

COUNTER

FORMATION

COUNTER

FORMATION

FABIAN FOHRER

CONTENTS

P.004

IV WORK INDEX P.159

V ABSTRACT P.179

VI COLOPHON, P.183
END NOTES,
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I APPROACHING P.007
COUNTERFORM
ESSAY

II IN P.061
CONVERSATION
WITH NATE
BROWN

III IN P.107
CONVERSATION
WITH JOE
PEREZ

P.005

APPROACHING COUNTERFORM

P.007

For every “form” (an idea, concept, method, or object) we introduce, inevitably, its complement, the “counterform” appears. “To produce one is to produce the other.”¹

Consider the capital letter “A.” In simple terms, its visual appearance could be described as two slanting lines, the disconnected sides of a triangle, with a horizontal bar in the middle, acting as a bridge. A light version would consist of three thin strokes, a heavier version three thick strokes. Consider what these lines demarcate: A triangle, a trapezoid, and the space that surrounds the letter. These three components are larger in a light version compared to a heavier version.

Form and counterform are perceived as two zones. The counterform has less perceptual saliency and appears as a “mere” background. Both parts do not appear juxtaposed, but rather stratified: there is a tendency to see the form as positioned in front, and the counterform behind, as if occluded by the former. The border separating the two is perceived as belonging to the form rather than the counterform, which delineate the contour.²

Even though the counterform supervenes on the formal, and the two together determine the complete picture, the focus is on the form. An “A” is an “A” is an “A;” reading this letter, we do not perceive triangles and trapezoids. In short, we examine what we have been trained to consider and disregard what appears trivial. What makes the counterform relevant? How might the counterform inform, deform, warp, alter, modify, question, break from, expand, superimpose, transform, morph, conflate, swap with, deconstruct, reconstruct, react to, reveal, or become the form?

“We do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things,” suggests philosopher Michel Foucault.³ In the same way should the work that emerges in my present and future practice not live on its own, isolated from its surrounding. Work that lives in spaces with the quality of being in relation to all

the other spaces, but in a way to question the relations they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.⁴ *Counter-Formation* places emphasis on the region where counterform reasserts itself and allows it to encounter form through counterform with a set of responsive structures.

Responsive Structures

To structure is to establish an ensemble of relations between elements that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off from one another, or implicated by each other, operating in a sort of configuration. Elements inside a structure may be randomly distributed or arranged according to single or to multiple classifications.⁵

Structures commonly evoke the idea of fixed arrangements, awaiting to be adopted by more or less flexible components (one instance might be buildings—the structures, and furniture—their components). Le Corbusier referred to these components as “equipment” and described them as “flexible elements with a capacity for adaptation and change.”⁶ This “equipment,” however, remains separated from the structure. It does not interfere with or influence it.

Combining the adjustable qualities of the equipment with the anatomy of a structure that contains them, leads us to responsive structures: structures that change from within specific parameters.

An example of such responsive structures is a building by the architecture firm Orambra (“Prairie House” in Northfield, Illinois → IMG-003). Also referred to as an example of “parametric architecture,” the building is driven by an interest in using alternative forms of architectural media to transpose

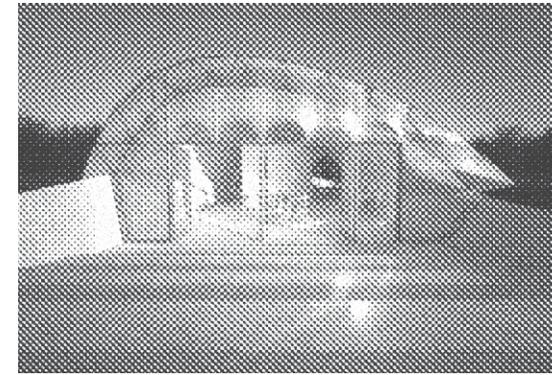
new modes of operation onto standardized building assemblies. Through the use of photo-chromatic inks, the color of the interior membrane becomes lighter on warmer days and darker on colder days.⁷ It reacts to, and lives with, the environment.

The unconsidered structure—in other words, the structure whose form appears too obvious to be actively reconsidered on every encounter—transforms from being supportive to a central component. It creates a relationship between more or less unpredictable influences, design, and the very moment of one’s encounter. It illustrates how an established solution transforms to a responsive suggestion. The conceptual orientation shifts and categorizational contours blur. It is no longer a question of defining the contours, but what escapes them—“the secret movement, the breaking, the torment, the unexpected.”⁸

Blurred Contours

As contours blur, elements exceed their boundaries, rearrange, and establish new contexts. They initiate a moment of counterbalance that allows one to grasp the unposed zone between existent and eventual structure—an unconstructed, liminal area, liberated from a delimiting formula.

Miles Davis and John Coltrane, for instance, are situated within this



IMG-001

zone. A Jazz band finds its basis in a tune or chord sequence of some kind of basic structure.⁹ The execution, however, is subject to each artists’ individual interpretation and improvisation. They follow, but blur the original structure. One band member takes a solo and makes a musical statement, another responds to it. It becomes a conversation. “The given is only the beginning” and the eventual “arrangement [is] subject to change—rearrangement.”¹⁰

Reacting to, instead of simply executing, puts emphasis on the liminal space—the zone between resources, influences, skills, and the “soon-to-be.” In other words: the process. It is no longer a tunnel that one moves through to reach its end, but becomes a free-climbing wall that requires repeated acknowledgment, depending on how previous moves were made. The process becomes a prototype, only defined by an approximate goal, that allows one to speak a yet unknown language. It becomes adaptable to contexts and a representation of a specialized

set of values to interpret something new—facultative from hierarchy and, in some cases, immune to formality.¹¹

Counterform As Resource

A fitting instance of putting emphasis on the process—or rather on the artifacts of the process—is the practice of Los Angeles-based artist Sterling Ruby, whose work spans across a large variety of media, including ceramics, painting, drawing, sculpture, video, collage, and fashion. A material used to cover the floor to create a sculpture may end up in one of his paintings. The forms of a painting may be transferred into a sculpture. Not only does he establish an experimental and innovative approach to recycling by mixing existent or leftover materials, forms, and ideas, but he also breaks hierarchies between intention and reaction.

Ruby's "Soft Sculptures" ↗ IMG-003 — large-scale, three-dimensional, stuffed fabric sculptures in unsettling biomorphic forms, laying on gallery floors or hanging from ceilings—highlight this break of hierarchies. Made from patterns that often involve the US flag, the works are abstract, reminiscent of deformed, super-sized pillows. The flag, a symbol of unity, is deconstructed and sewn back together to create new, unique compositions. The flag is no longer what it was intended to be, but the result of his way of reacting to the medium. By doing so, he not only interrupts the repetition of a pattern, but also reverses the definition of a sculpture as something that is carved or casted, and traditionally is thought of as a solid artwork.

The scraps of fabric that remain from those artworks, as well, are treated as another resource. They become the source material. "Each time a piece of artwork is finished, a new set of unique one-off garments are made, as a conclusion to the project. As a result, the garments are imbued with the precise treatments as the artworks—from the fabrics that are hand-dyed and hand-treated in Ruby's studio yard, to the exotic enzyme washes researched and sourced from Los Angeles' rich garment production industry."¹²

Ruby approaches those garments as workwear—pieces that he and his studio team wear to work on new artworks. The description of a recent exhibition put it this way:

"A sense of recycling and breaking down utilitarian versus aesthetic hierarchies has evolved in the artist's studio. Collages become quilts, quilts become soft sculptures, and sculptures become clothes."¹³

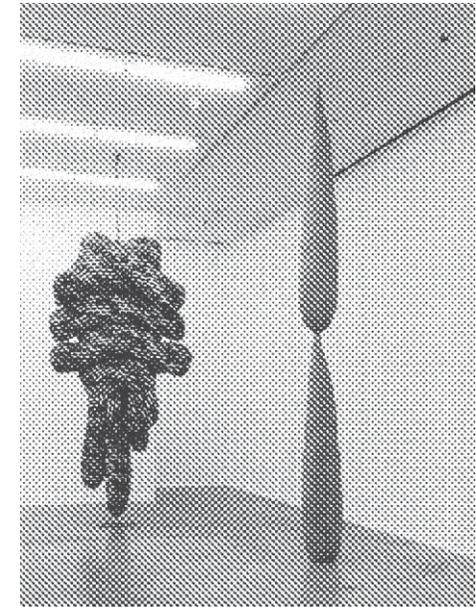
After creating numerous variations of workwear pieces over the years, he launched his own fashion line in 2019 ↗ IMG-002. One of his signature textures—bleached fabric—that previously appeared in sculptures, paintings, quilts, mixed media, and as textures in collections of fashion designer Raf Simons as well as backdrops in one of his stores—is now a key element of his first collection, blurring the distinctions between fine arts, fashion, workwear, up- and recycling. Similarly, many of his ceramic works contain pieces of previous sculptures ↗ IMG-004. Pieces that were damaged during the process and stored somewhere in his studio are being reclaimed as an ingredient for new work. Sooner or later, counterform reintegrates itself as form.

Counterform
As Framework

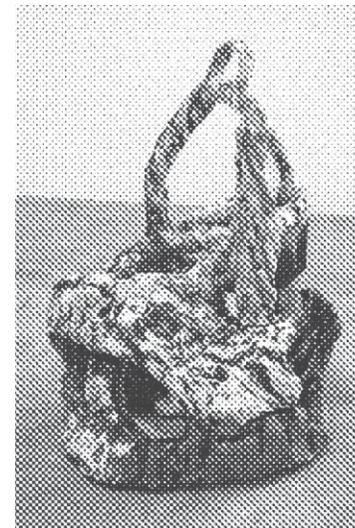
Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry—two architects known for their radical deconstructionist and suspenseful designs—actively utilize counterform. Gehry's design process is led by intuition and contradiction. Gehry frequently approaches buildings not as conventional buildings, but as different mediums—often as sculptures. He eliminates the expectations of what shape a building should assume.



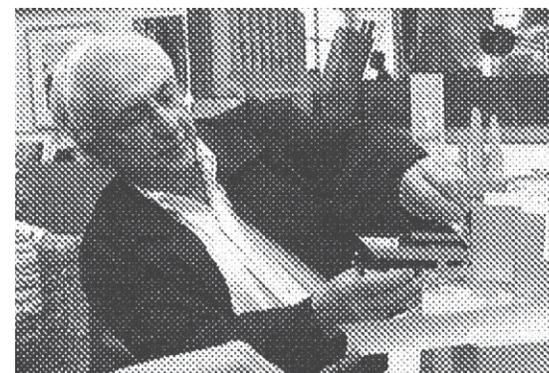
IMG-002



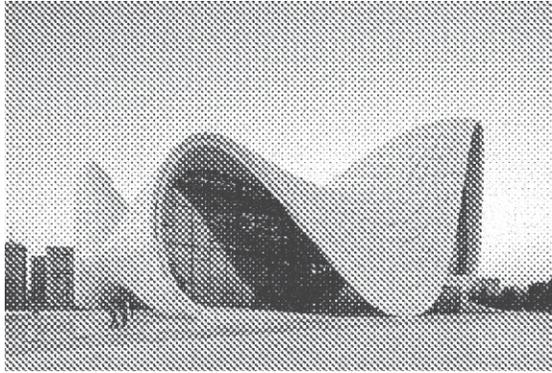
IMG-003



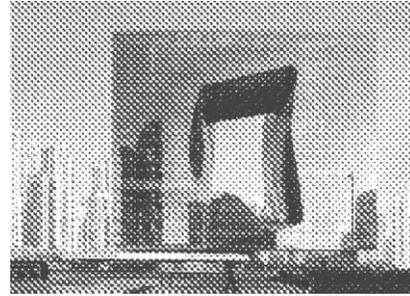
IMG-004



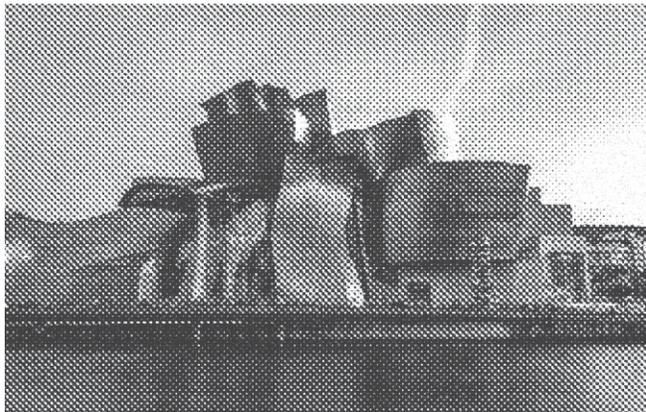
IMG-005



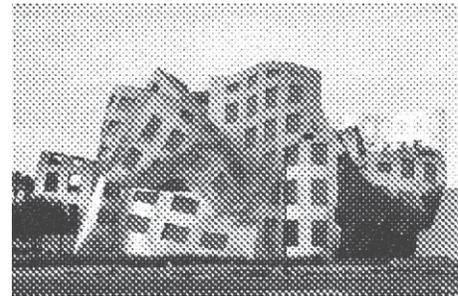
IMG-006



IMG-007



IMG-008



IMG-009

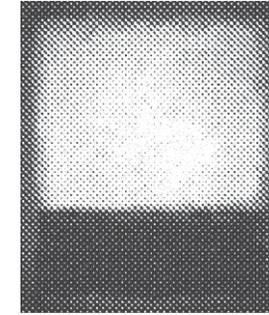
A scene in “Sketches of Frank Gehry,” a documentary film directed by Sydney Pollack, shows Gehry and his partner working on a new building which suggests a casual experimental art class in high school, rather than the studio environment of one of the most successful architects of this century ↗ IMG-005. The duo cuts and folds silver paper and tape scraps onto their model. After a quick analysis, Gehry decides that odd shapes work well, and adds more of them. By the end of the scene, the model might be described as a “coincidence” or “accident,” rather than a “plan.” There are elements of inappropriation, unease, and confusion that make Gehry’s work so intriguing—

not only during the process, but also the final buildings, that challenge the conventions of architecture.

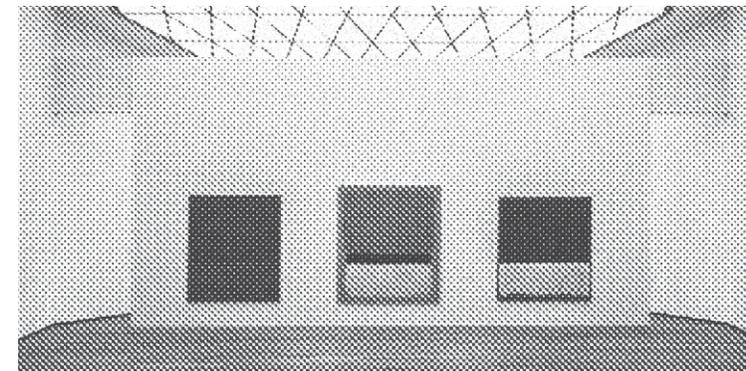
Hadid’s work, once described as “soft matter,” a term referring to a state between liquid and solid,¹⁴ challenges the logic of physics and occupies the space between those two states. The traditional definition of a building gets distorted. Something associated with strong and substantial structures adopts new meanings. Hadid utilizes generally invisible elements—gravity and physics—warps them and visually translates them into a building. The facade of the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan ↗ IMG-006, for example, appears to



IMG-010



IMG-011



IMG-012

be melting. Other buildings juxtapose geometric structures with organic counterspaces—such as the Opus Hotel in Dubai, United Arab Emirates ↗ IMG-007.

Gehry, too, reverses, juxtaposes, and flips things on its head. Think of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain ↗ IMG-008 with its facade consisting of edgy, but organically intertwined, shiny metal panels; or the Lou Ruvo Center in Las Vegas, Nevada ↗ IMG-009 that appears to be slowly collapsing.

Counterform
As Expansion

The work of Mark Rothko ↗ IMG-010, who rarely explained the meaning behind his paintings, especially the paintings created in his late period, plays with the dissolution of boundaries. “Multiforms” became his signature style ↗ IMG-011 and are described as “narrowly separated blocks of color [that] hover against a colored ground.”¹⁵ Edges are soft and irregular, so that when Rothko uses closely related tones they sometimes seem to barely emerge from the ground. Other colors appear to vibrate, creating an optical flicker.¹⁶

P.016

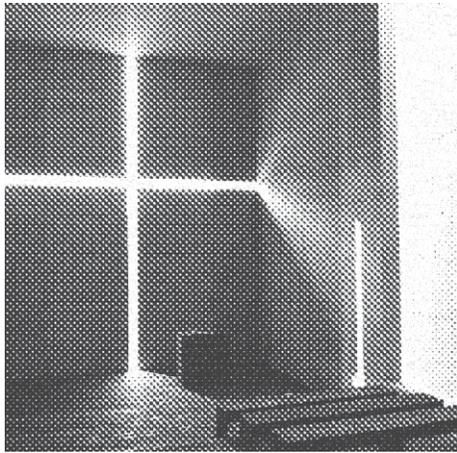
RESPONSIVE

STRUCTURES

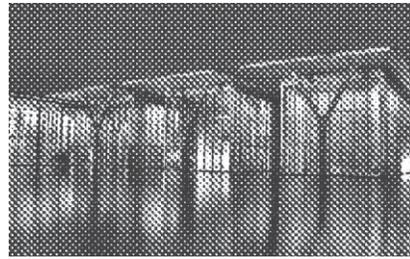
BLURRED

CONTOURS

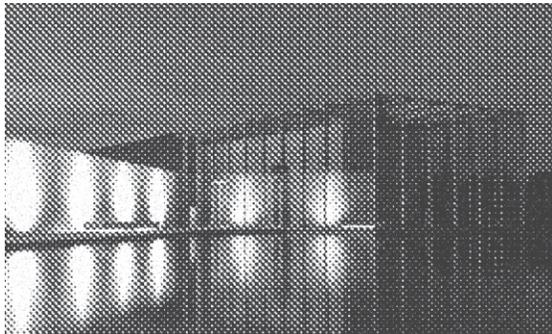
P.017



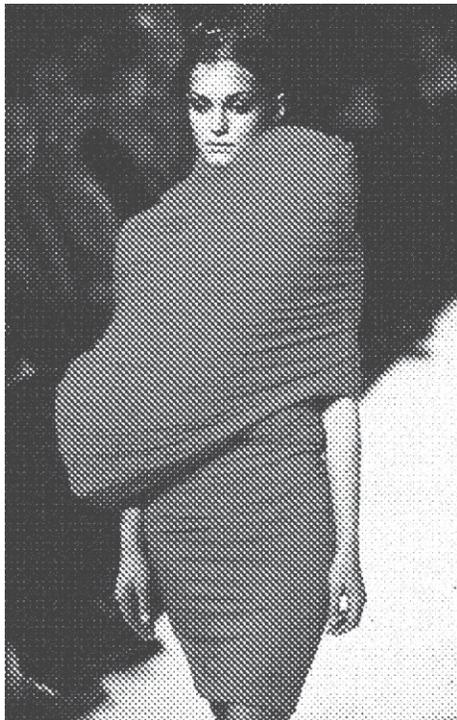
IMG-013



IMG-014



IMG-015



IMG-016



IMG-017

The colored grounds act as a zone that blurs with, or intensifies “the floating zones of color.”¹⁷ Shapes merge into the ground, and the ground merges with the environment—partly due to his rejection to frame his paintings so as not to give them limits.¹⁸ The sense of boundlessness in Rothko’s paintings¹⁹ allows the ground to build a bridge between form and viewer—between the interior and the exterior; between the abstracted expression of the artist’s notion of reality and the viewer’s reality ↗ IMG-012. The counterform eliminates the obstacles between Rothko and the idea and the observer²⁰ and allows the form to expand, hover out of the plane, pulsate, and create energy. It bleeds from one field into another, making it difficult as a viewer to truly say which field has been superimposed on the other.²¹ William S. Rubin, former chief curator of painting and sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, described them as forms that seem to “dematerialize into pure light.”²²

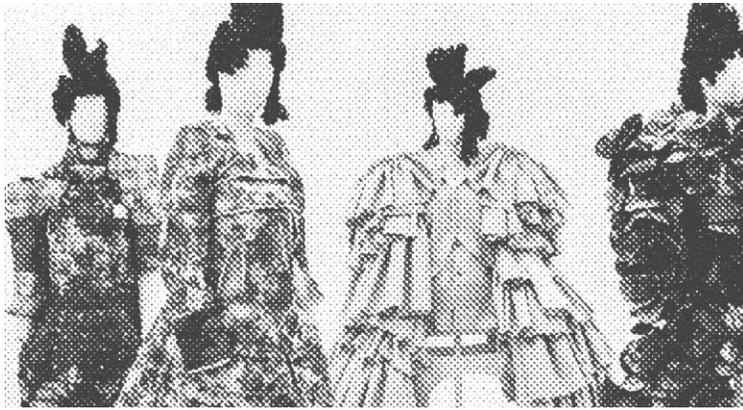
Counterform As Element

Light plays an important role in the work of Japanese architect Tadao Ando, which springs from the subconscious. Intersecting light and silence create awareness of the “nothingness”—a void that is a central element in many of his buildings. Simple geometry, carefully casted concrete walls, solids and voids, light and darkness are key features of his interior and exterior.²³

One of his signature architectural works that embraces his philosophical framework between nature and architecture through the way in which light can define and create new spatial perceptions, is the Church of the Light outside of Osaka, Japan ↗ IMG-013. The building is an architecture of duality—of solid and void, of light and dark, of stark and serene, of form and counterform.²⁴ Unlike traditional motifs and aesthetics of churches, it is absent from ornament. Instead, pure space, light, and perception serve as “ornament.”

