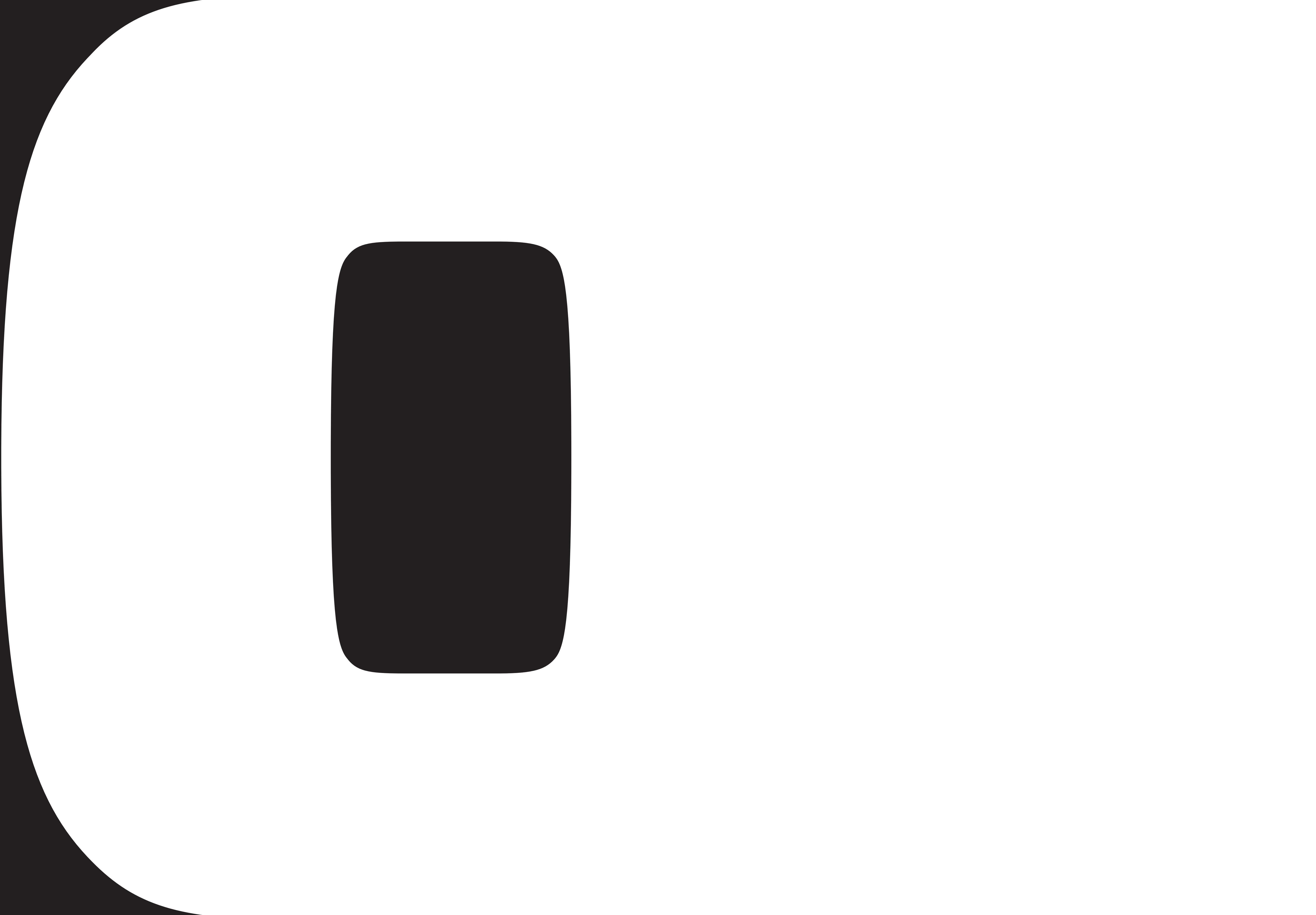Rand was unable to process, and therefore elected to discredit completely, the aesthetic voices that complicated his patrimonial privilege and associated worldview.

His argument lacked criticality. It displayed a severe allergy to criticism. It misconstructed irreverence for abuse.

and revising history...

only dilutes the lessons
we should learn from it.