Through the use of light as an element and pattern, many of Ando’s works have surreal effects that change one’s encounter and perception of materiality and space. “In all my works, light is an important controlling factor,” says Ando. “I create enclosed spaces mainly by means of thick concrete walls. The primary reason is to create a place for the individual, a zone for oneself within society. When the external factors of a city’s environment require the wall to be without openings, the interior must be especially full and satisfying.”²⁵

In other works, such as the Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas ↗ IMG-014 or the Langen Foundation in Neuss, Germany ↗ IMG-015, Ando utilizes areas of water that surround them as an element to reflect light and contribute animation. At night, this effect allows the buildings to glow from within.²⁶ The counterform allows the form to stand out.



IMG-018

Counterform As Expression

Comme des Garçons designer Rei Kawakubo creates pieces that are more than merely a “second skin.” Her clothing embodies individuality, closely allied to ambiguous and evocative meaning.²⁷ The color black, the theme of deconstruction, and human versus not-quite-human quickly became synonyms to Kawakubo after presenting her first collections ↗ IMG-016.

Her “objects for the body”²⁸ move away from the silhouette of the human body. Instead they act as a device to transform and distort it, pushing them into abstract realms. They are visual hybrids between clothing and sculpture, assumptions of the body and abstraction, the familiar and a radical exploration of the unknown.

In her earlier collections the absence of color was omnipresent. Shades of black as the color palette expressed individuality through uniformity ↗ IMG-017. Yohji Yamamoto,

Kawakubo’s former partner, described the concept of the uniform as a democratic device, that becomes by the way it is worn, the wearer’s own statement. Yamamoto’s work, too, relies on the repetitive use of black and untailed garments that obliterate any notion of glamour, status, or sexuality.²⁹

A Met Fifth Avenue exhibition, entitled “Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between,” reflected on Kawakubo’s approach of blurring the boundaries between body and fashion through juxtaposition and hybridity ↗ IMG-018. The display itself was presented as an artistic intervention, organized in eight overarching themes: present/absence, design/not design, fashion/anti-fashion, model/multiple, high/low, then/now, self/other, object/subject, and clothes/not clothes. It illustrated her revolutionary experiments of the in-betweenness and the way she gave form to the counterform by creating paradoxical anti-fashion, through which she reinvented herself and fashion every season.³⁰

Nearing Counterform

To illustrate and contextualize the counterform in my practice, I illuminate the conceptual ideas of several case studies as they share similar ideals. In each instance, the focus does not lie on particular forms but on their counterformative processes. One might respond to and fuse with a personal “archive” that includes previous work as a resource—such as in the practice of Sterling Ruby, or Rei Kawakubo who designs garments from an alternative point of view. Similarly in the work of Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry, they adopt a provisional method of working that challenges formal closure. A variable platform is influenced by the environment—like the paintings of Mark Rothko and the buildings of Tadao Ando. In response to current culture, new thought paths arise. The dynamic is innately malleable. By incorporating approximate relations into the archive and allowing for connections and alterations between form and counterform, contemporary work emerges. Sometimes a relation may be obvious, but occasionally it may seem arcane, random, and as if defying control. Eventually, however, it will become part of a living archive. I think of these relations as “interrelated elements [placed] together in a field,” to recall the words of Michel Foucault.³¹ Drawing connections, juxtaposing things, and bringing themes together is important, even if they are only related on a secondary or tertiary level.

My artistic understanding used to be informed by a point of view based on how things were right in front of me, followed by my reactions. I rarely escaped the boundaries of my perception because I did not perceive any as such. Now I realize those situations offered “possible scenarios of alternative kinds of [...] relations,” as Hal Foster states.³² My practice begins to shift away from an “excavation site” model of the archive—a site that I used to source from—to a “construction site”—a site that allows me to openly build upon.³³ From the perspective of design, it assumes that the fragments within the archive act “as a condition, not only to represent but to work through. [It allows me to propose] new orders of [...] association” and the possibility for “narrative ‘asides’.”³⁴

By approaching the unseen space of the counterform as a field of possibility, I open to the potential relations between the form and counterform and also of counterform as a unique lens on unbounded contexts for design. My ambition is not to answer the question of what lies in-between, but to create awareness that supports an unveiling of unforeseen contexts and craft new narratives that break from a simple binary play between them. Because “there does not exist a linear, static middle separating these two conditions.”³⁵

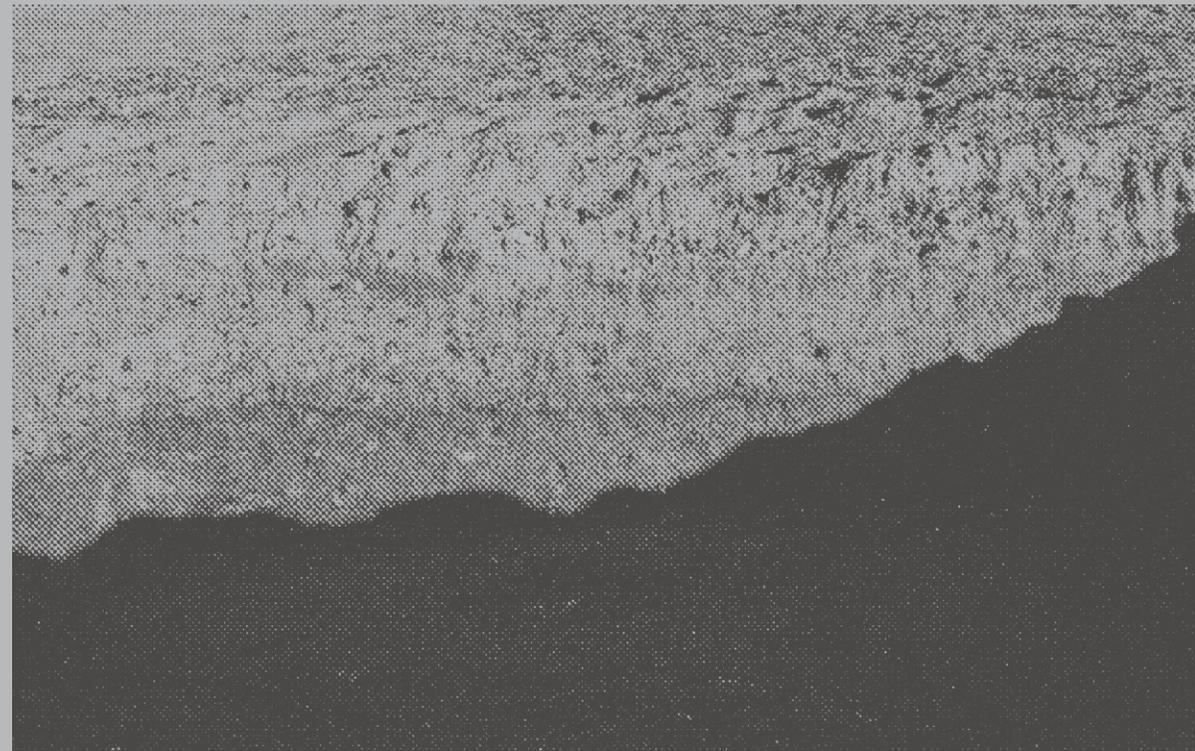
Counter-Formation intends is to establish a foundation that allows me to envision a more accurate shape and field of interrelations that are not only receptive (not passive reflectors), but appropriative and elaborative,³⁶ informed by a point of view that exists by evaluating form, reflecting interpretatively, and absorbing it through the lens of counterform. In other words: absorbing a formation through the lens of a counter-formation. It allows me to perceive from the outside in and put the spotlight on forms from different angles or not yet considered perspectives and organize or break them in a different fashion. By doing so and by incorporating the within, between, and around, my practice transforms into a responsive structure—a blank canvas with a variable format that enables to deconstruct essential components, reconstruct, question, and iterate, without simply imbuing them with formal values.



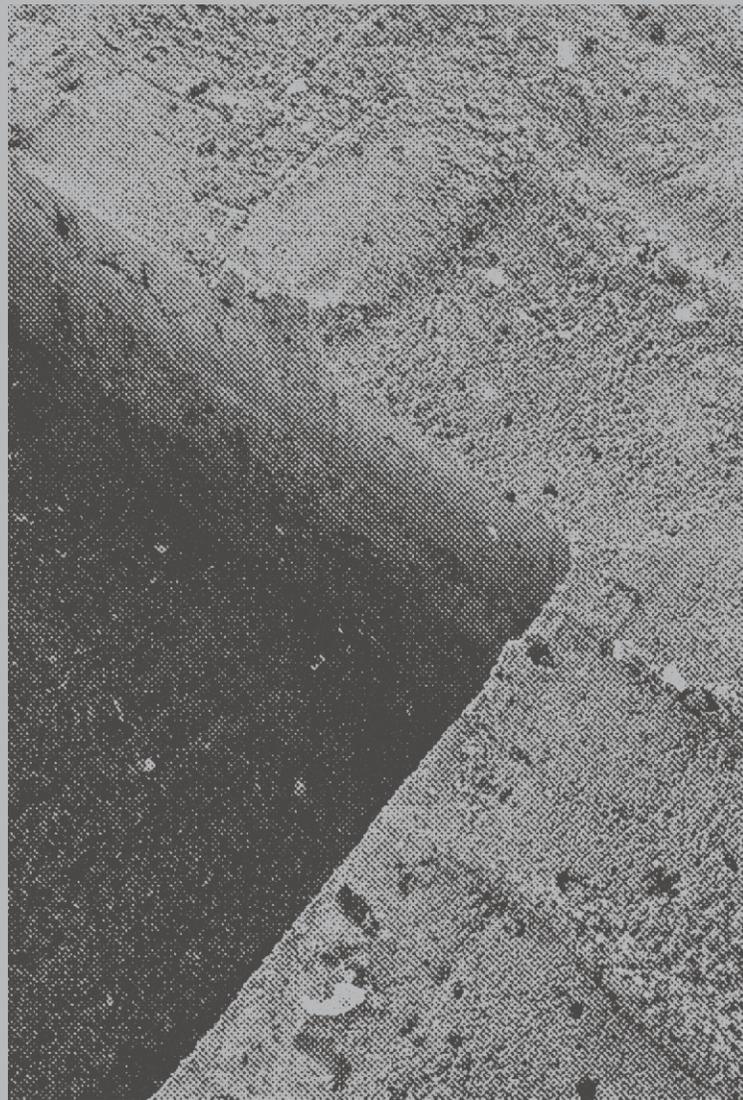
PR01-001



PR01-002



PR01-003



PR01-004



PR01-005

PR01-006 →



REDEFINED

MEDIUMS

P.031

P.030

FLATTENED

HIERARCHIES



PR01-007



PR01-008



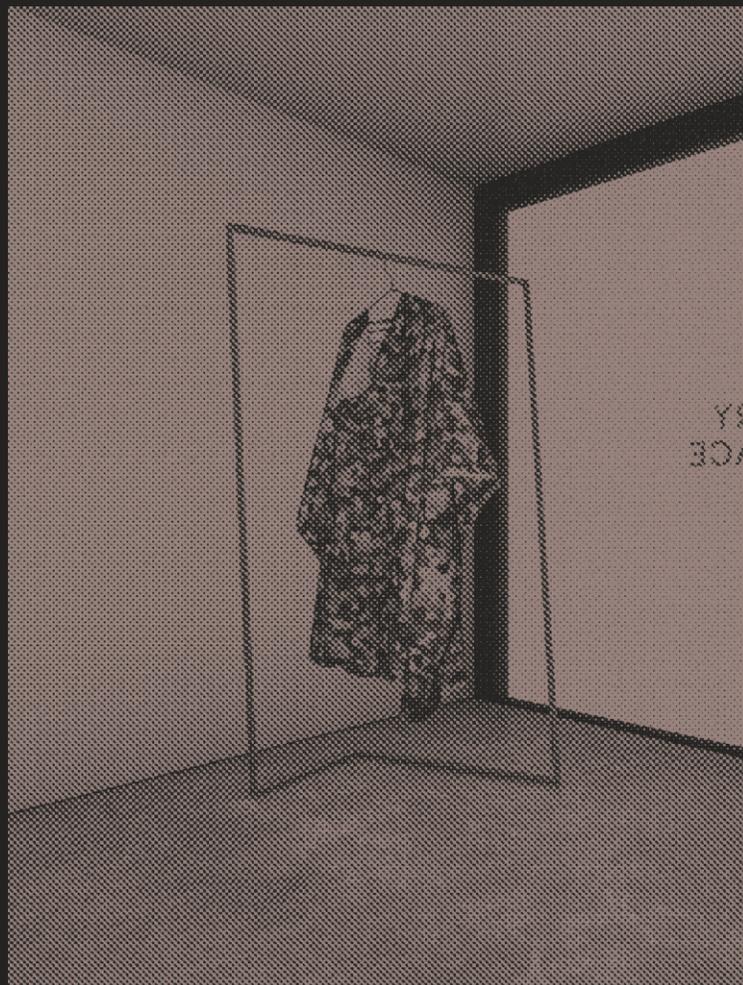
PR01-009

CIRCA

PR02-001



PR02-002



PR02-003

PR02-004 →



APPROXIMATE

ALTERED

INTERRELATIONS

PERSPECTIVES

P.040

P.041

CIRCA
Pop-Up Gallery
and Social Space

1

Documentation

CIRCA
Pop-Up Gallery
and Social Space

2

Documentation

PR02-005

P . 042

P . 043

**A
B
O
U
T**

CIRCA is an itinerant pop-up gallery and social space, periodically showcasing the work of designers and artists in small, temporary exhibitions.

Unlike traditional museums or galleries, CIRCA does not have a permanent location, collection, or identity. Instead, the approach is to work outside the boundaries of typical museum and gallery environments dedicated to and driven by the art market and often located in gentrified areas, not regularly available to less privileged groups.

By creating an open and adaptable environment, an exhibition is inclusive, not restrictive, and can be held at multiple locations. CIRCA invites audiences not regularly exposed to or drawn to temporary art and design. Doors may open in a public space, on a parking lot, next to a building, in an old factory, or on a city block. Depending on its location, the narrative and meaning of an exhibition changes.

PR02-006

P . 043

phemeral
ent, the
not
present
IRCA
regularly
con-
gn. Its
blic park,
a beach,
a side-
context,
ing of

C
U
R
A
T
I
O
N

Every curated exhibition is a stage, designed to allow discourse between artists and/or locations, that would have not been established otherwise.

The discourse is informed by utilizing art, design, locations, and artist's backgrounds as central elements for exhibition concepts. Exhibited artworks, installations, sculptures, books, photographs, videos, work in progress, fashion, and so on, question and comment on, show hidden details, or turn something upside down. The pieces do so, either by

themselves, or through juxtaposition with other pieces, artists, or locations.

In contrast to a static museum or gallery, which exhibition spaces are defined by its architecture, the changing locations and potential audiences can be utilized as a second element—passive or active.

The space is a non-gentrified setting, which is clearly communicated through every exhibition. Thus, exhibited pieces are not designated as "holy," but as part of our culture and everyday lives. An exhibited piece of furniture, for instance, should not be un-touchable, but actually usable. A fashion piece should not be hidden behind glass, but worn.

PDY



INTERMEDIATE

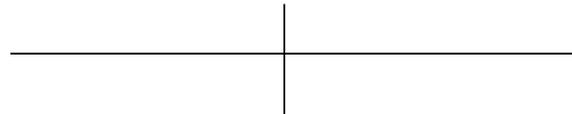
LIMINAL

SPACES



P.049

P.048



EXPLORATIONS



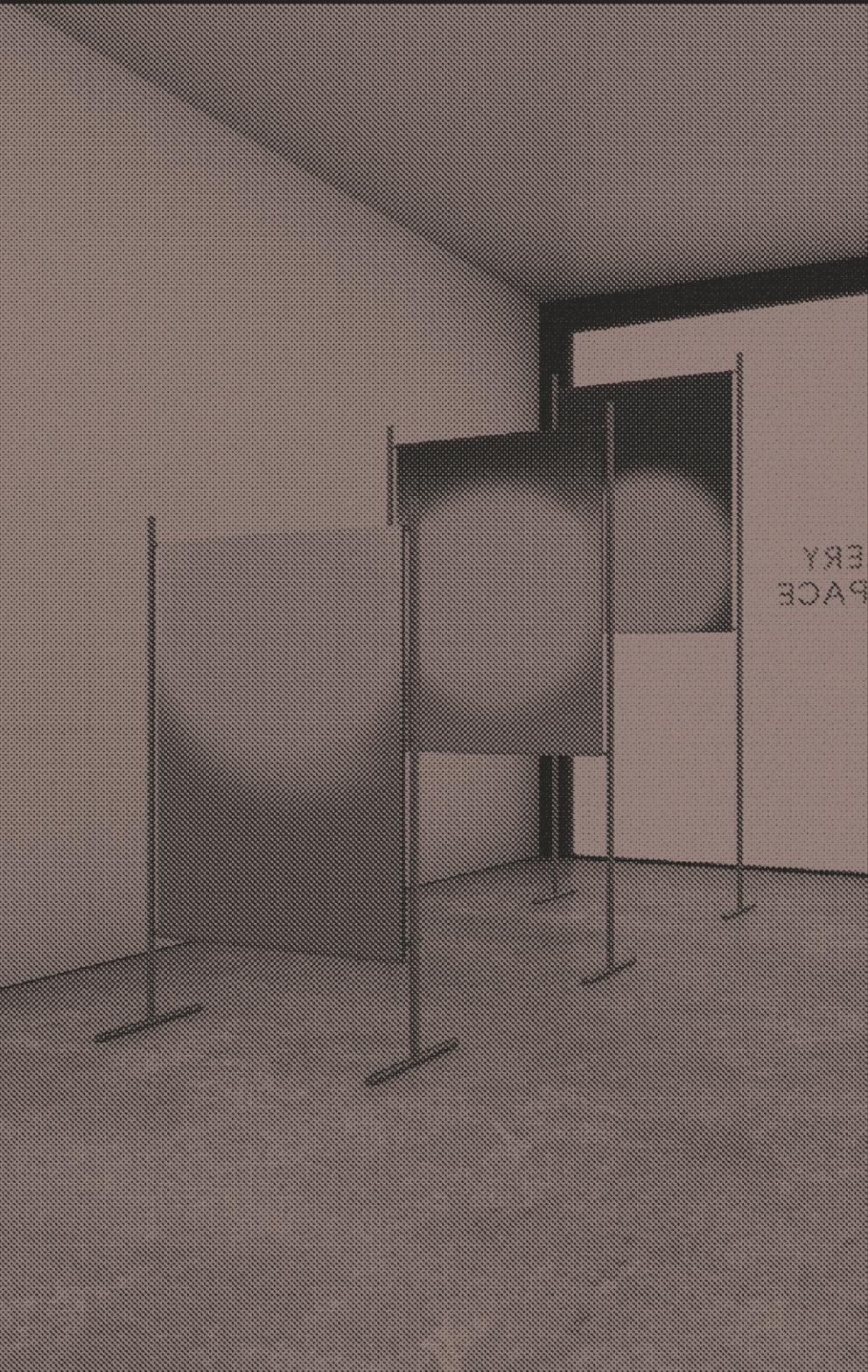
PR02-009



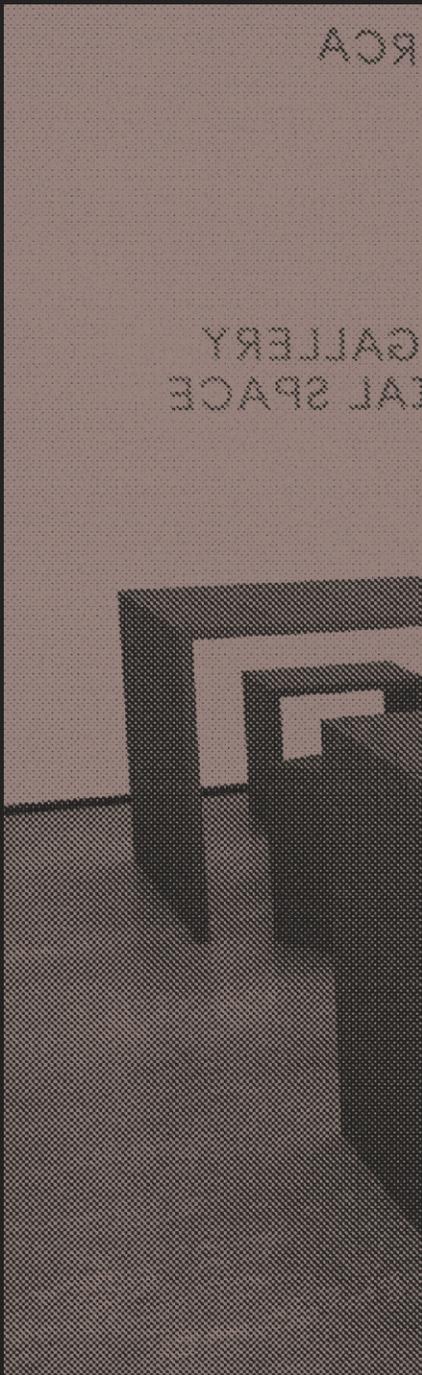
PR02-010



PR02-011



PR02-012



PR02-013



CI

POP-UR
AND SOC

P. 054



PR02-014

P. 055



PR02-015

Temporary
Exhibition?
Local/Global
(Pop-Up)
Workshop
Multimedia
Gallery...

PR02-016

Now On View:
Retrospective
Short-Term [17]
→ Ephemeral
Performance

PR02-017

Pa
Sh
(
M
P

PR02-018

Painting Festival
← Collection
op, Biennial '20
(Area) Culture
Museum [Today]
Impermanent
Poetry 9.45 AM
Urban Space

P. 060

IN CONVERSATION
NATE BROWN

WITH

P. 061

Nate Brown is a creative director based in New York. He established Studio Institute in 2013 after working for some of the most influential individuals in the music, fashion, and entertainment industry, including Kanye West, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Alexander Wang, Jerry Lorenzo, and Louis Vuitton.

You certainly had a unique career path, beginning with work for American Apparel at a young age, followed by Barneys and Donda—all while establishing a studio. The thrust of the entrepreneur seems hard-wired. Can you speak to those early experiences, as well as the impact of particular influences from the fashion, music, and entertainment industry upon your work and philosophy?

First of all, I appreciate that you did all the research. That's great. Sometimes the Internet has a way of telling you one thing. But so far, everything you mentioned actually happened. So that's great.

I think each different experience had its input and impacted various points of my philosophy. Since I began working at such a young age, my ability to need to think quickly was shaped early on. I started to think swiftly. I wouldn't say with haste—I am not thinking inconsiderately, but I was trained to be able to react to things quite fast—one can become agile at a young age. At 16 I moved to New York due to a life situation that forced me to make critical decisions. And you have to become confident in those decisions. I didn't have any formal creative or business schooling—everything that I was doing from a decision perspective was a guesstimate. I was guessing folks. I would guess and I would try and fail until I did it right or until the outcome was what I wanted it to be. So my confidence in decision making was shaped early on and my ability to know what I am looking for and how to react and comment on it.

It seems that you were put in unfamiliar situations regularly. Instead of relying on what you were taught, you were forced to establish your own set of "do's and don'ts." Might this be a powerful engine of exploration though?

Being exploratory in my creativity was something that I learned through the process of not learning. I was not taught by a formal education system on how to think creatively. I had to teach myself through the wonderful people that I was fortunate to be around, who were not knowingly teaching. They were doing their craft, so I had to proactively learn as opposed to passively learn.

Lina Kutsovskaya was the one who brought me into that world. She was the advertising director at Barneys and is now responsible for Fenty and Off-White via a studio called Be Good Studios—which she runs with her husband Nick Haymes (who also runs Little Big Man Gallery) in Los Angeles. She put a lot of trust in me to do various things that I had no idea how to do. I would learn through her and she wouldn't know that she was teaching me. She was just doing her job. And I thought: If she is the advertising director at Barneys, she obviously is the best at her craft.

That still is part of my philosophy. I learned from your work by seeing your Instagram feed. I am being taught by people who don't know they are teaching me, but they are. They always are. That shaped my philosophy of learning. No matter where you are in your career. It allows you to constantly come up with new ideas and that is what makes it fun. Getting too comfortable in your ideas can get quite boring because you start to regurgitate them all the time. Something new can become kind of scary.

What the career teaches you is that it is going to be OK. It takes a long time to learn because when you try something new at an early stage in your career, you are very much afraid of failing and worried that you are going to be washed up against it. This is pretty far from the truth. When you are young in your career, you can do whatever you want. I keep that same mentality now. You don't have to have a style that you are known for. You can constantly shift your craft.

Refreshing your perspective and not sticking to one thing that you already “mastered,” but rather experiencing the whole spectrum, or at least the next facet of it?

Correct. I think the people who were “teaching” me were purveyors of that philosophy as well. The way I work now is the opposite of a perfectionist. Nothing is perfect, right? Many creatives like to sit behind this armor of perfection. You have to move on to the next thing. Sometimes I look at something and think: “That was cool.” But then it is done. Instead of making it perfect, do something else or you make something that you could enjoy in your everyday life.

I learned a lot from Virgil [Abloh] and Kanye [West]. They would always encourage me to just try things. If they work, people quickly respond to them. If you are creating commercial work, the goal is for someone to have a response to it. It needs to speak to a wider audience of people. If people don't have a response to it, you're not doing your work. You are creating art for yourself. Which is—by the way—also fucking awesome. But not if your goal is to create commercial work in the sense of Kanye. He is a pop star. He would hate that I said that, like murder me. Or maybe not because he is a fan of McDonald's and Costco and these things at a really wide-reaching level. And to do that, you have to be in the graces of the people you are speaking to. You have to create things that are enjoyable for them. You are the vessel in which those things are being created.

Experiment a lot, don't necessarily be concerned about the result because you can form it in multiple different ways. Don't be precious or sensitive with your work.

Would you say being too precious with it puts you in a subjective position, in the sense of closing in on it and not allowing for a broader view?

You can have a really hard time if that is the case. Your job is to create work and be creative. If it is a hobby for you, you can be as sensitive as you want. If you are a hobbyist and someone gets mad at you for singing, even though you think you are good at singing, you are allowed to be offended. If you are a professional singer and someone tells you to be better at singing, you should probably be better at singing because your job is to be the best singer out there. So as a creative, my job is to ultimately

be the best creative or business owner that I can be. And, in doing so, I need to be receptive to feedback. That does not mean that I have to agree to it all the time. But it makes a project better.

I was shaped very early on that being sensitive and precious with your work is not the job or responsibility of a commercial creative—I hate that term, by the way. It can be the responsibility of an “art creative” who does not expect to make money off their creativity.

And also: have fun with it! If we are not enjoying our work—if working creatively is labor—it is painful. People always say that artists have to suffer. I totally disagree. We should be having a really good time doing it. If you are a creative you have to have fun doing it. That’s one thing that I tried to bring into the work that we do from a cultural perspective. I wake up every day and I pinch myself because I wonder if this is my job or if someone is going to come in and tell me: “Just kidding. You are an accountant.”

It is hard sometimes, but hard and fun don’t have to be opposites. If an idea does not work, move on. If something is not working, it is not going to suddenly work. Just move on to something else. Maybe the idea was not good and the world never needs to see it. I am not saying to give up easily, but if the battle is being lost, then try different about it. Go battle something else. You don’t need to fight yourself to make something work. That is how we approach things in our studio environment.

And sometimes things work well or you get inspired by something that you want to continue following. Were there key moments when you thought, “I’ve never worked on something like that before but it’s great” or “That’s what I want to do for the rest of my life?”

I don’t think there was a pivotal moment, but I remember the photo shoot editorial in the first fashion magazine I ever saw by either Peter Lindbergh or Steven Klein or Mart and Marcus or Craig McDine. I was ten years old and remember being like: Wow, first, these people are beautiful and second, the colors are so crazy. And if it’s the colors, it was Steven Klein or Craig McDean. Both of

them had such unique perspectives on color at the time. It must have been around ’99.

Another significant moment was when I was on set shooting some sort of fashion advertisement. I remember looking back at the set when I thought: “This is cool! I like controlling an environment or creating something.” Now that sensation is repeated every single day. Every time I am disheartened or demotivated, I remind myself that it is crazy to have calls with all these people. I just got off a call with one of our brands. We’ve been on calls all day. Some of this can get kind of boring because you want to get to the fun stuff, but this is the fun stuff. We are building. It is hard to step back and see it objectively when you are in it all the time and you are doing these seemingly mundane tasks.

Kevin Systrom, who started Instagram, has a quote that I always think about because it is annoying for creatives to hear: “Do the smallest possible thing.” Sometimes you think you have to have big visions for the future or for what your life or work is supposed to be. It can be very debilitating or paralyzing to think too big because you don’t know how to get there. You don’t just go from zero to one hundred. You go from zero to one, to two, to three. And if you grow that exponentially, you go from one to two, to four, to eight. So even when we are doing seemingly small stuff, it is amounting to the big. You don’t do one big thing. All the small things make up the big thing. It is a multitude of different things.

I don’t think one has ever done a project that impacted the world as a whole immediately. I don’t think it exists. You can impact scale. You can impact a lot of people or you can impact a small number of people. And one is not better than the other. Take Tesla’s rocket launch, which is a culmination of decades—a lifetime for Elon Musk. We just saw one thing that obviously impacted the world as a whole, but this one thing would not have existed without multiple steps involved. The same applies when you build a tour for an artist. It is a combination of all of these tiny mechanisms that have to move seamlessly in order to make up the show day.

Is this "small steps forward" methodology, which requires both an open mind and the ability to change direction, the leading force in your studio environment? Is that what you mean with "there is no agenda behind our projects"—a quote I pulled from your studio website?

Actually, it means that we try to create effort without our personal gain in mind. We are not the celebrity behind the project. We are creating a project to better the mission and purpose of whatever that project is intended to do—no matter if it is a brand, an artist, an individual, a cause.

One thing I have learned throughout the past few years is that creativity is cool, aesthetic is cool, but it means nothing if the purpose or the message behind what is being created does not exist. In the fashion world, you did not think about that because you would just reference. You would find a reference and apply it to a brand, to a photo shoot, or an editorial. You would not ask yourself if there is a message behind it. So we try to look at our work through the lens of what it is saying from a purpose perspective before we layer on the creativity. Creativity is the easy part, the fun part. The challenge is to ensure that a message means something to people and that it is aligned with what we think the world needs. And if the brand is not, we try to at least steer it in a direction of what it should be doing best. It makes it purposeful, which is quite fun.

So your—I would call it—"project framework" is primarily based on creating a meaningful purpose and message before taking the next step.

Yes. It is not so much about the aesthetics. You know, to get the palette of color, to research the type, to type-set is a very specific skill and I am fortunate to work with incredible people. My job is to say how to take that utility and ensure that it is matched with the utility of the brand so that both come together to create something really powerful.

[Nate picks up a cup next to his computer] This cup, for example, is made by a woman's collective in Oaxaca, Mexico, called Ten Fifty. Every single one of them is

handmade—I wish you could touch it, it is so beautifully crafted. If we were to make a brand around these, the mission is there.

[Nate picks up a green-ish plastic bottle, also next to his computer] Now, if we were to make a brand around this plastic bottle—which is ugly, by the way, it is this weird green color, like a dead olive or something—we can make it look cool, put branding on it, make a website, and do photo shoots. But will we be building a brand that has a strong purpose? I don't think so. So I am in this boat [points to the handmade cup]. We want to ensure that the creatives we are working with are attached to projects that have real intention and purpose.

How do you—as a creative director—select those creatives; in other words, your collaborators? How would you, for instance, put together a team to establish a brand for the handmade cups?

We have a couple of people in-house that we work with and each team is built specifically for a project. I would get inspired by creatives that I see out in the world. I actually use Instagram a lot for this because I think it is such a powerful tool. If I like someone's work, I would relentlessly hit them up until they tell me either to fuck off or agree to work on a project. And hopefully, they want to work on a project.

All creative projects that we do start with a strategy: Why are we doing this? What are we doing this for? Is there a real commercial market for it? We want to make sure that the work that we are putting our time and effort into is being seen by many people. I think there is something quite enjoyable about making work for a lot of people to enjoy it. Think about Apple. Think about the New York Yankees. Think about these brands that are so big in pop culture. That is fun to do. I am not saying that we always do that or that we are always successful, but we try at least to put it in the outlines.

Then we bring in creatives and designers. My goal is not to work with the best designers in the world, but to find the next best designer. If I go after a titan in the design

AMPLIFIED

P.071

DECONSTRUCTED

P.070

COMPLEXITY

MINIMALISM

world, I know they are going to be bored and that they are not going to give me much of their time. And they are going to charge a ton. It is important to make sure the teams work well together because we are building the future of all of these brands. When you are engaging in a project with us, we are truly approaching it as “the next brand,” which could be the next Nike, right? It does not always happen, but the possibility should always be that a brand could become the most groundbreaking, world-changing brand. And now let’s think of the tiny little steps that we need to take to get there.

Selecting a team is always the fun part of the process because you can work with so many unique creatives in so many different ways—copywriters, illustrators, and so on.

Within the dynamics of a team, how do you address the issue of hierarchy? Is there a strict hierarchy in your studio?

No. It is very collective, very comfortable. There are roles though. In our studio, there is a marketing director, an industrial designer, design interns, and so on. There are people of various skill sets, but everybody has a voice. I am not saying that everyone gets final say because someone has to make a decision at the end of the day, but we have open conversations and everyone is excited about the products they work on because they know that they can help shape it. If someone comes up with a better idea than me—cool, let’s do that. Hopefully, everyone around me has better ideas than I do.

I imagine you address team building similarly on in-house projects. I have seen you are about to launch a new Mezcal brand ↗ IMG-019...

...which is going to be launched in June, hopefully.

So this is one of your “in-house” projects?

We have a unique structure at the studio where we participate in client projects. We call them partners. And then we have our own projects that we develop through the studio that we are a stakeholder in.



IMG-019

What other projects are you currently working on beyond the Mezcal brand and this project called “Condition.World” which I discovered through your Instagram?

Condition.World is actually turning into a television show. It is not the same platform that it was before. It was a wellness platform and is now going to be a wellness series.

We have two cannabis brands that we are developing, the Mezcal brand, and an outdoor brand which is sort of slowly being developed. But we make sure that nothing is competitive with each other.

How do you plan and navigate through those very different projects?

You have to become really good at schedules.

One thing that I do miss is the freedom to just think whenever you want to think. You start to lose a little bit of that when the day is so structured with many projects. You have to be very good at turning one side of your brain off and one side on—almost as a skill set. It is hard to develop that because as a creative you get frustrated when you can not think fluidly and that always happens.

If I am, for instance, inspired by a color but currently working on a creative brief for something different, I just take a photo of it. So you get really good at sectioning off the

way that you think. And then you are also running a business. Everything has to be very regimented.

It seems, in order to allow freedom—creative freedom or just free time—you are required to be well structured throughout. Now, you've worked and still work with some of the most influential artists and fashion houses. How much freedom do you have working for and with those artists who perhaps have a precisely structured day as well and a great sense of creative direction and a clear vision of what values they want to project?

Freedom is an interesting word. I don't think that freedom and decision making are separate from each other. Decision making is gathering information and using that information to create either an argument or to agree. You always have the freedom to choose which path you want to take. Do I want to agree or do I want to disagree? If you want to disagree, you have to have a good reason why your disagreement benefits the project. And if you don't, don't disagree because that means you don't have a case. It is very systematic. That took me a long time to learn, even now. Because you want to make impulse decisions. But it does not work that way.

When you are working with someone who is high octane in the public eye and everything they do is criticized by the general public—which, by the way, can become a really, really harsh criticism—you realize the humanity of it all is that people can be highly critical by nature. It is hard enough when one person is telling you that they don't like something that you do. Imagine millions of people telling you that. It can be mentally disturbing. At the end of the day, you have to make sure your decisions—even if they are crazy skyjacker ideas—are made through a smart enough, calculated lens and that you are considering those things.

To answer your question more directly: A lot of freedom. As long as your arguments are sound. And sometimes you just lose them because artists have huge egos. Like, duh, if you are a superstar from childbirth you are supposed to have an ego. People get confused about that. I get an ego when I get a bunch of likes on Instagram.

So imagine if this is multiplied by a hundred million people. Of course, you have a great ego. So sometimes you lose the argument just because you are, which is fine. Sometimes the project works and sometimes it does not.

Fortunately—going back to learning at a very early age—I will push my ideas through. In particular ones for which I've built a strong conviction. If I like something, I have no problem bringing it to one of these artists and telling them “we should do this!” Sometimes they respond with: “OK, let's go,” sometimes they don't like it. If you want to argue at that point—trust me—it is going to hurt your career, the vibe, the album, the music—it all works together. Sometimes they don't like it or don't want to do it. It happens a lot. Cool. Next idea. You are an idea factory, essentially—like the Costco of ideas.

I believe those experiences help to sharpen your sense of decision making and in turn support creative freedom.

Talking about experiences, in an interview you described your work as experiences. I remember when I was younger I always watched Apple's product releases. Probably not because I was interested in buying the latest products—or maybe I was, but couldn't afford them—but because of how Steve Jobs made his vision so experienceable.

In the same interview you mentioned, that “fashion is not only about fashion but about the experience,” which I found quite interesting since I can see a connection here. Does that play an important role in your work—thinking about the surrounding, the emotional component, how things are packaged?