"Lack of humility and originality and the obsession with style is what seem to encourage these excesses... the focus on freedom is just another sign that suggests a longing to reject the past...'It is no secret,' asserts the author of Tenured Radicals, '...every special interest — women's studies, black studies, gay studies, and the like — ...has found a welcome roost in the academy...while the traditional curriculum and modes of intellectual inquiry are excoriated as sexist, racist, or just plain reactionary', ...adds another critic, '...dangers... ensue...when signifiers and signifieds part company, with the deconstructionists' blessing'...To poke fun at form or formalism is to poke fun at Roger Fry, Clive Bell, John Dewey, and the philosophy called aesthetics."
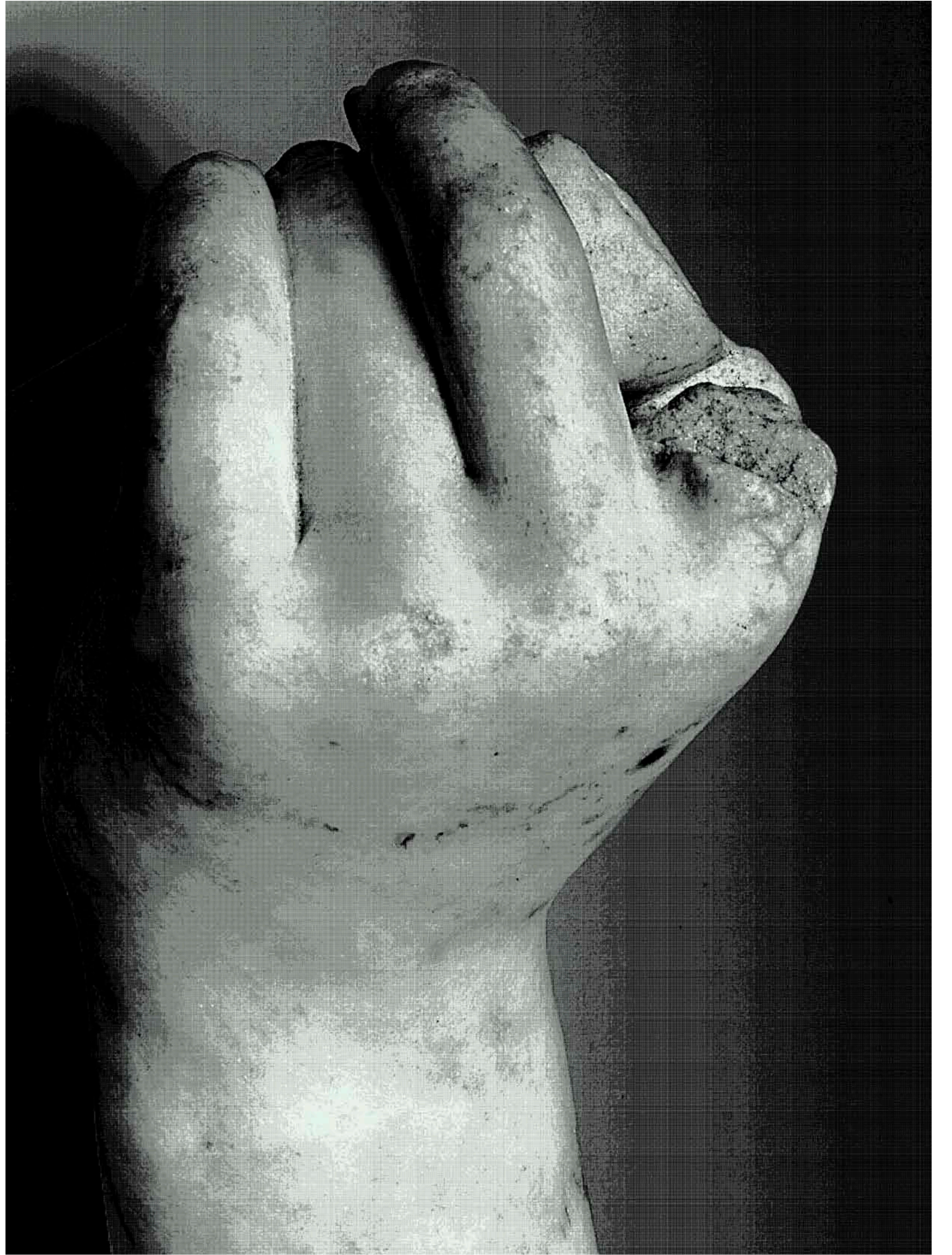
— Paul Rand, Angry White Male

Rand v. Society

7

6

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO,

BABY, COULDN'T'A DONE A WORSE THING TO ME

65

In modernism, post-modernism, re-
alism, Brandon Taylor argues
that, at they're core, modern-
ist movements (post-modernity in-
cluded) pretend towards a univer-
sality that resists recognizing
anything that may destabilize or
disprove it.[1] These movements keep
dissenting voices at arms length,
and from this tension generate an
awesome, perpetual power.

(Artistic practices self-conscious-
ly situated within cultural con-
texts where they gain their iden-
tity through contrast, as Johanna
Drucker puts it.[2])

This is why Piet Mondrian threw
away his friendship with Theo van
Doesburg over diagonal lines.

Live and work with passion and responsibility; have a sense of humor and fantasy.

Try to express personal, spiritual, and domestic values even if our culture continues to
de dominated by corporate, marketing, and institutional values.

Choose to remain progressive; don't be regressive.

Find comfort in the past only if it expands insight into the future and not just for the
sake of nostalgia.

Embrace the richness of all cultures; be inclusive instead of exclusive.

Think of your work as a significant element in the context of a more important,
transcendental purpose.

Use you work to become advocates of projects for the public good.