I think that the term experience got shifted into this thing of having to be multi-sensory and a big show. So as I've matured into hearing the statement “fashion is an experience,” I think that everything is an experience. Our job is to make experiences—to make things that can help people experience something because that is the joy of life—to experience things. We are always experiencing something at some time. Some things amplify, some things dampen, some things shift, some things focus, some things defocus, some things escape. Everything is part of the

experience in some capacity. And I believe the job of a creative is to help enable that experience.

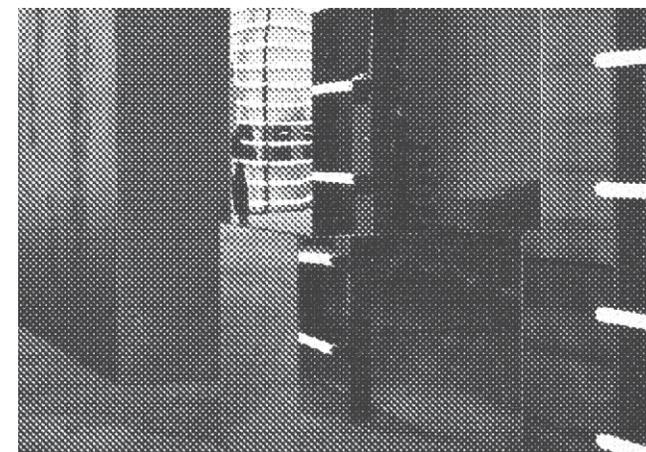
For five years experience meant to brand a pop-up shop and put a bunch of different things on the walls for people to take photos of. That is a form of experience. Was that the best manifestation of how brands create experiences? I think it was just a wagon people jumped on, we jumped on it for a bit. But now I look at experiences in terms of: What does this experience say to the consumer? What does this product do to help amplify the experience? Through the lens of a brand or an artist, how true is it to the experience that you are creating? How are you amplifying the music or the connection an artist can have or the entertainment value an artist can bring to a table? Artistry is such a fantastic form of being able to bring entertainment. That is Disney, Pixar. It is entertaining, even if it is a sad movie. Even "Up" is entertaining because you are feeling those emotions. You want to feel emotions through things.

Like an Apple keynote.

Yes. The keynotes are exciting because there is a thrill when you are watching it. You know you are participating in something that the whole world is participating in.

Just like the Olympics. What makes the Olympic arena so much crazier than a standard arena? It is the fact that you are one member of the entire population watching. The human experience is shared, the multicultural experience is shared. The stakes are higher. Everything is elevated. And because of that, it is exhilarating. It is emotional. It is a human moment where all of us as different races, different ethnicities, and different walks of life come together and perform sports, which is the ultimate experience. But what makes that experience different from watching a pickup game on the West 4th Street basketball court, which is also great, but a different kind of experience?

So an added experience, even if the experience itself is somewhat passively linked to it, evaluates something from being ordinary—on the examples of Apple and the



IMG-020



IMG-021

Olympics from a product or a sport—to something emotional and memorable.

Is this idea of indirectly connecting one with another something you can relate to in your work, too? After looking at your projects I have the feeling that many of them are not one or another. You know, a fashion show reminds one of a slick contemporary art installation, a retail store of a fashion show ↗ IMG-020 & IMG-021. Do you think it is important to connect and to blur those lines between fashion, art, the experience of it, and so on, in order to innovate and boost their value?

We see art in different ways that we did not see before. People that were originally closed off to knowing about it are not anymore. When you are not closed off to it, you get people pissed off because there are people who are zealots and don't need to discover it, don't need to go through the due process that everyone else has to go through. And then some people are of the mindset that art has been democratized or at least the accessibility of art. A young retail merchandiser can do a window inspired by Rothko or Eva Hesse. That relationship would not have existed without the Internet, without Tumblr, which ultimately defined all of us as creatives. I was not in a bookstore looking at books. I found a cool photo while scrolling through Tumblr. And because I am thirsty to learn, I would reverse image search and find out about Banks Violette. Now I am a fan of Banks Violette through whom

I discover other artists. You go through these black holes. Lines get very much blurred. And because they are blurred they allow for art to exist in multiple different formats that never existed before. In multiple different levels of commerciality that never existed before as well.

That brings me to the “Work from Home” project you launched, which quite literally blurs the lines between the various disciplines and locations of this fascinating group of individuals.

Exactly. It is a utility and a place for people to come together because we are not in a situation where you can walk down the street and see your friend anymore. And because of that, you open up this whole new form of communication, which existed before, but was not used the right way because we are just scrolling and sliding into DMs.

Now we realize that we can engage with and work with people and create connections in a digital perspective that do not have to be looked at as a taboo. Online and real-life are the same thing. We are still trying to figure out the tools to make this connection feel real though. I mean, we are having a very real conversation now. We are not in the same room today, but it does not matter. We are having the same conversation. This is sort of the future of how people are ultimately going to be socializing. We still have the needs of humans and all the good stuff. This is not new. It existed for a long time. People would not use AOL chat rooms for real purposes because they were just a secondary or tertiary part of their lives. But this is our primary part of life right now. When something becomes a primary part of someone’s life, they take it seriously. They need to make these connections real because this is life now. You know?

What made you come up with this Slack channel that you managed to put together over the course of just a few days?

Well, I didn’t really do much. I just posted it on my Instagram. I didn’t think anyone was going to take it seriously, nor that I would take it seriously. I started it because I didn’t want to go through the next four weeks of being

bored. Not that I am bored. I like to bring people together. That’s part of the experience I care about. I like to create live shows for people; I like to create brands; I like to create things that can have people come together. And all I do is light a match, and be like: “You guys talk now.” I am very good at that. But once the conversation dies, I am always like: “Fuck, I don’t know what else to say.”

But I know that I can make those connections for people. With the “Work from Home” project, I saw the ability for a lot of cool, young creatives to do exactly that. What if we just put the guard down for a second? We don’t have the likes, we don’t know how many followers we have, we don’t know if we have a blue check or not. It doesn’t matter. I don’t know half the people in there. I have never even checked them on Instagram. I don’t want to. We have all these preconceived notions that we don’t have when we just meet on Slack. It is more like meeting someone in real life, because the guard is down.

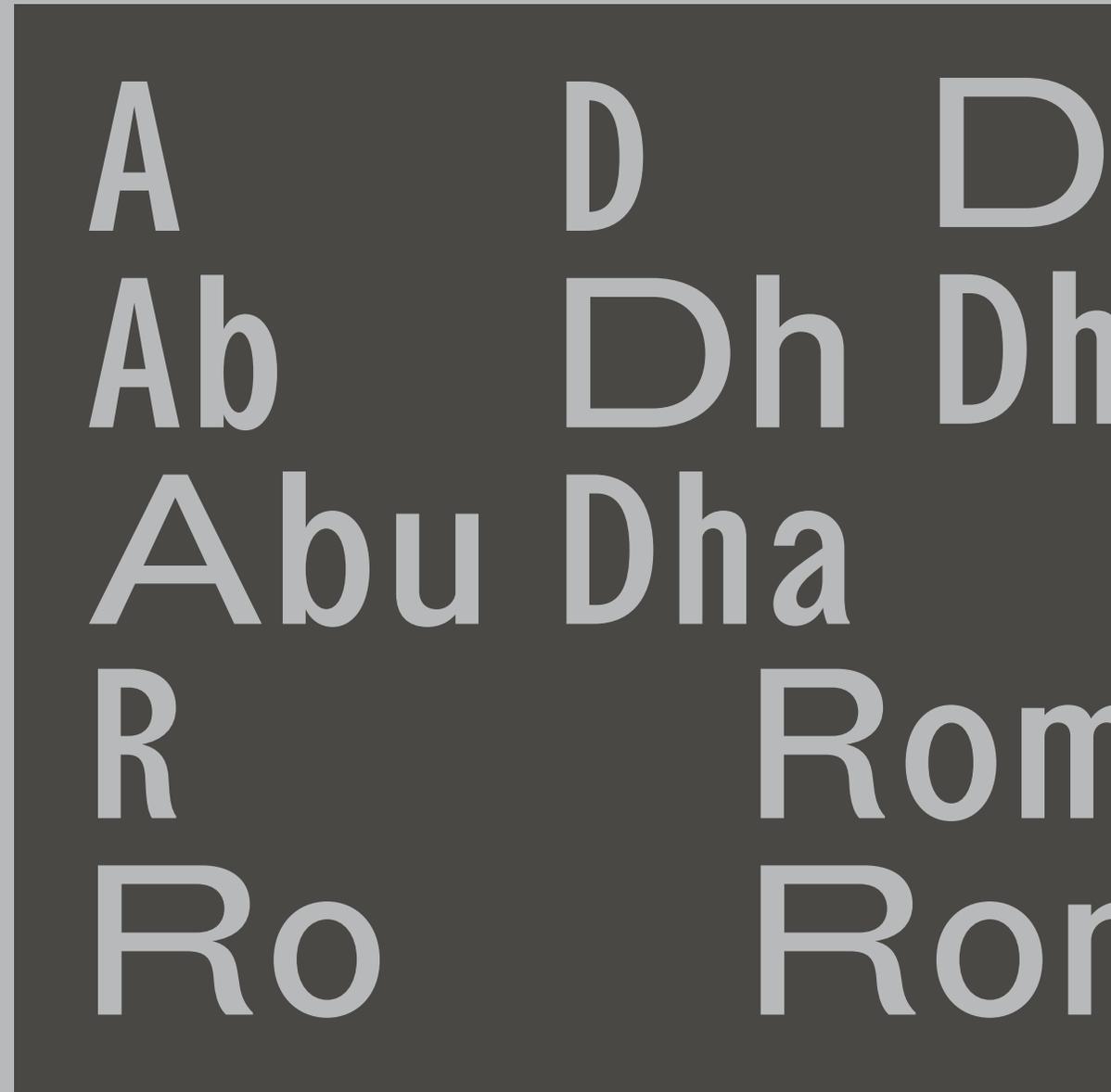
If you meet someone at Coachella... or let’s say you meet someone at a farmer’s market, you don’t know where they live. You don’t know their name. You don’t know their financial status. So Slack is like a farmer’s market. I mean, your name just says “FF.” The connection has to be quite real there. You start talking and a shared interest might spark a conversation, which is how you originally would speak to people. With social media, you don’t do that. You speak to people after you see the resumé, which puts you in a different situation.

Do you think this “new” way of meeting is going to influence how we work or interact with people?

I hope so because now we can interact with people in an old school way. It sometimes makes things a little slower because you have to take more time to get to learn about someone. But I believe the connection is stronger. And I think if there is one thing that we need to do more of, which is making real connections. We are not going to survive as a civilization making fabricated short-term connections. I can’t remember half the people this year that I spoke to last year on Instagram.

So what's your take away from the last two weeks?

That is a big question. Perhaps that we can all very quickly shift our perspectives onto things and work very quickly to come up with solutions. As humans we want our civilization to thrive. It is inherent to us. And after we slouch on the couch for a couple of days, we are ready to get to work and find a solution. I am ready to be part of the creation of whatever this new way of thinking is. We are powerful when we put our minds to something. I am always reminded of that. Sometimes we forget that. We take things for granted when they are going well.