Attempt to become a cultural provocateur; be a leader rather than a follower.

Engage in self-restraint; accept the challenge of working with reduced expectations and
diminished resources.

Avoid getting stuck in corners, such as being a servant to increasing overhead
careerism, or narrow points of view.

Bridge the boundaries that separate us from other creative professions and unexpected
possibilities.

Use the new technologies, but don't be seduced into thinking that they provide answers
to fundamental questions.

Be radical.

— Dan Friedman, Radical Modernist Agenda (excerpt)[4]

By contrast, Dan Friedman turned towards the diversity he saw blooming around him.

According to Christopher Pullman, Friedman "plunged into the flamboyant and eccentric New York hip-hop art scene of the early '80s."[3]

Friedman carved himself a path as a Radical Modernist, and built into his own practice a humor and curiousity that pushed him towards different cultures, not away from them.

Both Rand and Friedman's responses
to the cultures they found swirling
around them involved, in some way,
the same word.

That's pretty radical.

69

Dan v. Rand

1. Brandon Taylor. Modernism, post-modernism, realism: a critical perspective for art. (Michigan: Winchester SoAP, 1987), 123.
2. Johanna Drucker. The Visible Word. (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1994), 51.
3. Christopher Pullman, "Dan Friedman: Radical Modernist," christopherpullman.com, October 21, 2014,
   http://christopherpullman.com/home/dan-friedman-radical-modernist/.
4. Dan Friedman. Dan Friedman: Radical Moderism. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994).

The enemy of my-self is my friend

So, I was sharpening my knives one day and started thinking about the words "sharp" and "blunt." In the context of cutlery, these two terms are antonyms—diametrically opposed states of being.

But what about as character traits? As styles of communication or interpretation?

But what about: sharp as in shrewd? Blunt as in direct? Sharp as in abrupt? Blunt as in abrupt?

CONTINUA
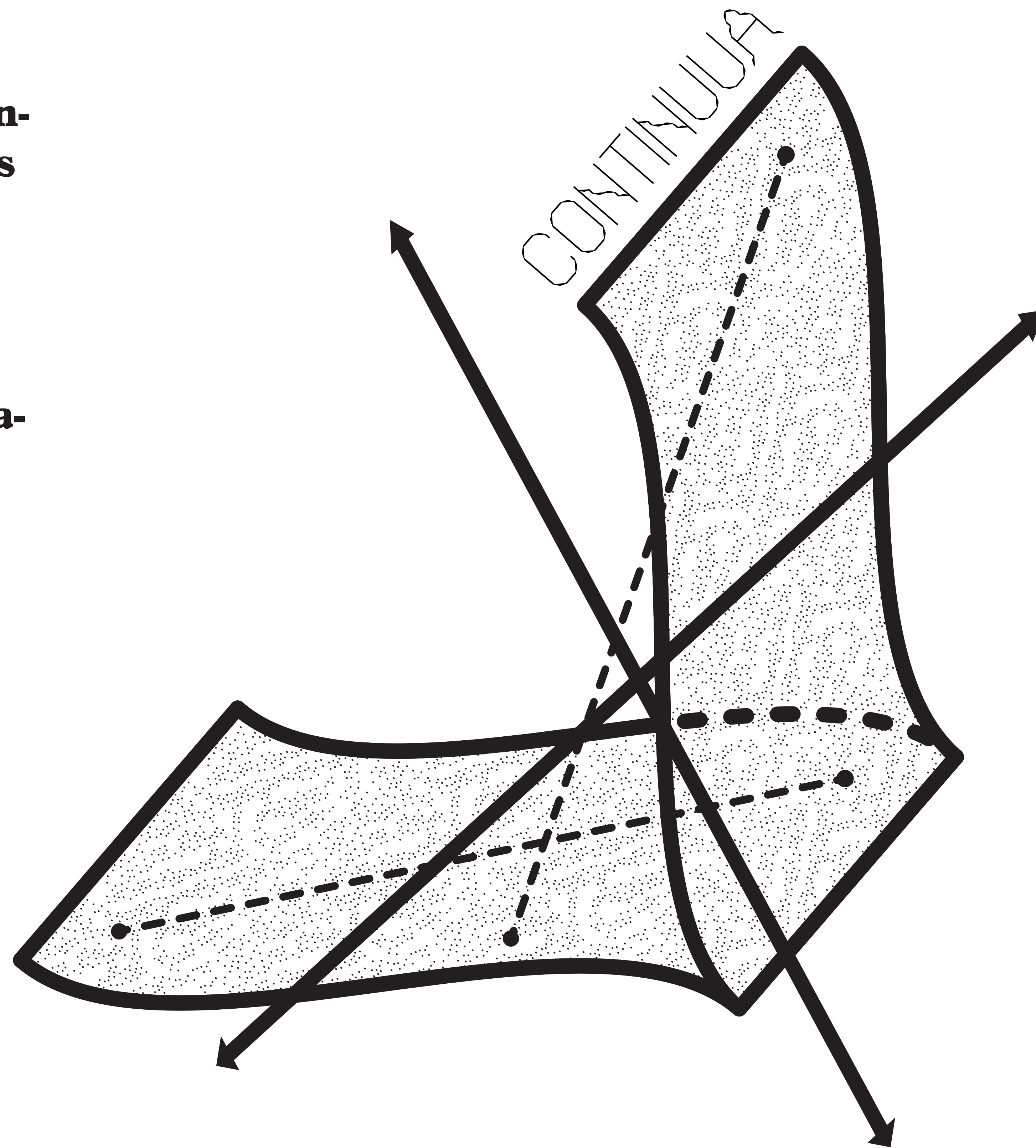
In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger writes about ax-stones, and about how tools and equipment vanish usefully into usefulness as they're being put to use.