PR03-001

hab
abi
me

L Lo Los
A Ang
An Ange
Angel
Angele
Angeles

PR03-002

P. 082

P. 083

N Y
Ne Yo
New Yor
York
B B
Be B
Ber B

PR03-003

C
Ci
Cit
City
Berl
erli
erlin

PR03-004

S P Paul
Sa Pa Paulo
Sao Pau

P . 084

P . 085

M
Mi
Mil
Mila
Mila

PR03-005

D De Del Delh an Delhi

PR03-006 →



INTERDISCIPLINARY

JUXTAPOSED

APPROACHES

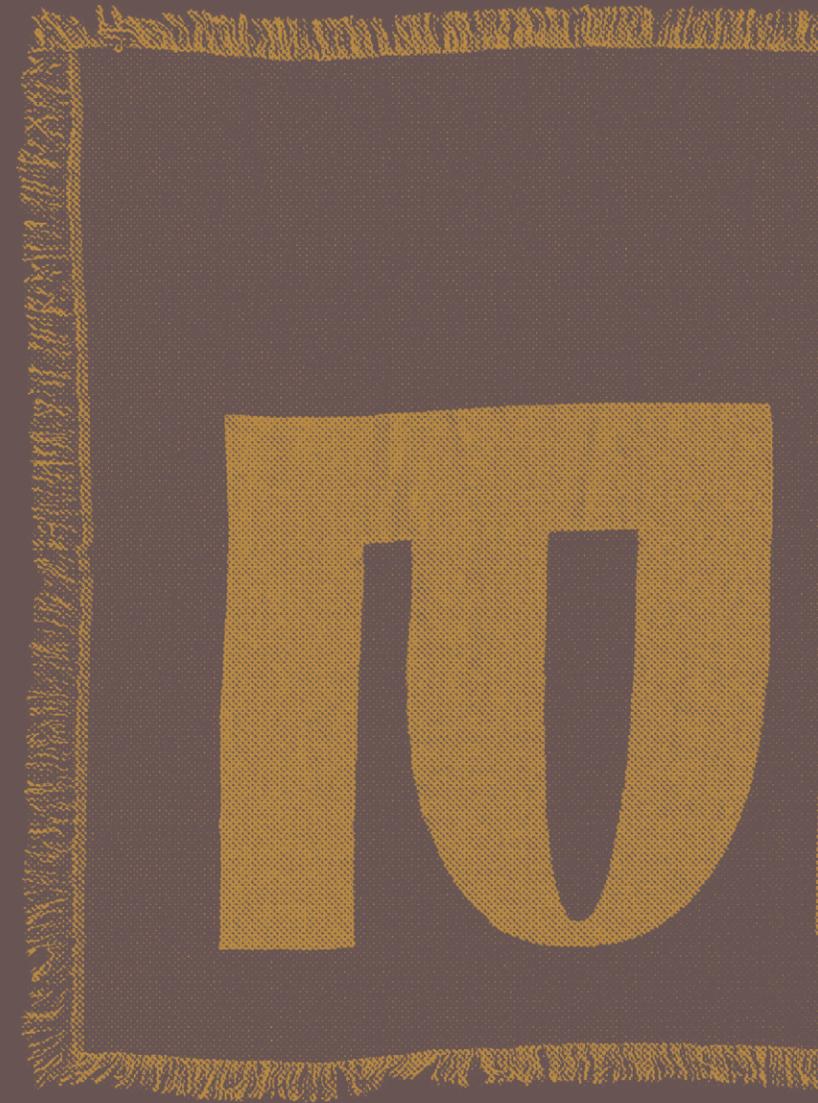
DUALITIES

P.088

P.089



PR04-001



PR04-002



PR04-003 →

P. 092





PR04-005



PR04-006



PR04-007

P. 066

P. 097

CONCRETE

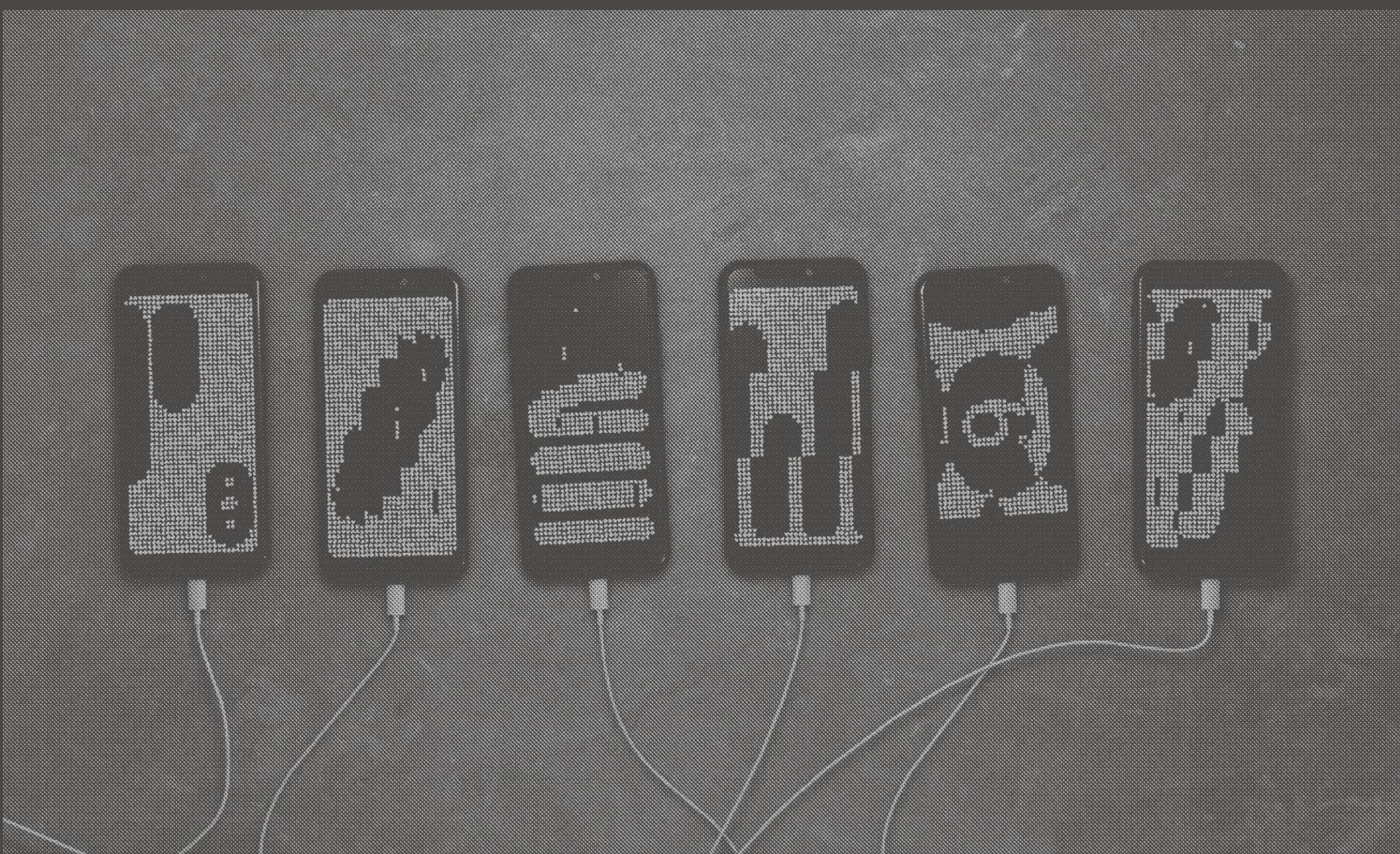
NON-LINEAR

SEQUENCES

ABSTRACTION

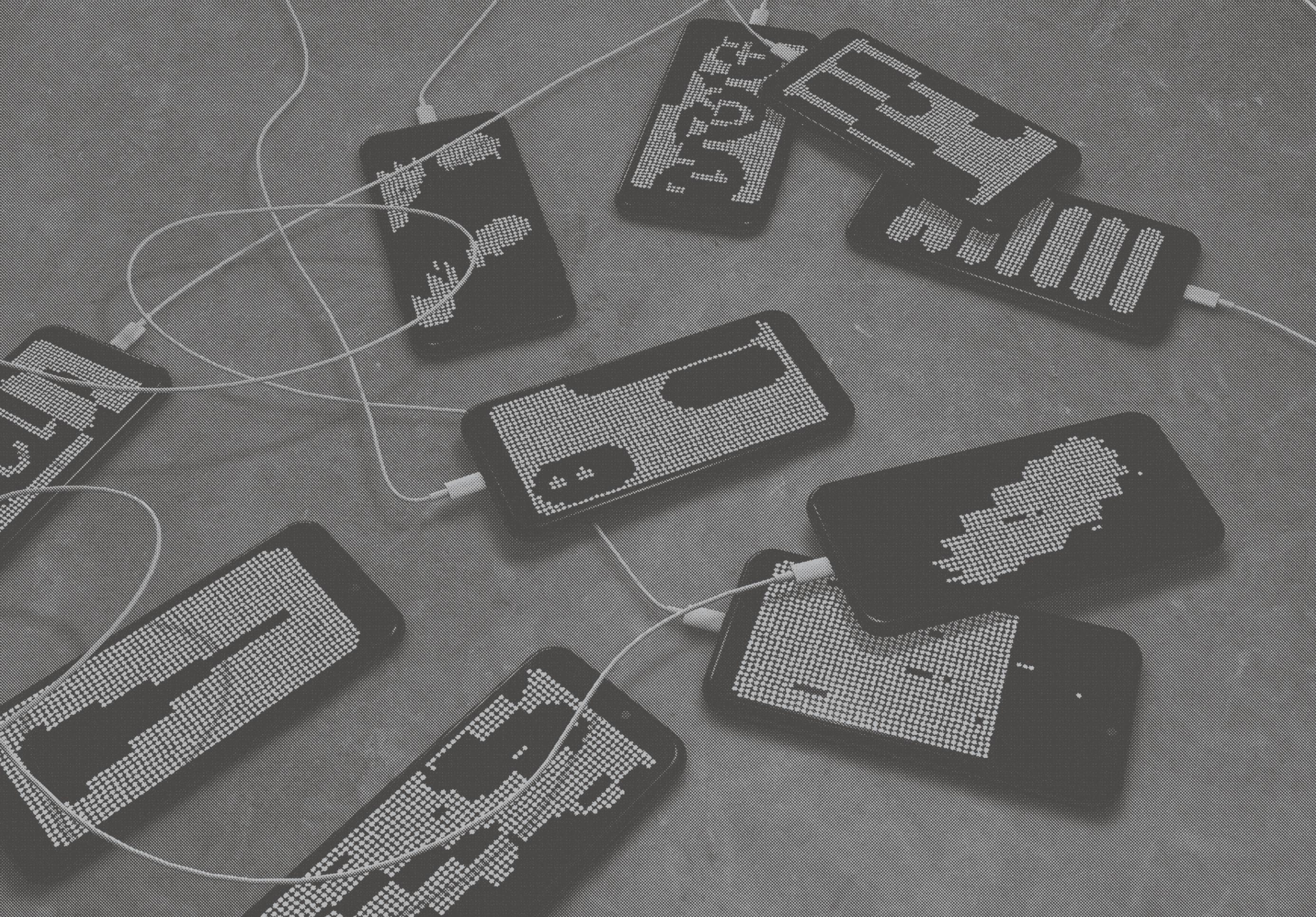
P.098

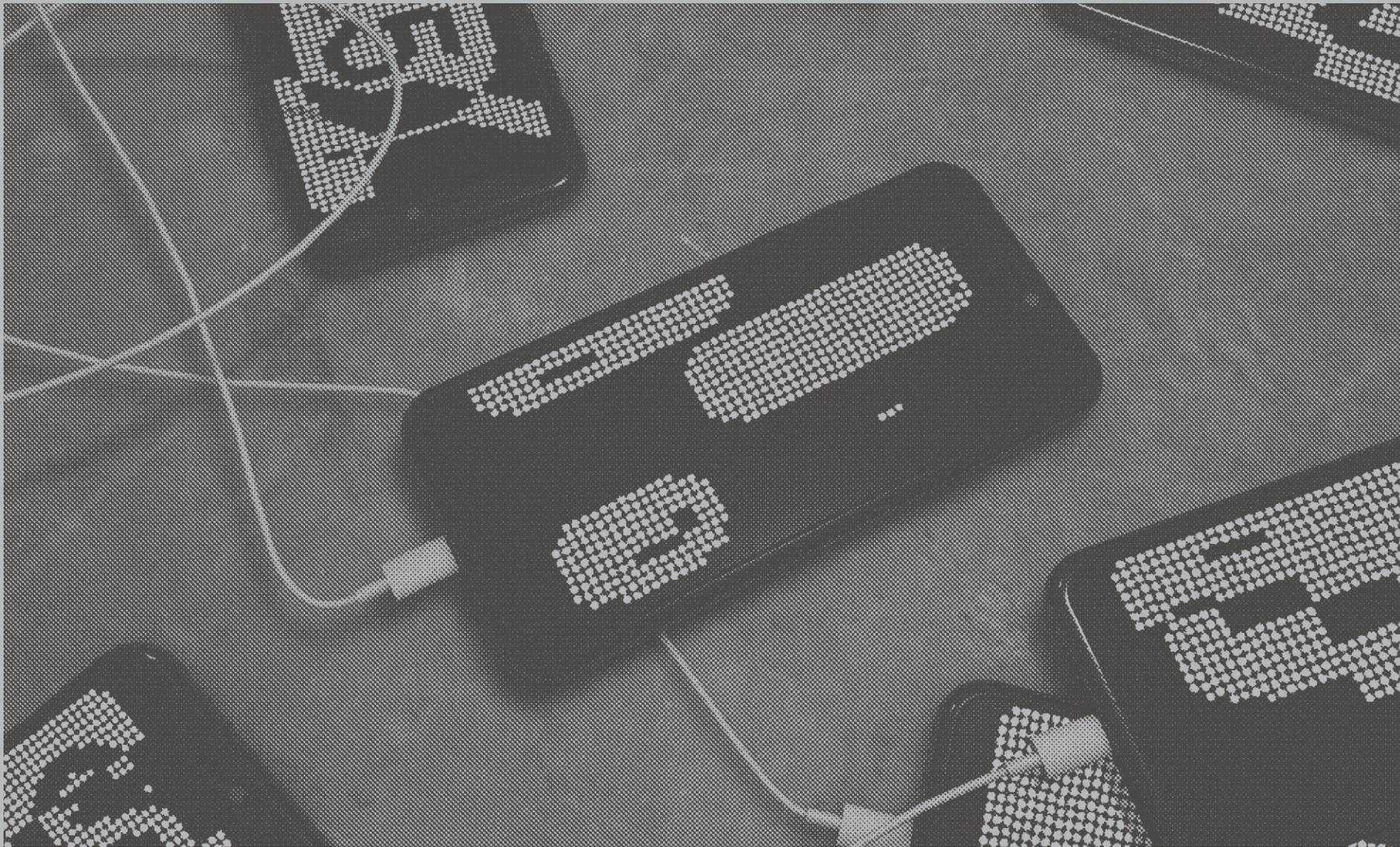
P.099



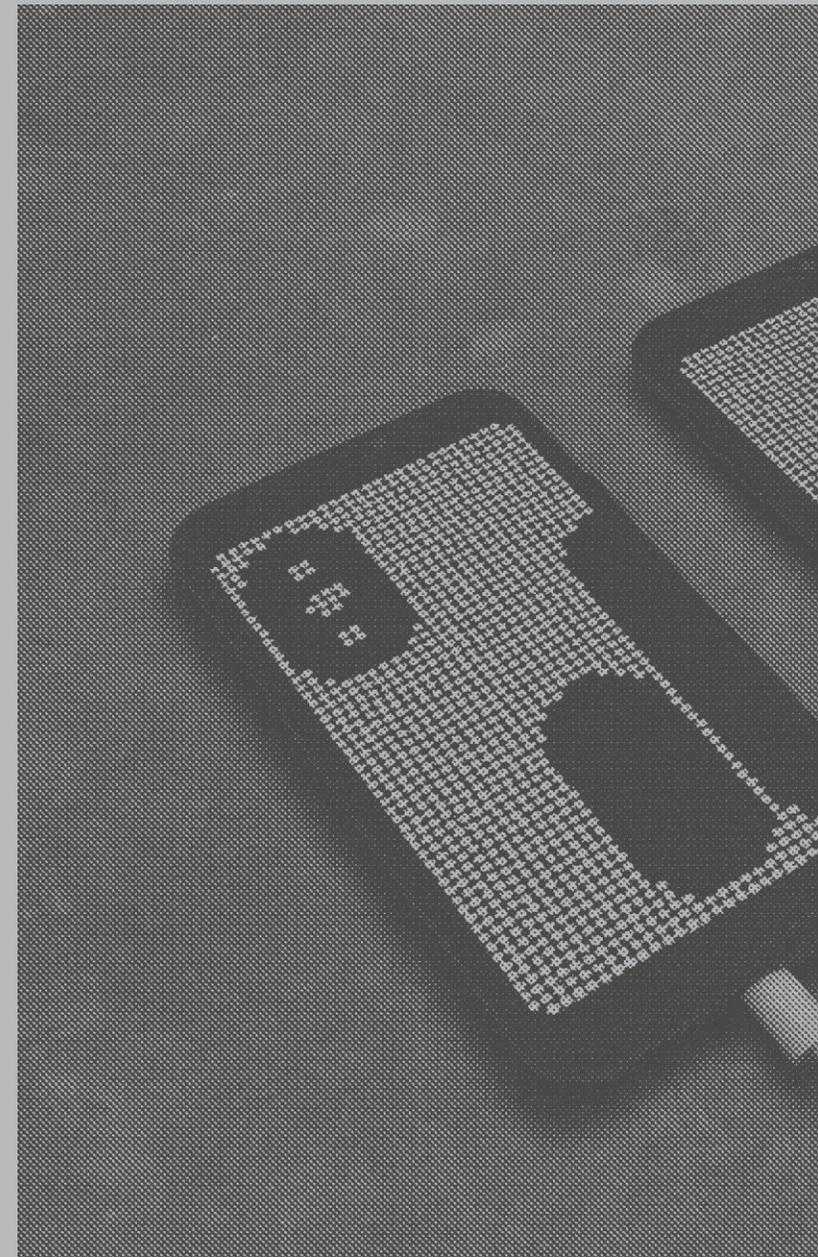
PR05-001

PR05-002 →

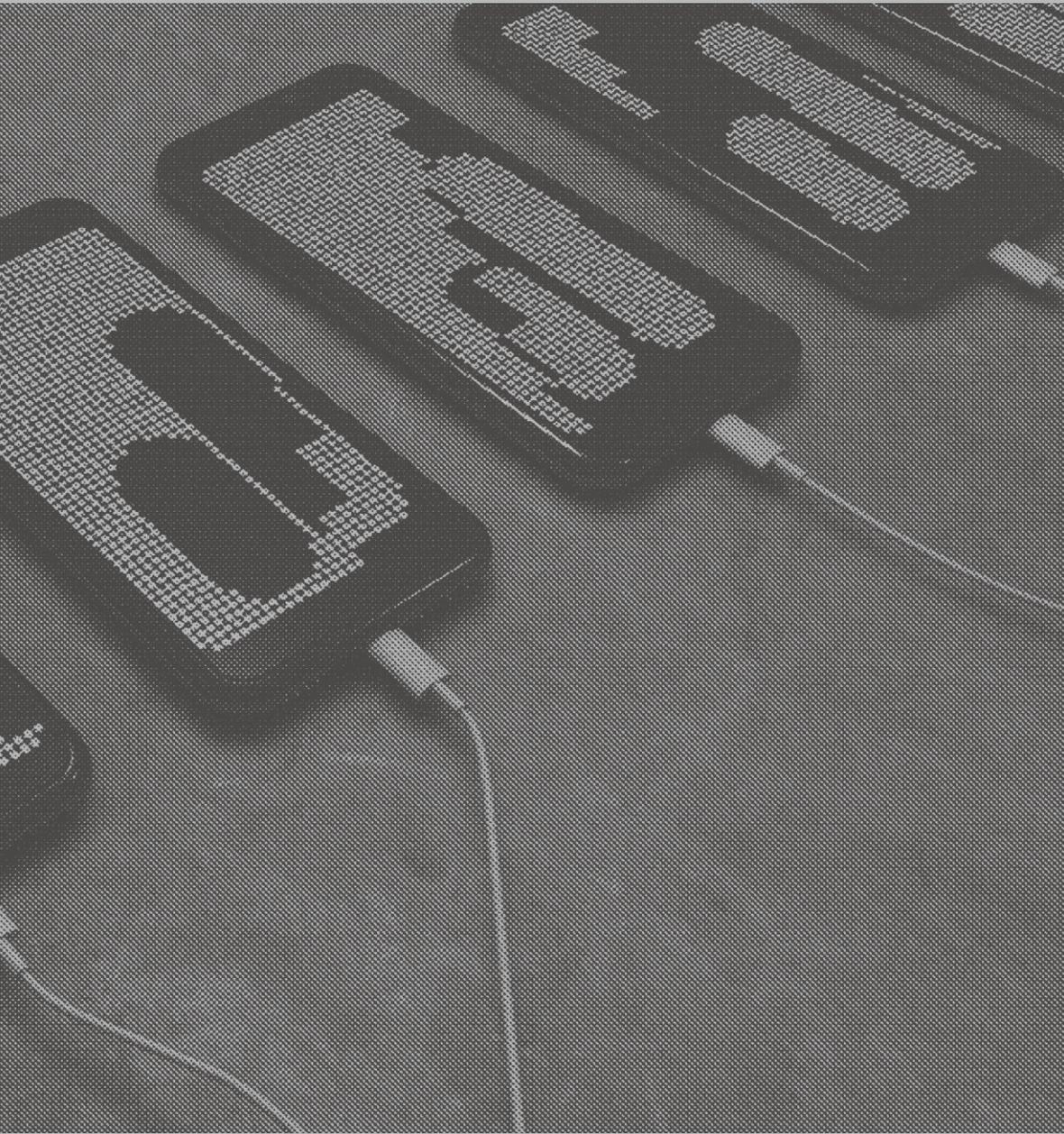




PR05-003



PR05-004



P. 106

IN CONVERSATION
JOE PEREZ

WITH

P. 107

Joe Perez is a creative director with a background in graphic design and filmmaking. Originally from Providence, Rhode Island, he worked as an art director in Los Angeles before establishing a multidisciplinary design and animation studio that works within the industries of music, fashion, and advertising for clients such as Kanye West, Beyoncé, Louis Vuitton, Nike, and Versace.

Hey Joe, how are you doing?

I'm good. How are you?

Hanging in there. Are you in Providence?

I am. I feel like I have been training for this moment for a while. I worked from the same setup five years ago when I worked for Kanye [West].

It seems that you are prepared for this.

Well, he had me working around the clock and when I worked from home. It was pretty isolated in general. I always tried to get out as much as possible to be amongst people. But now I feel I am back.

I mean, just by seeing the enormous output, I believe your time as an art director at Donda was a very intense experience.

Working in a team environment where everybody had their own perspectives and shared ideas was unique. Virgil [Abloh] would draw ideas on napkins on a private jet and then text them to me. Literally a photo of an idea on a napkin. And that was our creative brief. It was really neat to be a part of this team and to bring those thought processes to my own creative output.

It gave me a perspective that I might not have had if I wasn't a part of that group. Kanye and Virgil demanded excellence at all times. Nobody slept and everybody worked around the clock. I had never been pushed by anybody that hard. I really found out what my boundaries were—not just as a creative but as a human being. I worked 12 to 18 hours a day for stretches of months on end. After a while your body starts to give out physically, your

mind starts to melt. But you just keep creating because the well feels like it is going dry. In that time period, you really find what motivates you. You might be looking externally for what may be inspiring. Those experiences were very positive. On the negative side though, working for so many hours does not leave room for personal or creative growth. It also affects your personal life.

The harmony is trying to find the balance between the two. That was never the case while working at Donda because everything was about Kanye. It was about creating the best possible product, which took precedence over pretty much everything in my life. But at the same time, I grew as an artist and I could not trade that experience for anything in the world.

Look at Virgil, Jerry [Lorenzo], Nate [Brown], and Heron [Preston]—all of them are at the top of their industries. It was an experience that led to a better life and a networking channel that constantly keeps growing—friends are helping friends at this point. And now I have a thriving studio because of that experience.

But you also worked in Los Angeles during that period, correct? Why did you decide to establish your studio in Rhode Island?

I grew up in Rhode Island before I moved to Los Angeles to attend ArtCenter where I then lived for eight years.

I felt like I had worked there enough and made enough contacts. I mean, we have iPhones and Zoom meetings, so I can work from anywhere. If I have to be face to face, I fly to a different city. Now that I can go anywhere I moved back here and actually find many interns at RISD. A few years ago, Katie McIntyre worked for me who is now an art director at Apple.

Do you see benefits in running the only studio that is specialized in what you do, compared to being one of many in cities with an oversaturated design scene such as Los Angeles or New York? I mean, I wouldn't exactly categorize Rhode Island as a design metropole.

It has positive and negatives. I always promote to all of my younger designers that you should move to a major city, which is a mecca for your industry so you can work in your industry and make the connections that you need to make. I did that over the span of eight years when I was in Los Angeles. When I got to the point where I didn't need that anymore I moved back here because it is away from Los Angeles and the entertainment industry. All those parties are fun, but you get lost in them and your focus diminishes. Here, I can focus better. Also, the architecture is inspiring. There is a lot of history in this city. That's where I am the most creative.

At some point, it is important to ask yourself those questions. Every two weeks I reevaluate my whole life like that. I am always asking myself what inspires me and where do I feel the most inspired. I have the same feeling when I go to Europe because there is so much fucking history. I am inspired by my environment, architecture, everything around me.

RISD's Fleet Library usually is a great source of inspiration for you, right? Where do you go these days to find inspiration, resources, or motivation?

There are many museums and schools that hop on online archives. But the RISD library is amazing. I remember talking to students who have only been in there a handful of times—I mean—you guys literally have the biggest art depository on the East Coast. The whole history of art is right there at your school. I spent practically every day at the RISD Library from 2009 to 2010 scanning books and ended up having some 60,000 scans.

Wait, why and what did you do with them?

I scanned the whole jewelry section because Kanye worked on his fashion lines and needed jewelry. So I sent him everything from the history of jewelry within the Mediterranean area to contemporary jewelry.

I didn't know you guys worked on jewelry as well.

He did jewelry for this first women's collection before he launched Yeezy. Also, he is doing jewelry now. He has always dabbled in that. But nothing from what I saw came out.

I like this approach though. I mean, why not do jewelry?

Is this the approach designers or artists are going to adapt to? You know, Virgil went from architecture to fashion; Kanye is doing everything from music to fashion to architecture to jewelry; and you, with a background in filmmaking, are now running a "multidisciplinary design and animation studio," as well as Club Fantasy which you launched not long ago.

The world is a big place. You as a person, your tastes, and your goals are constantly evolving. So why put yourself in one box?

I mean, I am bored of album covers. I have been doing it for ten years. So what's next? It feels like working in a cubicle. At some point, you are going to get bored. It is important to constantly inform yourself of what is going on in other disciplines. Constantly challenge yourself and push yourself out of your comfort zone. If you are doing the same shit every day, you are going to be great at it—no doubt. But at the same time, if you are an idea-generating person or have that mind, you need other disciplines or you eventually feel trapped and limited by just working in one. Many disciplines are melding together as technology and how we digest art and media evolve. Even if you decide to go back to your original discipline, you still have this whole other breadth of knowledge that you can now take and grow.

If you look at filmmaking—which is about telling stories—it is a conceptual thought process that covers all genres, mediums, and disciplines. It is as if you were a painter. You are telling a story with a pictorial piece and connecting emotionally with the audience. It is the same with film, photographs, and good design. And of course album art. You are trying to sum up all themes that the music artists are trying to convey or talk about within their music with one picture.

Since you just mentioned album art and designed album covers for so many years, I'd be interested in your opinion.

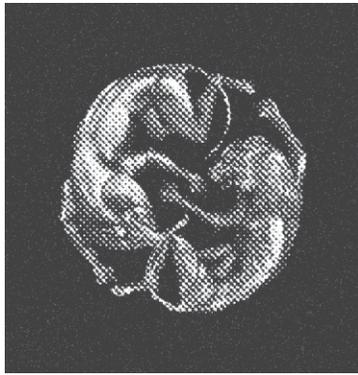
When I look at vinyl, CDs, and digital album covers, I notice that the idea of what a cover represents changed drastically. For example, much of the album art released within the last few years is reduced to its minimum. They only showcase a photograph or visuals without the artist's name or the album title on it—which makes total sense since this information is right next to it on streaming platforms anyway. The most severe version is perhaps Donald Glover's latest album cover—the blank one. How do you think that is going to change? Are we still going to have album covers or are they going to be obsolete?

There is still room for that to change. But everything comes and goes in waves—like life in general.

With album art, technology is dictating how it is digested by the consumer. Nobody needs to put an album title on a cover anymore because it is always going to have a digital footprint. None of us buy a CD, very few buy vinyl. Even on vinyl, many artists are just putting the title on a sticker on top of the plastic wrap that you can take off. The title is on the disc anyway. But I think you are going to see that evolve. Nobody really knows what it is going to look like—will it get more minimal? But again, things come in waves. It can only get so minimal before people start getting bored. Then they go maximal.

To connect emotionally to the consumer, it is important to inject the artist's personality in the album art. If you do that correctly, you get to tell the story they are telling through their music. That's when you have something special—sonically and visually.

Pink Floyd is a great example of a band and musical talent who understood that. Their album covers needed to resonate as much as their music. It was haunting and both have survived the test of time. You can listen to Pink Floyd today and it still sounds new. They did shit in progressive rock at a point that nobody else had done.



IMG-022



IMG-023

And their covers are just as iconic. And there will be pieces of art that people are going to keep throwing and T-shirts for another 100 years. I can never see that go away, especially the triangle with the prism.

When working with those artists, how do you make sure your voice is heard?

I think as a designer—no matter what you create—it is coming from you, so it is going to have some sort of your stamp on it. I look for music artists that I can collaborate with and not just take dictation from them. For me, collaborations are vastly more exciting. They understand that I understand music and how to communicate their themes and stories into visuals in a way that resonates with their fan base. Collaborations are more rewarding. It allows me to explore how I feel about the music I am working on. If you only take dictation, you are just a gun for hire.

When I first started designing album art, I took a lot of dictation. It was fun at the time—I was excited working with big names and whatnot. Now, I am constantly looking for music artists I want to collaborate with.

The last album art I did was for Beyoncé ↗ IMG-022. It was a great collaboration between her creative team, her creative director, and my team together with my 3D artist and me as the creative director. Two creative directors working together is fun. I first thought it was going to be

a lot of butting heads but it came together and felt as if we were one team.

So it felt more like a dialog than a “design service?”

When you work in music and meet another creative director, you instantly click with almost everybody because we have all been through the same bullshit. It feels like everybody is old friends and we get together and work.

How do you establish those dialogues when you work with corporate clients like Converse?

With the brands we work with, it is like working with a creative director. Obviously, they have corporate rules and branding guidelines that you have to follow, so you are a bit more limited with a set of unique challenges compared to music, where everything is open.

When you work with corporate clients, you have to dial yourself into their guidelines and do a massive amount of research to bring you up to speed. Not just with the brand, but also with their story and competitors. I need to digest all this information before I feel ready to dive into that world and communicate my ideas.

After we rebranded the basketball division for Converse, they decided to spread the design we did all over the brand. Everything we suggested for their basketball division is going to be used for Converse as a whole, which is exciting. We can now expand on the world we built. So ideally, when I look for corporate clients, I look for that opportunity—to impress them with one project and then possibly move into other areas of the corporation and redefine who they are, what their personality stands for, how they market themselves, the language they use for marketing. With Converse, it was fun, but we had more to offer and they saw that opportunity. Those are the people I love to work with.

Call of Duty ↗ IMG-023 was very similar. They let us do whatever we wanted. Yet, they put us into a finite box. We had to use certain typography. They didn’t want anything too military. This blew my mind because everybody who

P.116

ENVIRONMENTS

ADAPTIVE

INTERSECTING

GENRES

P.117

works with Call of Duty puts tanks and guns on merchandise. They just wanted you to be inspired by the games. To bridge that in-between was a weird challenge or at least one that I never experienced with music artists: to show those worlds on merch in a new, creative fashion and simultaneously bridge the gap by bringing street-wear language into gaming. Because right now, e-sports merch is not very cool. We tried to make it more accessible to other demographics.

From what I have seen you certainly achieved that.

I think we did a good job and hope that we can take it to the next level with another e-sports team we are working with. It's like a new frontier. As a designer, you want to make this nerdy shit kind of cool and culturally relevant. I don't think anybody has done it justice yet or put the thought has needed to go into it.

I am excited to see more! Now, how do you approach those projects in your studio? On your website, I noticed that everybody at your studio is some sort of "director": creative director, animation director, or art director. Tell me more about this.

Everybody within my studio does a bit of everything. And they do it well. The two art directors/designers in my studio are very much involved with the conceptual process, the creation, and the evolution of projects which makes them automatically art directors. You are directing where the art is going. I wouldn't call them creative directors though until they helm their own music artists and create all these assets and stories on their own.

One of them is working with young artists and is part of the full-time team. He is going to be in charge of everything—that's when somebody steps over the line of being an art director to a creative director. He will be on set during the shoot, overseeing photographs, and all the assets that go out for marketing. But it takes you a good couple of years to get your bearings as a creative director and feel comfortable with steering the ship.

My friend Eric [Weindel] who did all the animated covers on my website is at a senior level, like myself. He's an old fuck. My friend Jenna [Marsh] directs music videos and shows. She has done creative direction with me for Nicki Minaj and Beyoncé. She was a photographer and made the leap into directing. She is a storyteller, so the transition from creative direction and photography into directing music videos was easy for her.

In that regard it sounds like your studio structure is quite flexible.

Very flexible. When you go through a few different album cycles, you know the process and the research involved. I don't have to hold their hand anymore.

Talking about album cycles—you launched Options Archive earlier this year to give the world a peek behind the scenes of the projects you worked on while at Donda 7 IMG-024 - IMG-026. How did you come up with this? I mean, I don't think I have seen something like that before—at least not on that scale.

My NDA expired and I have been sitting on all these files for years. I heard the new NDA is for life, which scares the shit out of me. But I signed one back in 2013 for five years. I waited a few years on top of that because I felt like it was still too soon to post this stuff.

Now that enough time has passed and Kanye is more focused on his clothing line, I felt like it was the perfect time to show the process. I kept getting hit up by designers who would ask me about my process and if I was going to teach any classes. I figured the Options Archive is a nice way to show this process. You know, round 24 versus round one, different projects, different years.

I thought of it more as an educational tool and to get a conversation started and inspire younger designers. When you work for somebody at the stature of Kanye or Beyoncé, you are expected to work on that many designs every day you work for them. So now I have an archive of over 150,000 files. At the current rate, it would take me 40 years to post everything. So I'm trying to speed it up a

little bit. I think a lot of great designs emerged over the years that people should see.

Also knowing that it took over 300 versions to land at the final design of the Cruel Summer cover [IMG-027](#) definitely reduces everyone's anxiety.

That is a big thing, too. I want to make sure that all the young designers out there realize that you can do a few iterations, then do 100 more, and maybe go back to that first one. The Cruel Summer cover was the first project where I felt like I learned more in three months than I learned in two years.

Do you plan to expand this “educational tool” into actually teaching at some point?

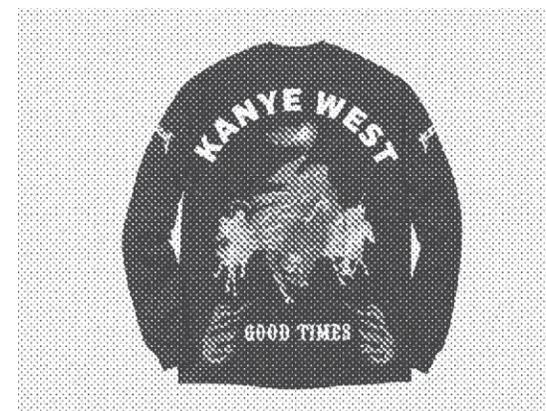
I am. I am 41 now, so I'm hoping to be teaching in my mid to late 50s, whether it's RISD or out west. But probably somewhere on the East Coast. My father teaches industrial design at the Academy of Arts in San Francisco. I have sat into a few of his classes and have done some lectures. It has been a lot of fun, so I definitely intend to.

What would you be teaching? Like, what would be the essence of your classes?

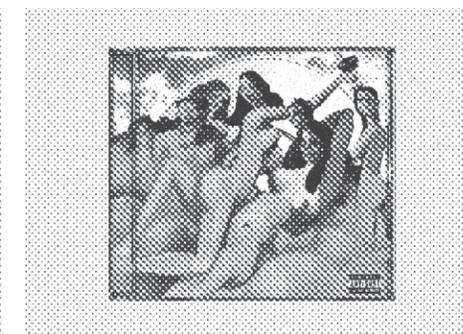
I feel like I still need a few more years to take time and figure that out. Right now, I would be teaching something that has to do with commercial art and bridging the gap between conceptual thought, narrative, and visual design.

That sounds exciting! How do you think this current situation, which introduced new restrictions to our lives that we never experienced and dealt with before, will impact teaching or our work as designers and the way we approach our work in the future?

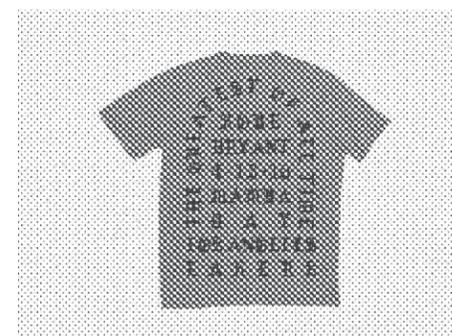
I think it is going to have a positive impact and will bring awareness on how we communicate and travel. You still need in-person conversations for certain projects and at key moments—some things still need to be said in a room together when you spitball ideas or first start out on designs. I especially see that now that I worked on



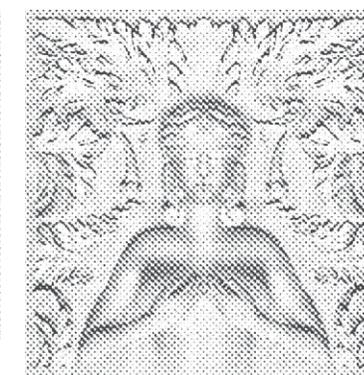
IMG-024



IMG-025



IMG-026



IMG-027

the first projects remotely with some of my designers. I am used to looking over their shoulder and giving a little guideline here and there. Now there are long stretches of time where I don't see the evolution of a project. Things take a bit longer now. They kind of mold as I see fit just because there is less face to face.

But overall, I think people are becoming more efficient. And with screen sharing, you are still able to look over somebody's shoulder. I should probably implement screen sharing a lot more, as you can see what these guys are working on. I might be doing that in the next project.

For me personally, it makes me realize that I want to travel less unless it is traveling to learn and grow as a designer. The next travel spot to oversee my clothing line I want to go to instead of Los Angeles is Milan. It shifted my idea of where I want to travel and what I want to travel for.

Before this, I found myself flying to Los Angeles every month. And I don't want to do that anymore. I realized that I neither enjoyed nor needed it. A lot of the stuff can get done from home. And at the same time, it cuts down your carbon footprint. Hopefully a lot of goodwill comes from that and people will stick with it. If we all reevaluated what was important and how we communicate, we could take steps in the right direction from an environmental perspective to help society into that transition.

One day I went out to pick up a prescription and I remember looking at the crystal clear sky. I was like "holy shit, I haven't seen a sky like this since I was ten or twelve." I feel like this makes me want to drive less and do the research to buy the right electric car to make sure how the cars are made. Sometimes you buy electric cars before you do the research and realize the carbon footprint to make that fucking car is just as bad as buying a gas car.

Does that also make you rethink how the projects you work on are produced—Club Fantasy for example?

I think everybody is trying to rethink that. There is a lot of waste with clothing lines. The fashion industry is constantly cycling through shit. Right now, Club Fantasy is not eco friendly. But when you start a clothing line, you realize there is overhead. You have to turn a profit or it is not even worth your time. You are forced into an area where you are trying to find the cheapest goods and get it out there. But is that the right thing to do in the end?

As far as the other projects are concerned, I find myself getting a lot of work within the e-sports industry because they are the only athletes left. Everybody is playing Call of Duty, everybody is on Apex Legends and Fortnite. They are thriving during this environment. Music has almost shut down. All my music projects just vanished. I was supposed to be working on merch for a big tour—that's gone for a year. So I am really lucky that I had started down the path of e-sports right before this. Fortunately, I am getting a lot of work through this industry. I got lucky. Things worked out.



IMG-028



IMG-029

When you launched Club Fantasy ↗ IMG-028 & IMG-029, I believe you had a great network established prior to working on executing your ideas. Do you think having a "business plan" is essential for making such a project successful? Or rather try and error and see how things develop?

I am a fan of aligning myself with people that are more interested in business than me. I understand the business side, I am involved with the marketing, every store that we go into, strategic alignments of collaborations and what-not, but that's as far as I go into the business. I have an investor who takes care of all the production and fulfillment and a brilliant marketing team. You need those three pillars to have a chance as a brand at this point. I am lucky enough to have that. But again, that all came through the network that I created over the years. I had a clothing line before Club Fantasy, which showed people in the industry that we can not only do merch. We got into a bunch of stores across the world, so that opened eyes. It was a good experience.

A lot of fashion brands right now—specifically brands that are more into wholesale than direct to consumer—are experiencing really tough times. Everybody is scrambling to build up their D2C on their web stores.

What are your plans to move forward with your brand and your studio projects?

Obviously production slowed because everybody in the factories is laid off and in-person events are not possible though right now. But we are going to continue engaging our consumers and doing collaborations. It is about finding those other opportunities online and connecting with people. We have a few things lined up in the future which I am not going to disclose, but it should be pretty exciting. We will get through this stronger and take fewer things for granted—like hanging out with parents or loved ones.