WITNESS

The more I investigated their additional meanings, the less exclusive these terms became. They began to reach towards one another, creating between them a continuum.

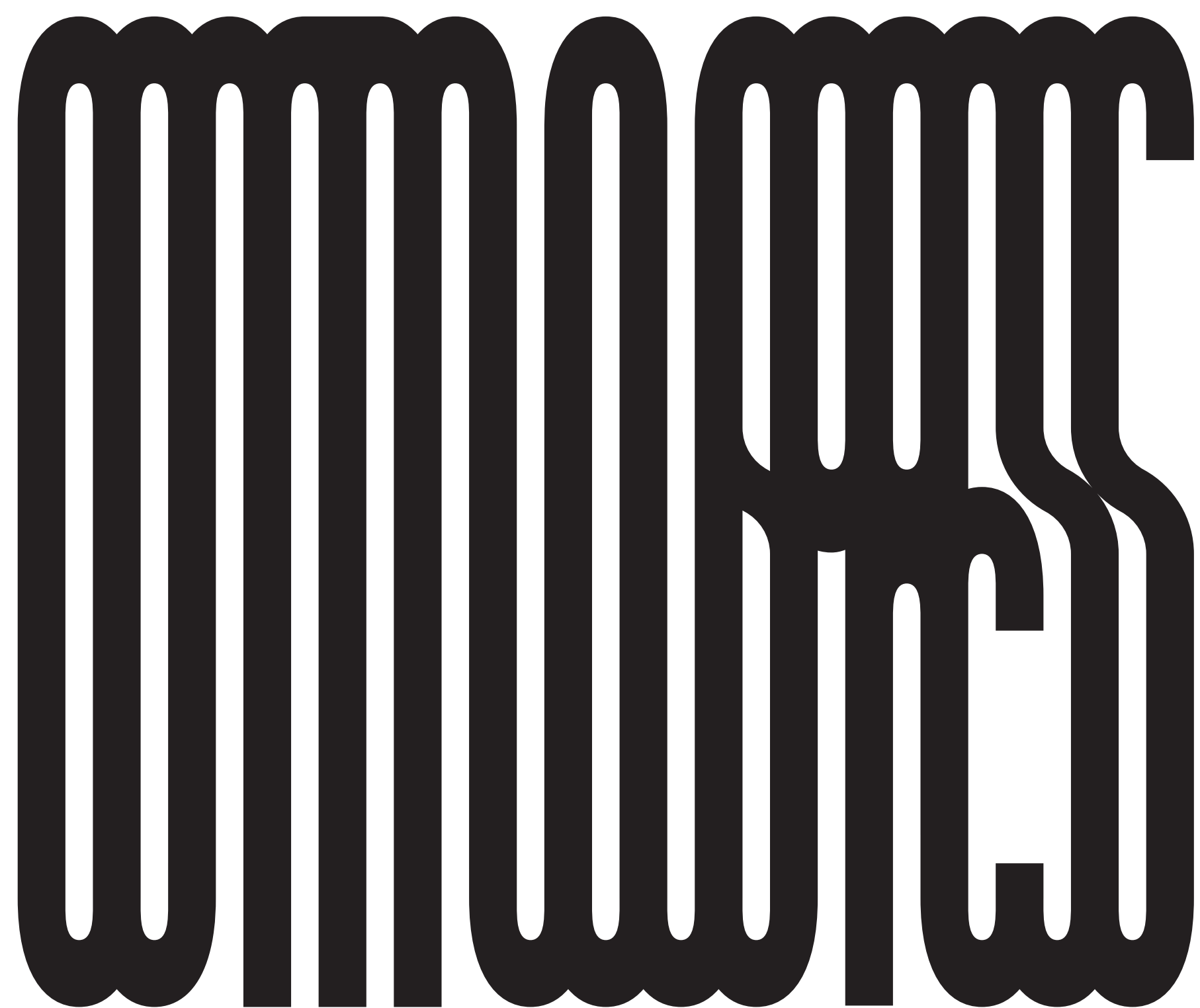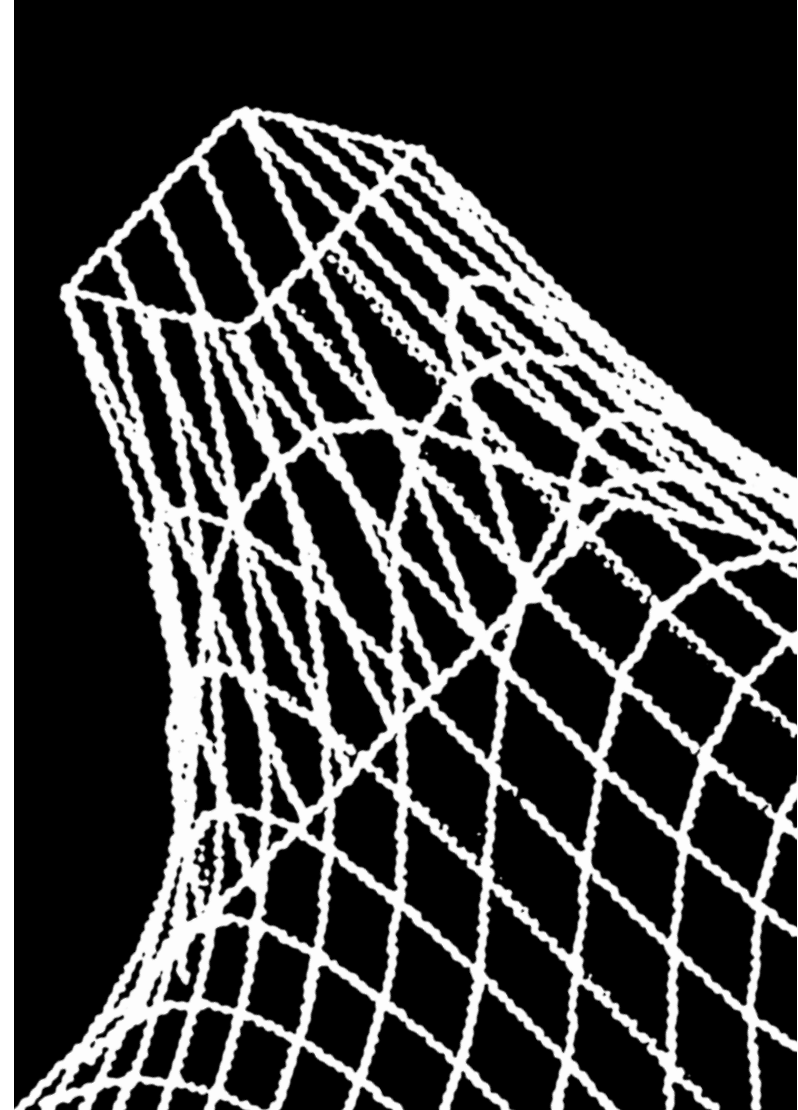A maul is 1/2 sledgehammer, 1/2 axe, and all business. Each side is equally powerful, yet differently so—and connecting them is one continuous, transitional plane. Growing up, there was always one in our toolshed; now it lives in the garage. I see it everytime I visit. Its orange handle is very conspicuous.

In fabricating equipment, an ax-stone is used, and used up. It disappears into usefulness. The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment.[1]
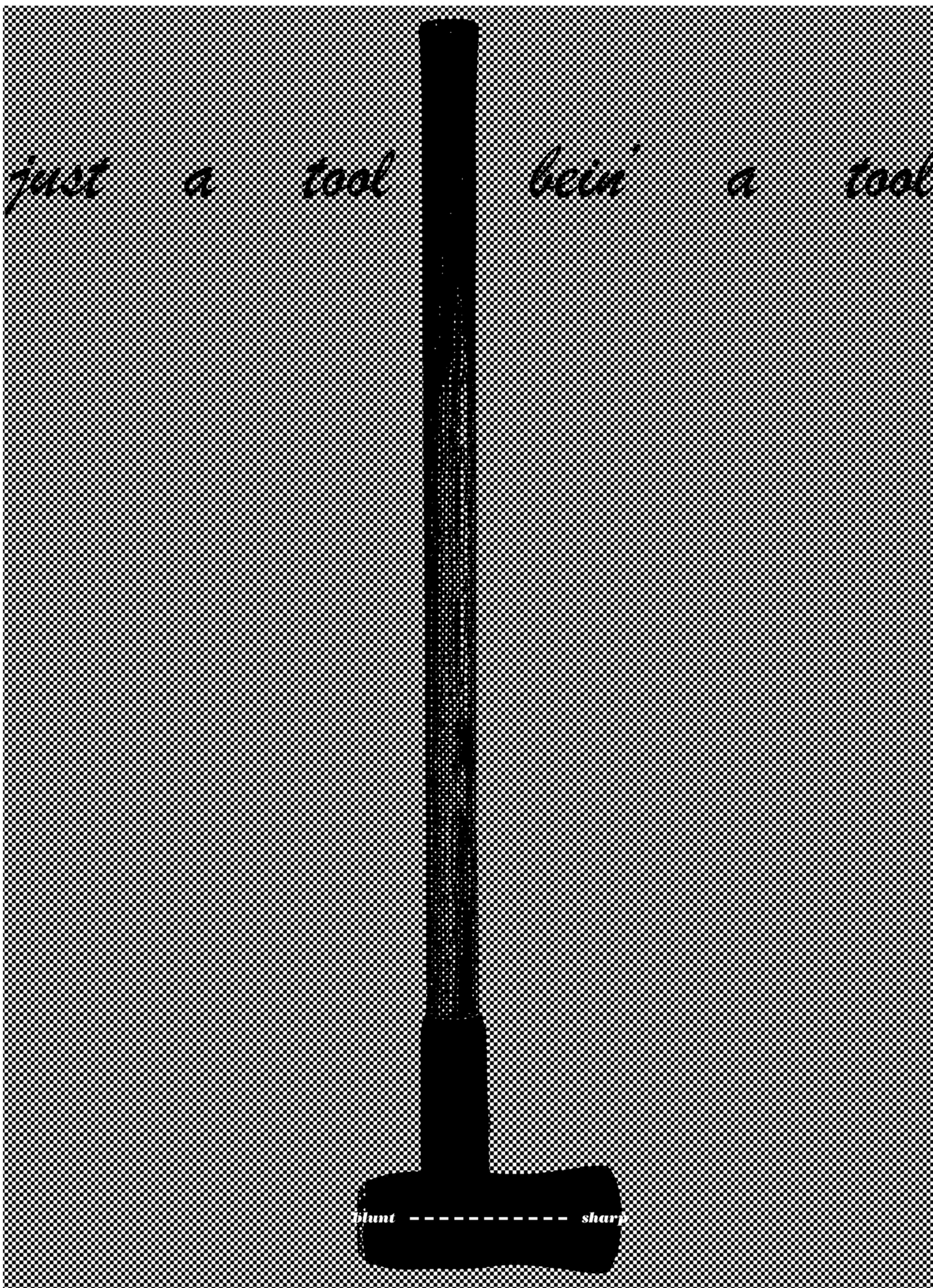
1. Martin Heidegger. *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1960). (New York: Harpers Perennial, 2008), 171.