PR06-001



PR06-002

on-Sat 7AM-8PM

Popsicles
CREAM
Banana
ICE
Sundae
Boat
Deluxe
Sandwich

Co/dest
CERV
in the
Liquors
TROPICAL
EZA
CITY



PR06-003



PR06-004

Marlboro
\$10.42
L&M \$8.90
AMERICAN Spirit \$10.80

FRESH Hot
Pizza
FREE Delivery



PR06-005

BIKE Route
Limit 25

Speed

No PARKING
Any Time

100% Puro
ESPRESSO
CAFÉ e l'Aguila

Frozen Lemonade
BEST in TOWN

PR06-006



PR07A-001



PR07A-002



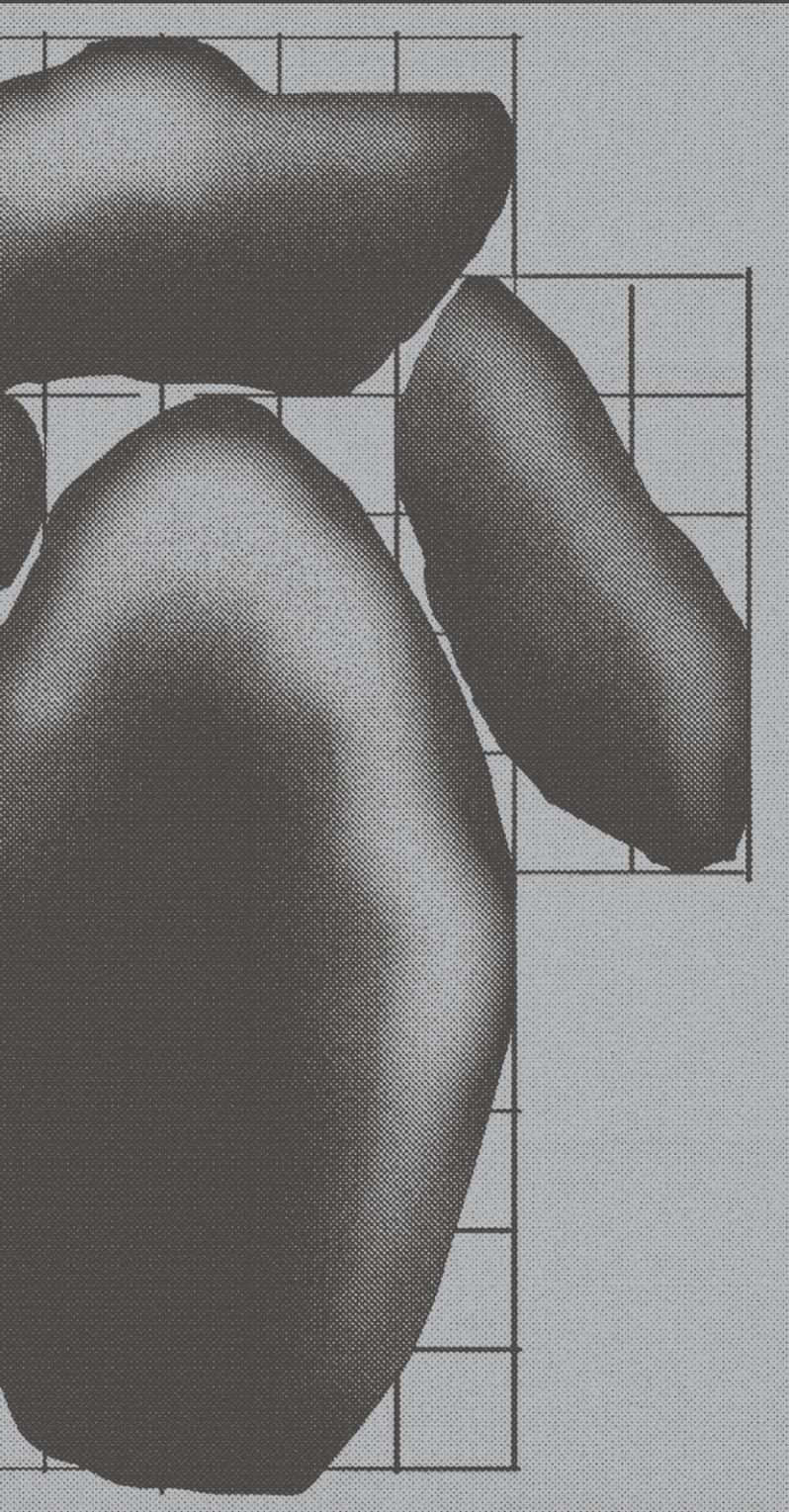
PR07B-001



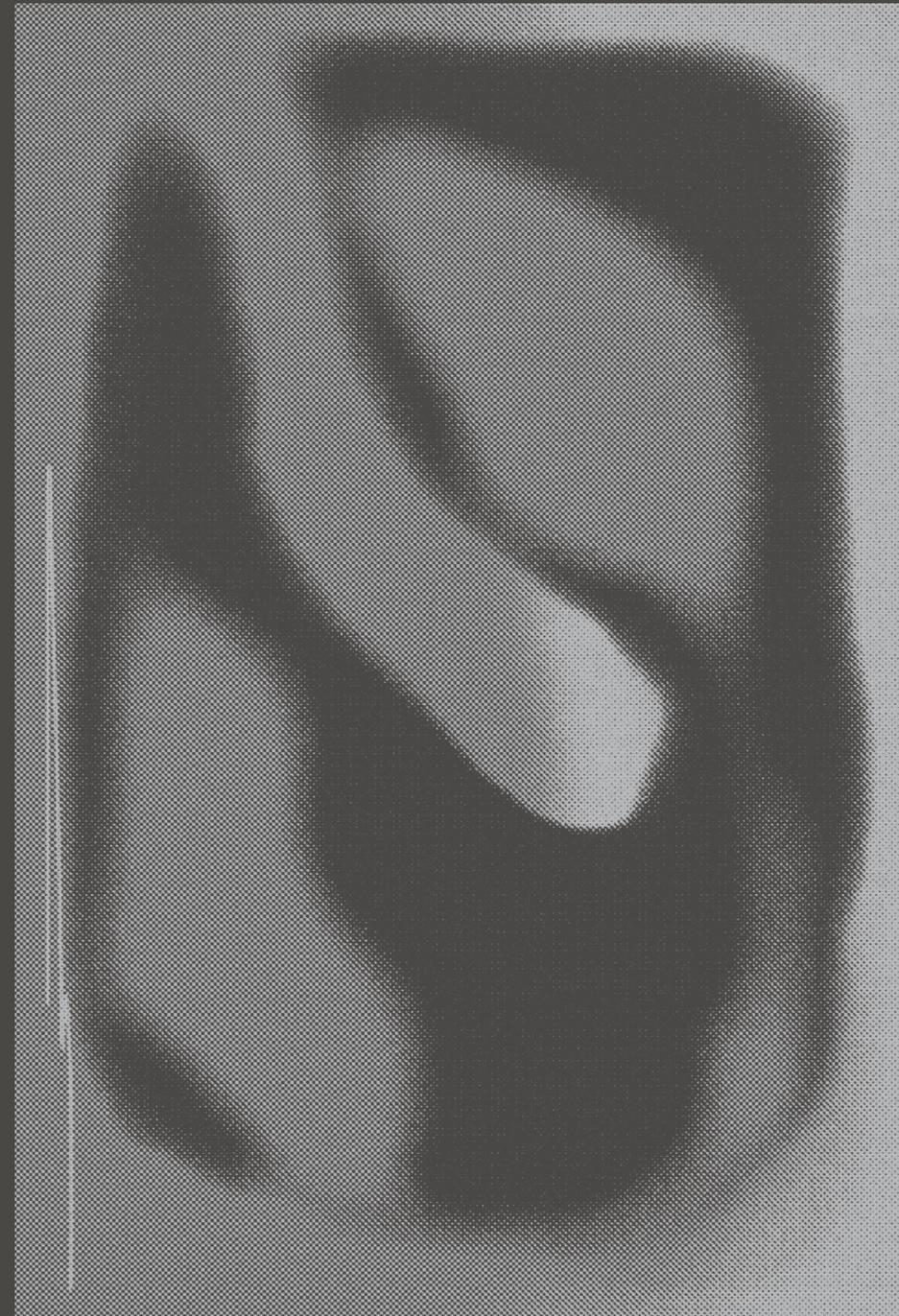
PR07B-002



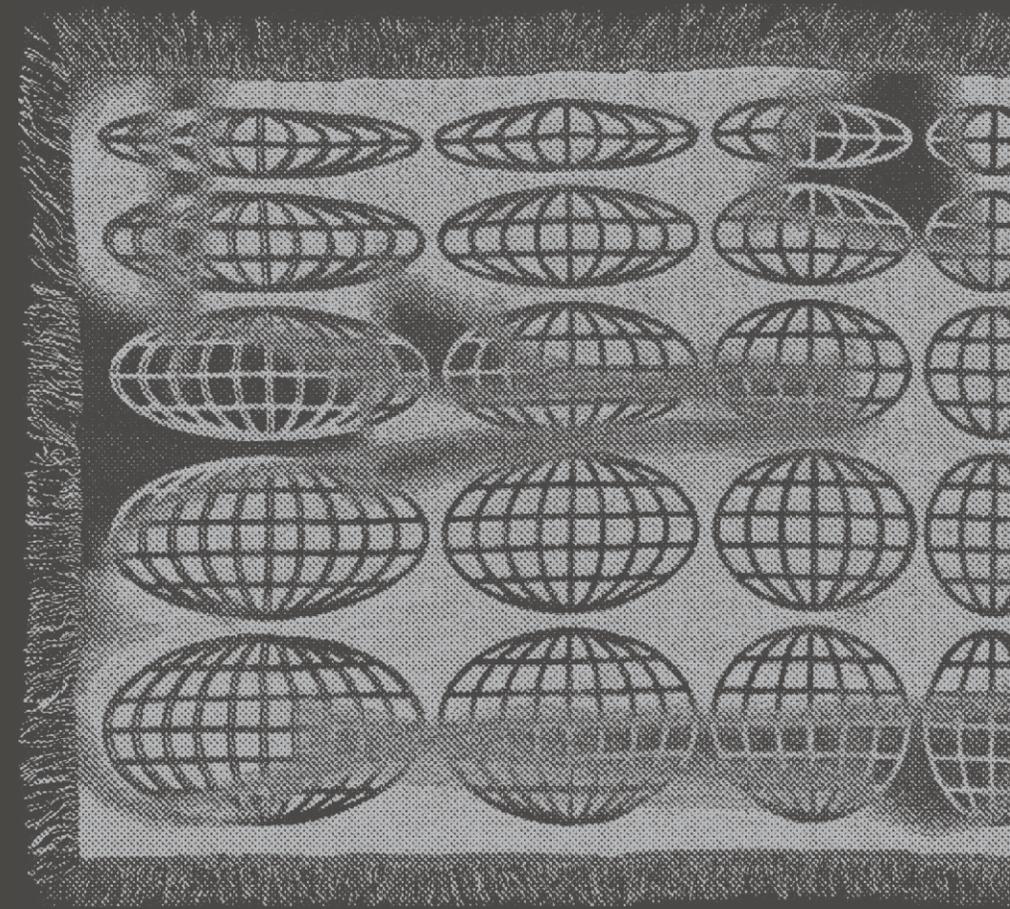
PR07B-003



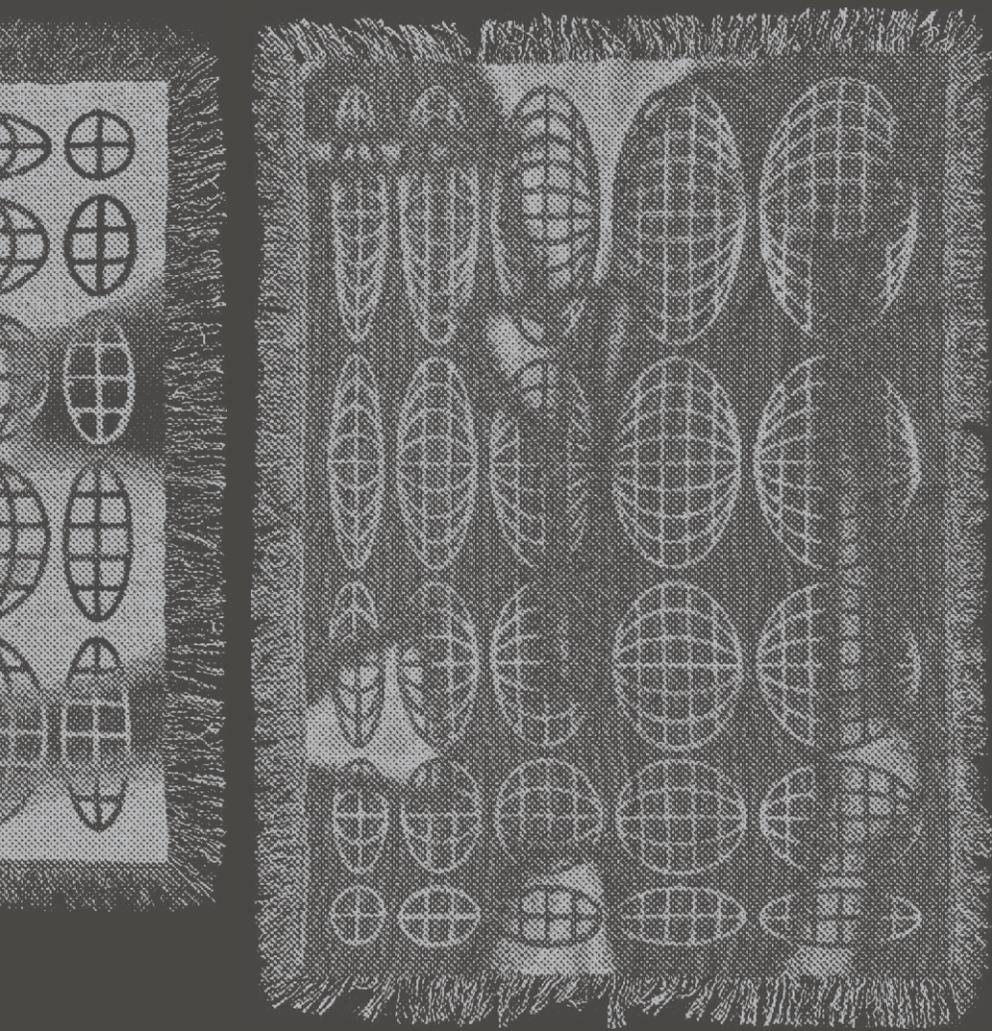
PR07B-004



PR07B-004

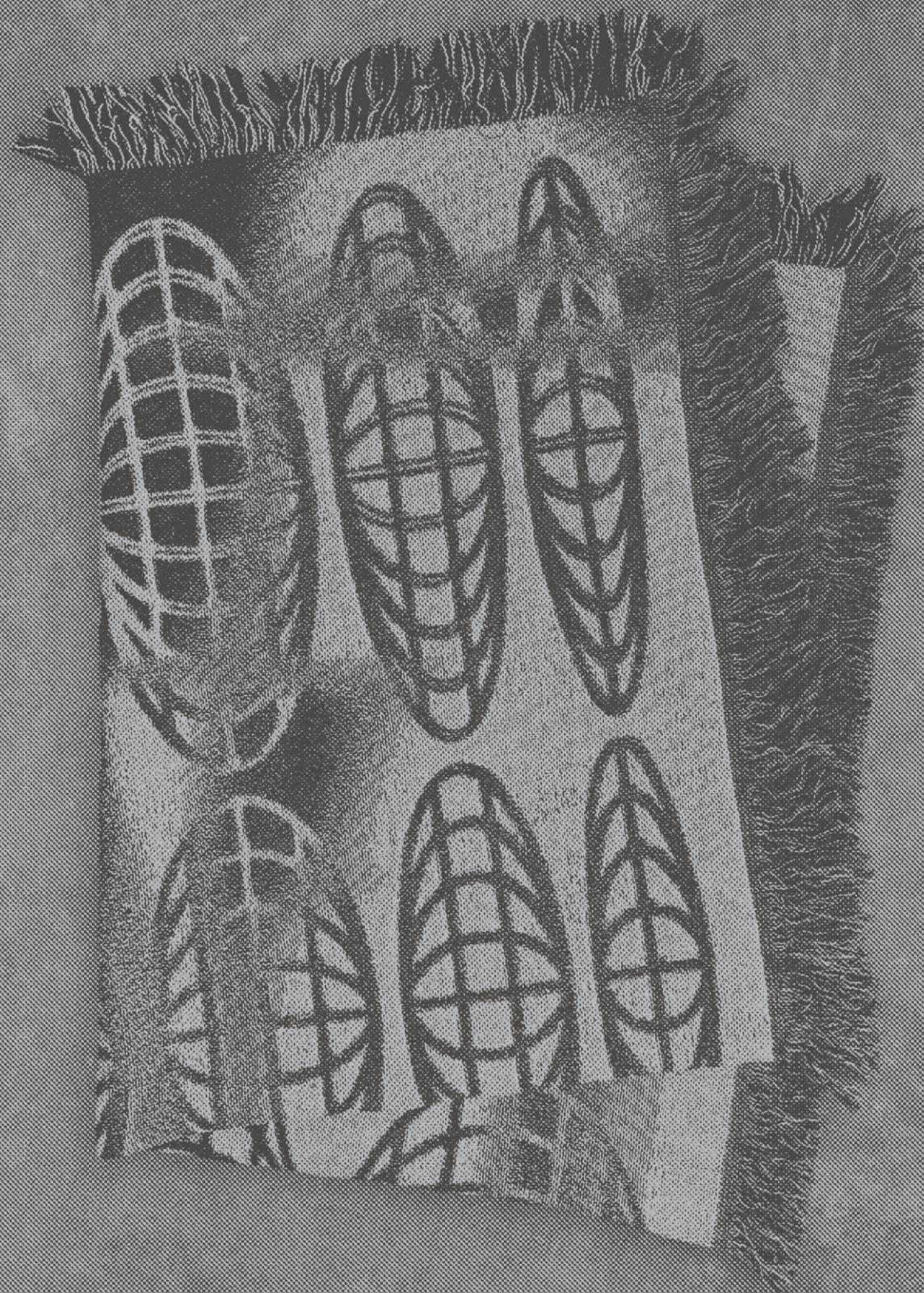


PR07C-001



PR07C-002

PR07C-003 →



PRESENT

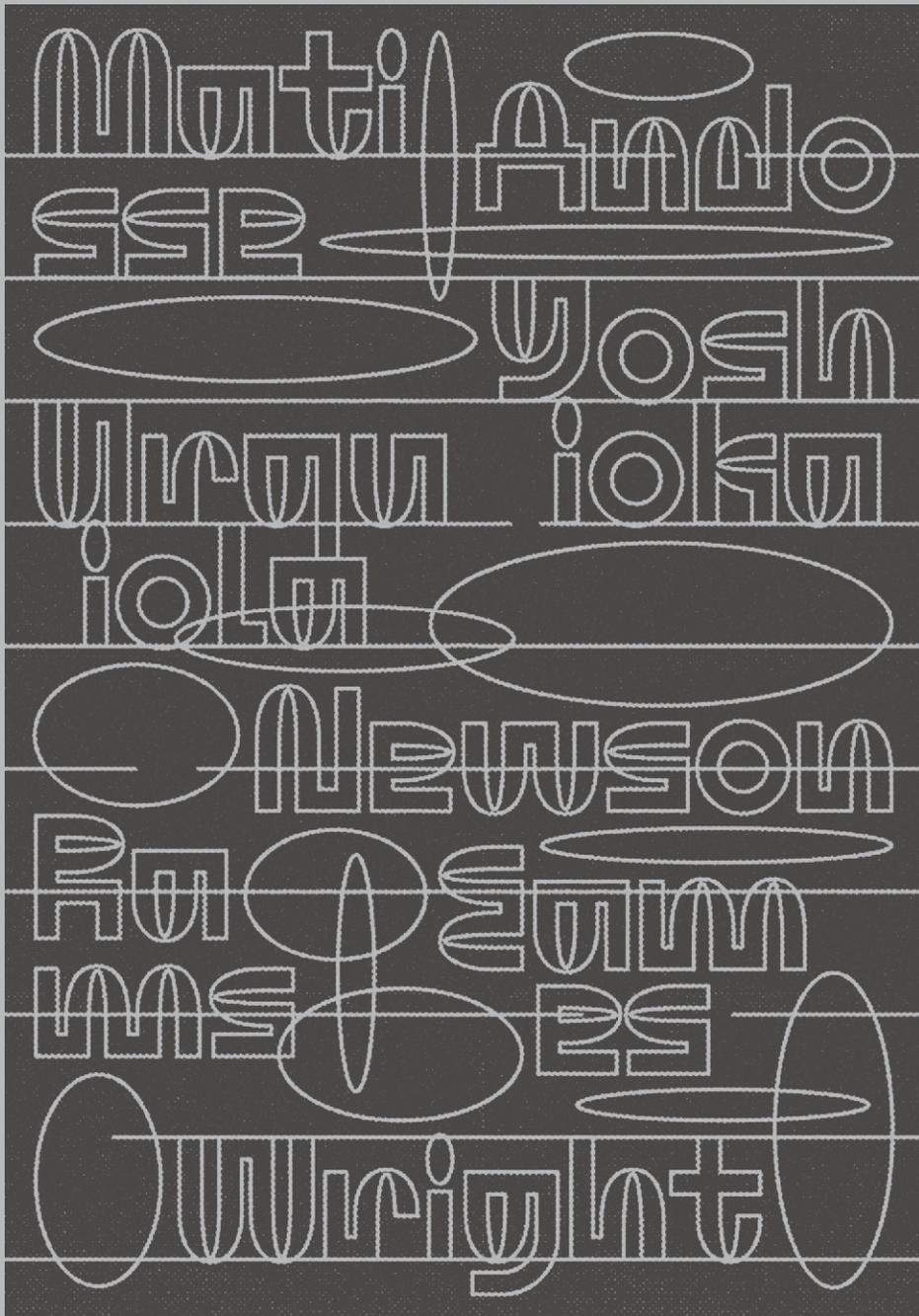
PERPETUAL

P. 140

ABSENCE

ABSOLUTES

P. 141



PR07D-001



PR07E-001



PR07F-001



**RAD
FOR
2019
WALK
WED
DAY 7:30-
9:11PM
DANCE
US TO CELEBRATE THE
GRADUATING CLASS OF 2019**

DANCING HORS D'OEUVRES CHAMPAGNE TOAST
GRADUATE STUDENTS PLUS ONES WELCOME CASH BAR DRESS UP
ONE DRINK TICKETS PER STUDENT (WHILE SUPPLIES LAST)

PR07G-001

PR07H-001 →

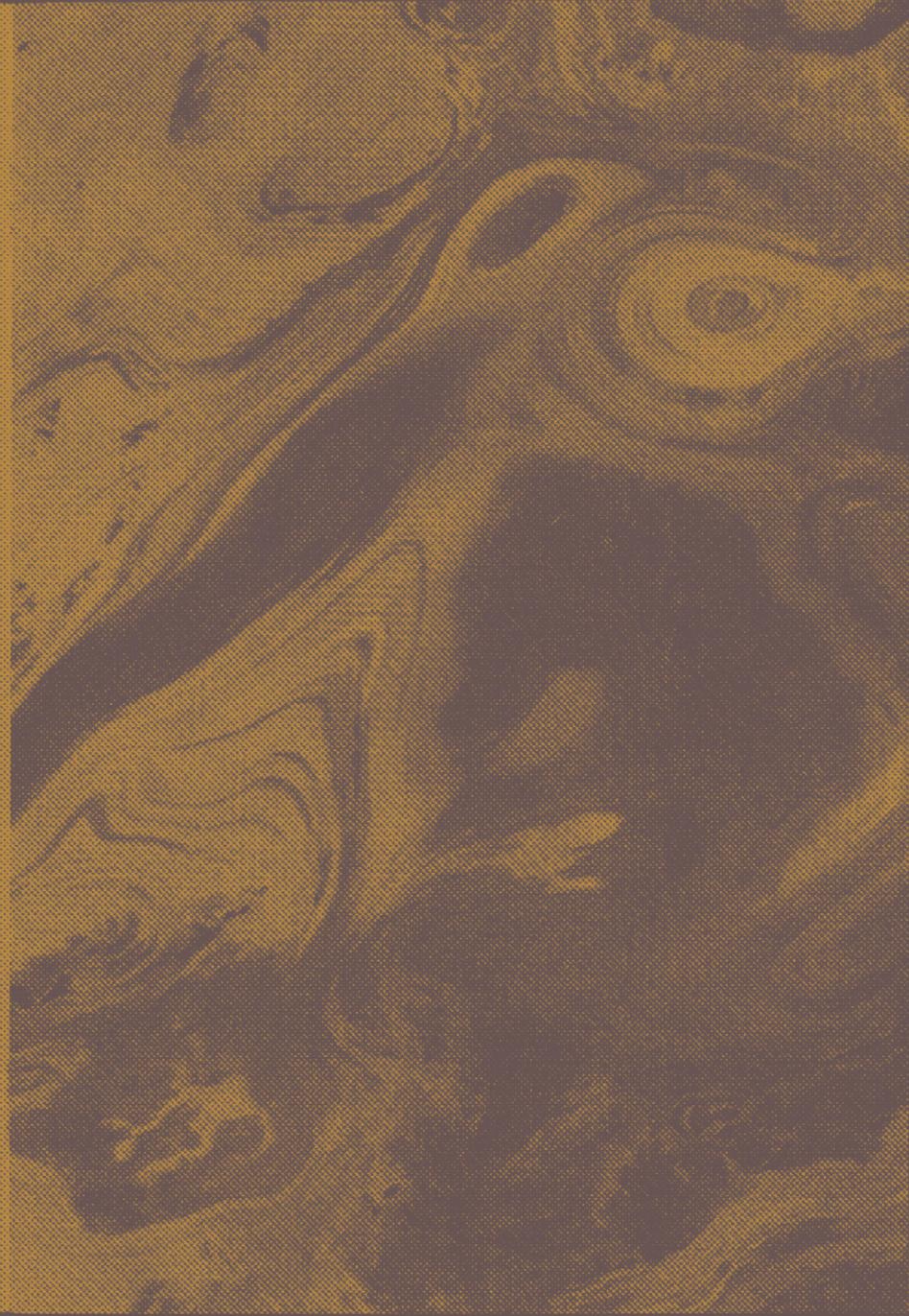


Hot & Dry
(Subtropical)

Semiarid
(Cold Winter)

Coastal

Cold
(Polar)



Aegirine, Beryl
Copper + Diamond

Emerald

Ferrosilite? Gold!