1. Peter Gibian, "Levity and Gravity in Twain: The Bipolar Dynamics of the Early Tales" in Studies in American Humor, New Series 3, No. 1 (1994), pp. 84.

"...neither pole or voice or force can ever exist in isolation:...each voice needs the other, each gains its charge only through opposition to the other – it is only when the two poles are in contact that the vital sparks begin to fly."[1]

just a tool bein' a tool

blunt ----------- sharp

List of Continua

Form	Theory
Blunt	Sharp
Usage	Ownership
Gravity	Levity
Translate	Transpose
Overprint	Hyper-text
Verbal	Vocal
Fast burn	Slow burn
Decision	Choice
Self-control	Self-expression
Interest	Influence
Explanatory	Evocative

Initially, this poster said TOOLBEING (a Heideggerian priciple, and the title of a Graham Harman book on Heidegger's metaphysics of objects). Looking at it there on the page, however, the word was somehow too esoteric and too on the nose.

The location of the maul's handle, however, required breaking the word into "tool" and "being," and in attempt to lighten the poster's tone I eventually found my way to a pun:

just a tool bein' a tool.

77

9

"any given language was, for Bakhtin, always being pulled in different directions, spoken in multiple voices; it was both official and idiomatic, received pronunciation and slang."[1]

"...has been continued by being continuously corrupted: by being made impure rather than pure; by being made ambiguous uncertain and unstable; and by not limiting itself to its own competences."[2]

Is it OK to free-associate your way from Heidegger to a cheap pun off the title of a book you haven't read? Yes.

Puns are important.
Humor is important.
Levity is important.
Slang is important.
Gravity is important.
Grammar is important.
Irreverance is important.
Devotion is important.

Russian theorist Mikhail Bahktin argued that language is unstable, dynamic, and polyphonic. Timbres clash and coalesce, compelling constant change (renewal).[3]

Discussing painting, David Batchelor writes of "continuation through corruption," of "being made impure rather than pure."

Jan Van Toorn says that the designer should work from the angle of the artist and her métier, in addition to a conventional industrial-technical angle.

Slang subverts grammar, purposefully complicating and corrupting existing semantic structures.

A graphic designer who wants to engage with content like a poet should tend towards a formal sense that, like language itself, stretches to incorporate aberrant gestures and syntaxes.

(heteroglossia:

Apollinaire cherished the vernacular

The low brow pushes the higher one towards change

the coexistence of distinct varieties within a single linguistic code)

A realist accepts the probability of encountering their own antithesis

78
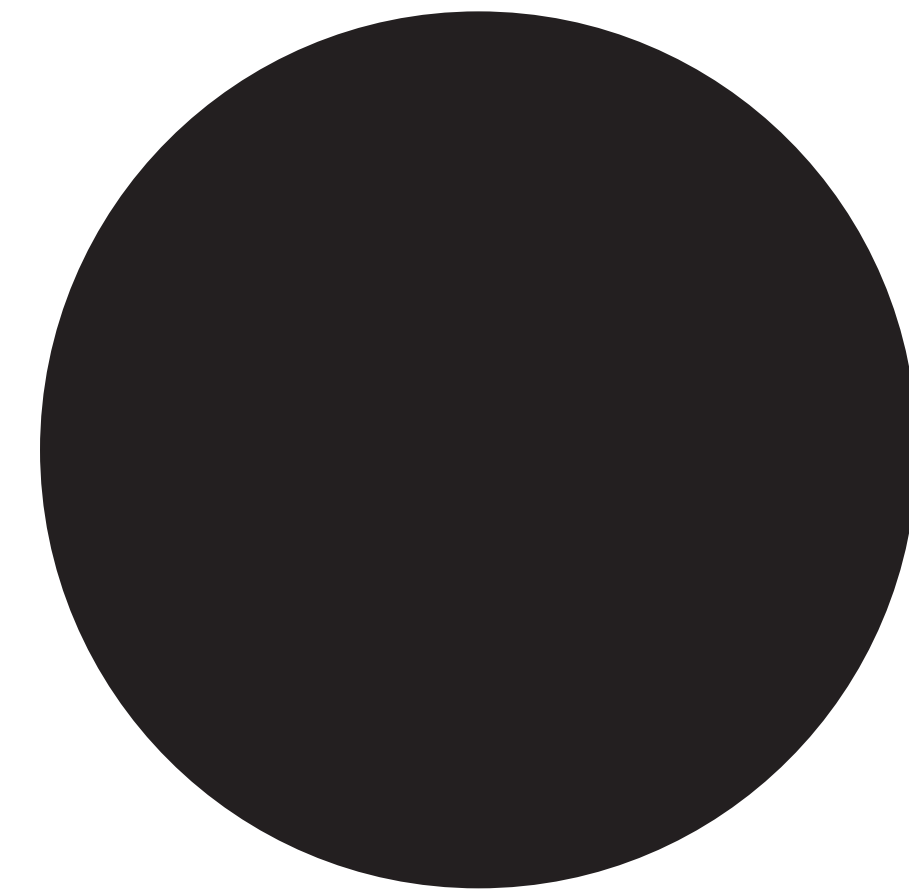
1. David Batchelor Chromophobia (London: Reaktion Books, 2000) 103.
2. Ibid., 100.
3. Ibid., 103.

PLASTER ME WITH CLEAN ELEGANCE

"I will never, never, never forget to include people of colour, people of different points of view, people of both genders, people of different sexual preferences. It's just not possible any more to move without remembering...Diversity and inclusiveness are our only hope. It is not possible to plaster everything over with clean elegance. Dirty architecture, fuzzy theory and dirty design must also be out there."

— sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Autumn 1993 eye magazine interivew with Ellen Lupton

In a lecture she gave last year in Norway, Irit Rogoff defined theory as, "the possibility of positing sets of alternative realities and finding the strategies to make them come into being."[1]

I intend to use graphic design to create spaces that make theory tangible.

Spaces in which theories come into being, and into dialogue with one another.

Spaces that become essays, which circumscribe and investigate ideas.

Spaces other people can navigate physically and rhetorically.

Spaces that not only contain intentional meaning, but also the raw material to inspire the never-ending inference of new meaning.

I do not want to mislead, but at the same time I have no desire to make sure everyone gets to the same place at the same time.

I want to demonstrate that language is as malleable, as mutable, as any substrate.

Sometimes I want to be type; sometimes image; often both, and when possible, more.

What should I do when I'm done being literal?

10

1. André Tribbensee, "IRIT ROGOFF / RETHINKING ART EDUCATION," Youtube, Aug 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVNxZunelBo.

Abrams, Joseph. **A Glossary of Literary Terms**. Boston: Thompson Wadsworth, 2005.

A book that defines and discusses terms, theories, and movements commonly used to analyze and critique works of literature. Graphic design and literature are visual communicative practices centering on the arrangement of symbols. Graphic designers and authors both employ syntactic structures to organize and enhance information, and that information inevitably has denotative and connotative value.

Batchelor, David. **Chromophobia**. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.

Batchelor argues that at the center of Western cultural and intellectual thought is chromophobia — the fear of corruption or contamination through color. Throughout the ages, the West has infantilized, marginalized, ignored, vilified, and exiled color. Like Batchelor, I am chromophilic. If color is a corruption, all the better. As Batchelor writes in the book's final chapter, "Chromophila," corruption is the force through which all art advances.

Broos, Kees, and David Quay. **Wim Crouwel Alphabets**. Amsterdam: BIS, 2003.

A survey of Wim Crouwel's most iconic print and type design projects collected as a series of interviews with Kees Broos. Crouwel displays the same charasmatic candor as in *The Debate*. The work collected in *Alphabets*, however, better exemplifies the exciting, plastic logic behind Crouwel's explorations into the geometric boundaries of legebility.

Couwel, Wim, and Jan van Toorn. **The Debate**. New York: The Monacelli Press, 2015.

Transcript and analysis of a significant moment in graphic design history: the 1972 public debate between Wim Crouwel and Jan Van Toorn. Two historical moments and aesthetic fronts met through these men. Their discussion ranges from obeying constraints, to aesthetics and form-making, to creating identity. Crouwel and Van Toorn typify my personal definitions of "objectivism" and "subjectivism," repsectively.

Elliman, Paul. **Mevis & Van Deursen: Recycled Works 1990-2005**. Amsterdam: Artimo Foundation, 2005.

With Paul Elliman, Armand Mevis and Linda Van Deursen collage together old process work into new compositions. During the process, they reflect on the choices they made during the jobs out of which the material originally evolved. The re-combination of existing material into novel visual content is central to all graphic design practice. Reflecting on their new collages, Mevis and Van Deursen demonstrate how new literal and connotative meaning can be created from the recycling of existing work.

Martens, Karel, Carel Kuitenbrouwer, and Karel Martens. **Karel Martens: Counterprint**. London: Hyphen Press, 2004.

Using metal plates, washers, and other found industrial detritus, Karel Martens has made volumes of uncommissioned artistic explorations into color and form. Recontextualized in Martens's compositions, geometric forms accrue new levels of significance. Through his process, Martens transposes these utilitarian objects into signifiers with added cultural value beyond their original, practical purpose.

McCloud, Scott. **Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art**. New York: Harperperennial, 1994.

A critical analysis of comic arts, which explains how sequential, illustrated narrative use a combination of type and image, and gestalt principles, to encourage a reader to become a proactive participant in the creation of the story. Itself a fully-functional comic book, *Understanding Comics* shows as it tells, and in doing so manages to deliver huge quantities of dense analysis through a plethora of affable voices.

Meckseper, Josephine. **The Josephine Meckseper Catalogue No. 2**. New York: Sternberg Press, 2006.

A conceptual, high-gloss mailer from a dystopian post-consumer near-future. Along with photographs of Meckseper's installations, the catalog contains essays and historical quotes. Josephine Meckseper's vitrine and storefront installations transform mundane commercial space in this world into artifacts from eerie, fictive worlds that refract our own.

Nelson, Maggie. **Bluets**. New York: Waves Books, 2009.

A memoir focused around an exploration of blue — as a color, an emotion, and an obsession. The novella is written as a series of numbered passages. Nelson uses parenthetical notes and italic asides to great effect, and creates with them an undulating emotional tonality for her searching thoughts. Within one central identity (Nelson's), numerous sub-identities emerge. As a character and fellow human, Nelson is multifaceted. Her typography reflects this reality, and communicates it to us, her fellow humans.

Pedraglio, Francesco, Samara Scott and Batia Suter. **A School for Design Fiction Workshop**. Warwickshire: Emmerson Press, 2014.

Research produced at five A School for Design Fiction" workshops. The workbook juxtaposes found photographs with fantastical sculptures, and a work of speculative fiction. Like the logic with the essay itself, the rationale behind the workbook overall (behind this particular collection of material) never fully materializes. This causal gap creates for the reader narrative space to investigate and fill with their own inferences and associations.

Sacker, Marvin, and Ruth Sacker. **The Art of Typewriting**. New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc. 2015.

A collection of typewriter artwork, featuring a foreward by Steven Heller in which Heller writes about the implications of the typewriter as a mark-making tool. The connotative power of a tool, process, and form is central to a poetical approach to graphic design practice.

Taylor, Brandon. **Modernism, Post-Modernism, Realism: A Critical Perspective for Art**. Winchester, Hampshire: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987.

A dense, critical discussion of the history and ethos behind Modernism, post-Modernism, and Realism. Taylor argues that Modernism and post-Modernism are two sides of the same coin — inverse and obverse aesthetic movements connected by a common psychopathological core. Realism, however, is distinct in that it does not pretend towards universality and, as a result, does not become paralyzed when it encounters something antithetical to itself.

Thomasse, Erwin. **38 Under Par and 11 Holes-in-One**. Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2010.

Collected works by, and essays about, visual artist Erwin Thomasse. In both his 2D graphic work and 3D sculptures, Thomasse gathers objects and experiences from the world around him. He filters this found material through an idiosyncratic sense of humor, and simply re-releases the outcome back into the world from which it came — or, a world adjacent to that from which it came.

Weingart, Wolfgang. **Typography**. Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2000.

A personal typographic manifesto, and collection of letterpress experiments, by master printer Wolfgang Weingart. The result is a more experiential narrative: the book becomes an environment in which the reader can draw their own conclusions from Weingart's typographic experiments, as well as read his interpretations.

My sincerest thanks to my committee.