Hyalophane & Iron
Jade; Kaňkite (Lead)

Mercury »Nickel«

Onyx—Peridot

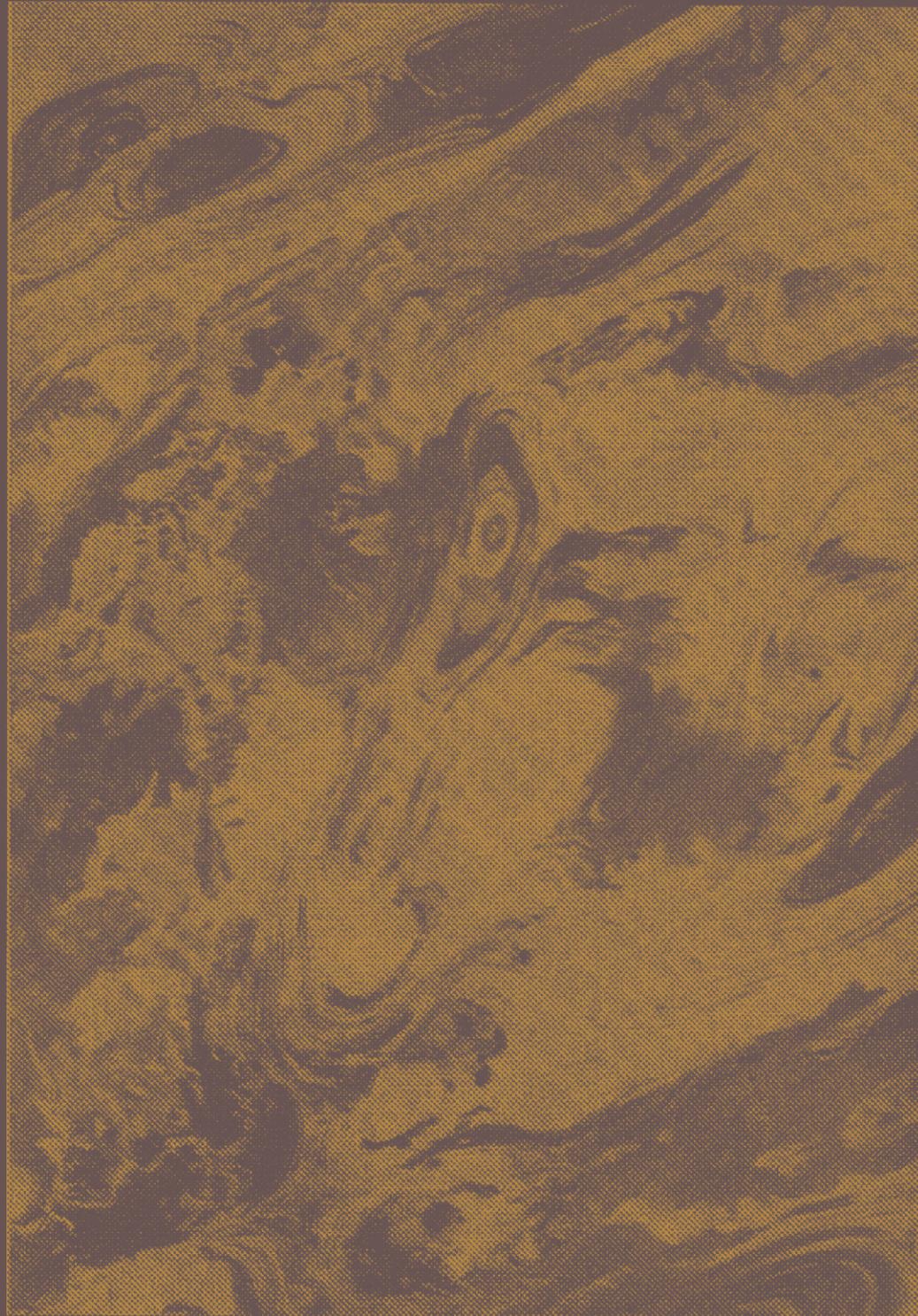
PR08A-002

PR08A-001

Quartz & Ruby
{Silver} Titanium

Ulvöspinel
Vulcanite/Wüstite

Xenotime
Ye'elimite [Zircon]



Antarctica, Arctic,
Sahara, Australian,
Arabian, Gobi,
Kalahari, Patagonian,
Syrian, Great Basin,
Chihuahuan,
Karakum, Colorado
Plateau, Sonoran,
Kyzylkum,
Taklamakan, Thar,
Dasht-e Margo,
Registan, Atacama,
Mojave, Columbia
Basin, Namib, Dasht-e
Kavir, Dasht-e Loot

PR08A-003

LAGOON, SEA
RESERVOIR
CREEK & GULF
WATERFALL
POOL # BASIN

PR08B-001

P. 150

P. 151

ISLAND
FOUNTAIN
OCEAN
BAY + REEF
GLACIER
LAKE 10
SHORE 9

PR08B-002

N
F
R
\$
L

SPAGHETTI
ACINI DI PEPE
FETTUCCHINE
TAGLIATELLE
MANICOTTI
PAPPARDELLE
TORTELLINI

PR08C-001

ROTTINI
RIGATONI
ELBOW
LASAGNE
FUSILLI
GEMELLI
PENNE
RAVIOLI
SHELL
ROTELLE

PR08C-002

no
n

PR08D-001

**tsingy de
bemaraha
ature reserve
national park
melaky
madagascar**

**COLBY POSTER
PRINTING Co.
Screen, Inkjet,
Digital,
Letterpress
Los Angeles C.A.
3 Union Print Shop
1332 W 12th Pl**

**Family Owned
Since '48**

PR08E-001

Donatello
Michelangelo
Botticelli
Raphael
Leonardo da Vinci
Michelangelo
Miró
de Chirico
Duchamp
Marcel Duchamp
Arp

PR08F-001

P. 156

P. 157

PR08F-002

Donatello
Michelangelo
Botticelli

ԱՆՏ ԱՄԺԱՐ
ԴՆԿԵՄԿ
ՐՏՏՕՆ ԿԼԵԲ
ՕՄԱՐԿԵՐՕՒՏ

P. 158

WORK
INDEX

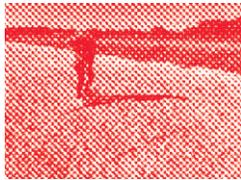
P. 159

PR01	I,O,S	Positive, Negative, In-Between
PR02	B,P,S,T	Circa
PR03	T	Unspaced Spaces
PR04	O	Deconstruction, Reconstruction
PR05	I	+1 (320) 313-1312
PR06	P	Atlas
PR07 A-H	O,P	Various Artworks, Posters & Objects
PR08 A-F	T	Various Typefaces

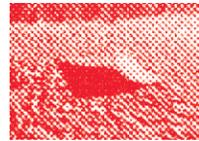
B	Brand
I	Installation
O	Object
P	Print
S	Spacial
T	Typeface

PR01 023-035 On a sunny fall afternoon, artist Will Chouinard and I made our way to the Tillinghast Farm Beach in Rhode Island, equipped with two shovels and a bucket. Except for a quick sketch, nothing was planned. We decided to realize an experimental project around sixty yards from the main beach entrance, so most beach walkers would pass us.

We marked a rectangular square of roughly eight by eight feet on the sand, parallel to the waterfront. This area would become a cube of sand, with the only purpose of interrupting the beautiful beach landscape. We imagined it as “the sand version” of the famous monolith, known from Stanley Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey,” but rotated by ninety degrees—an unfamiliar object in a familiar environment.



PR01-001



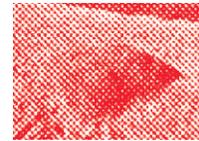
PR01-002



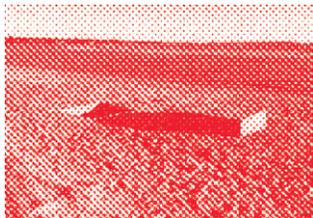
PR01-003



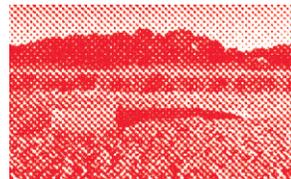
PR01-004



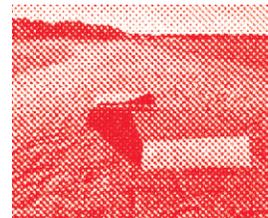
PR01-005



PR01-006



PR01-007



PR01-008



PR01-009

For three hours we excavated sand from nearby, moving it to our defined rectangular shape. Our activities temporarily interrupted the landscape and the expectations of those on a Saturday afternoon walk. We did not clearly—or perhaps at all—communicate why we were performing this activity, yet clearly people

wondered. Some entered into conversation with us in search of an explanation.

Soon the excavated area became a hole—a second component of the piece. We decided to extend it to the same size as the planned cube to create a negative. The positive and the negative element were set parallel to each other on the beachfront, but slightly shifted, with an approximate eight foot space in-between.

We moved the sand within the rectangular marked area to begin shaping the cube. Creating clean edges and corners that presented it as a linear object was challenging, but we came close after discovering some wooden blocks nearby. Small variations of these forms, however, reminded us that the concept of perfect geometry is not tangible in practice and that “close enough” is good enough to satisfy the categorizational tendencies of our minds.

The final piece—a large rectangular rammed sand form matched the shape of the hole nearby. It looked like the excavation and reformation were as simple as cutting and pasting. But the building process took more than five hours.

The two elements—form and counterform—were very different: one was shaped by adding mass, the other by removing mass; one positive, the other negative space; one actively interrupts the landscape, the other hides it. Yet both share commonalities: material, function, scale and imperfection. Does the concept of true opposites exist only so long as we rely solely on words to convey meaning?

Once completed, the sun set, creating longer and longer shadows. Time became a subject. At around six o'clock the shadow of the positive form crept across the ground until eventually

in entered the excavated form to visually connect the two elements.

During this experimental process, with each element observed and recorded, our attention shifted from the cube to the discourse established by performing and interrupting a familiar place, to the positive and the negative. As soon as the sun began to set, the shadow and the untouched area in-between—the unconsidered component—became the central and third element of the composition.

The shadow could not exist without the cube. The shadow play may now be considered a separate element or rather as part of it. Are shadows attached to the objects that create them? To say yes means that the cube reentered the space from which it originated and now lives in two places at once, occupying positive and negative space simultaneously.

Upon return to the location several days later, the artwork remained visible, though the shadow decreased. The two forms were distinguishable but noticeably more similar. The cube was trampled, with the edges of the hole slumped. Soon to disappear and transform back to its original, eliminating the possibility of a shadow.

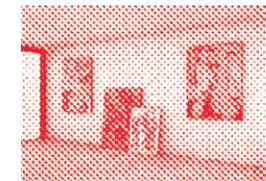
Through time it will be revealed that the opposites were not so different and always connected because they will eventually become the in-between.

Circa is an itinerant pop-up gallery and social space, periodically showcasing the work of designers and artists in small, temporary exhibitions.

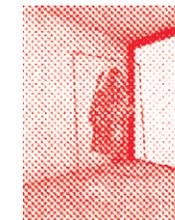
Unlike traditional museums or galleries, Circa does not have a permanent location, collection, or identity. Instead, the approach is to work outside the boundaries of typical museum and gallery environments dedicated to and driven by the art market and often located in gentrified areas, not regularly available to less privileged groups.



PR02-001



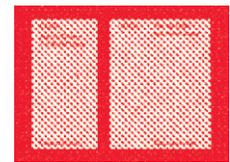
PR02-002



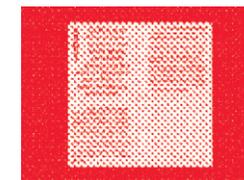
PR02-003



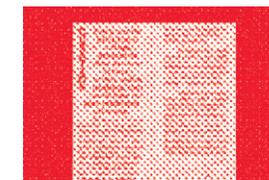
PR02-004



PR02-005



PR02-006



PR02-007



PR02-008

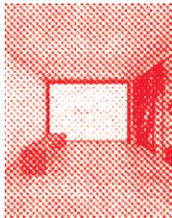


PR02-009

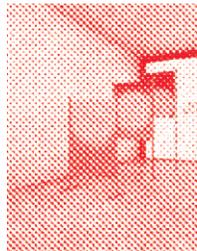
By creating ephemeral and adaptable environments, the exhibitions are inclusive, not restrictive, and can be present at multiple locations. Circa invites audiences not exposed to or drawn to contemporary art and design. Its doors may open in a public park, on a parking lot, next to a beach, in an old factory, or on a sidewalk. Depending on its context, the narrative and meaning of an exhibition changes. Circa converts unconsidered and unused public or private spaces into artistic experiences. Likewise, people may not explicitly plan a visit to an exhibition, but stop over out of curiosity.

Every curated exhibition is a stage, designed to allow discourse between artists and/or

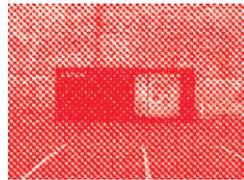
locations, that would have not been established otherwise. The discourse is informed by utilizing art, design, locations, and artist's backgrounds as central elements for exhibition concepts. Exhibited artworks, installations, sculptures, books, photographs, videos, work in progress, fashion, and so on, question and comment on, show hidden details, or turn something upside down. The pieces do so, either by themselves, or through juxtaposition with other pieces, artists, or locations.



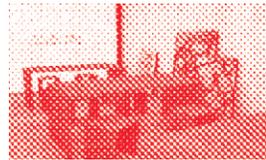
PR02-010



PR02-011



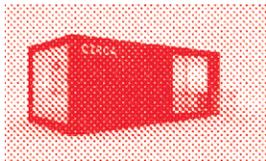
PR02-012



PR02-013



PR02-014



PR02-015

Temporary
Exhibition?
Local/Global
(Pop-Up)
Workshop
Multimedia
Gallery...

PR02-016

Now On View:
Retrospective
Short-Term [17]
→ Ephemeral
Performance

PR02-017

Painting Festival
← Collection
Shop, Biennial '20
(Area) Culture
Museum [Today]
Impermanent
Poetry 9.45 AM
Urban Space

PR02-018

In contrast to static museums or galleries, whose exhibition spaces are defined by their architecture, changing locations and potential audiences can be utilized as a second component—either passive or active.

The space is a non-gentrified setting, which is clearly communicated through every exhibition. Thus, exhibited pieces are not designated as “holy,” but as part of our culture and everyday lives. An exhibited piece of furniture, for instance, should not be

untouchable, but actually usable. A garment should not be hidden behind glass, but worn.

The name originates from the Latin word “circum” (approximately, more or less, in the region of, in the neighborhood of, around, in circulation) and expresses the essence of a mobile pop-up space, that changes locations and exhibitions regularly.

Both space and visual identity incorporate permanent elements—the four walls of the space, its name, and a graphic design structure. Simultaneously, every element is temporary. Elements may be bent or changed—the interior may look and feel different from a previous exhibition; the typeface may be modified to better express an exhibition's intention. Both graphic design structure and typeface are meant to be used as templates—they are only a suggestion. There's no hierarchy between Circa's identity and an exhibition—the identity reacts to the content.

Just as adaptable as Circa's identity system are its exhibition formats—including, but not limited to the following three examples.

1 Site-specific exhibitions react to and comment on the location Circa is located at. An exhibition set up on a supermarket parking lot, for instance, comment on topics such as consumerism and capitalism.

2 Through workshops held in the space, local artists are invited to design an exhibition on the spot, reacting and relating it to the location and the communities the artists originate from.

3 Two or more locations are juxtaposed and connected through the work of local artists.

Artists from different communities are invited to be part of a group exhibition. The exhibition is only showcased in the areas the artists live in or originate from, resulting in a dialogue between them and multiple, perhaps very different, conversations about the works.

Works showcased in the renderings by Colin Doerffler, Frederik Sutter, George Rouy, Jonas Lindstroem, Jean-Baptiste Castel and Astric Reringa, Studio Mut, Nao Tatsumi, Marine Julié, Ben Clark, Kentaro Okawara, and Johanna Burai.

Spaces between letters are conventionally adjusted to create harmonious legibility. By visualizing the void—the invisible and supportive spaces between the letterforms—this interactive typeface invites viewers to influence the appearance by becoming a component of it.

While typing, the typeface constantly changes. Letters react to their context—their visual appearances are dependent on the word they appear in. The “N” in New York is different from the “N” in Norway.

The typeface is accompanied by a printed as well as an interactive online type specimen. Text samples in the online type specimen are generated and drawn from the viewers meta data—the ultimate space between a web-based application and the viewers themselves. The typeface becomes an object that responds by highlighting the unnoticed details of one’s online presence. Contents of the specimen change, depending on the location, time, and other factors it is viewed from. It never looks the same twice and only exists when it is actively being engaged with and disappears otherwise.

PR03

081-087

A D Dhab
Ab Dh Dhabi
Abu Dha
R Rom
Ro Rome

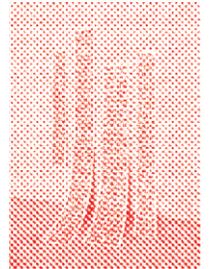
PR03-001

L Lo Los
A Ang
An Ange
Angel
Angele
Angeles

PR03-002

N Y C
Ne Yo Ci
New Yor Cit
York City
B Berl
Be Berli
Ber Berlin

PR03-003



PR03-006

S P Paul
Sa Pa Paulo
Sao Pau

PR03-004

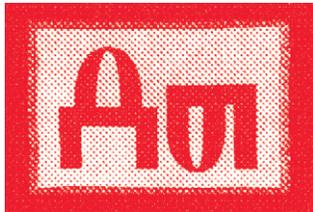
M D
Mi De
Mil Del
Mila Delh
Milan Delhi

PR03-005

The typeface is mono-spaced, simultaneously it is not. Similar to conventional mono-spaced typefaces, each character takes up a fixed amount of space, which are, however, dependent on the character’s natural widths, just like proportional typefaces that have multiple letter widths.

The irregular spaces in-between letters are not adjusted. Instead, letters adjust to fill these spaces. Thus, spaces and letters remain imperfect—sometimes larger, sometimes smaller. They create an unconventional rhythm, disconnected from pronunciation, syllables or meaning or words. They create their own “visual pronunciation.”

PR04 090-097 Woven cotton blankets—originally produced to present uppercase and lowercase “A” of a typeface on the front ↗PR04-001, with the inverted equivalent on the back ↗PR04-002—became part of an exploration into deconstructionism.



PR04-001



PR04-002



PR04-003



PR04-004



PR04-005



PR04-006

The blankets were utilized as source material for a sweater ↗PR04-004 & PR04-005 and several scarves ↗PR04-006. The sweater’s front and one sleeve used to be the back of a blanket, the back of the sweater and the second sleeve used to be the front. The appearance of the scarves are random.

Our lives are defined, even led by interacting with them. It’s difficult to distance

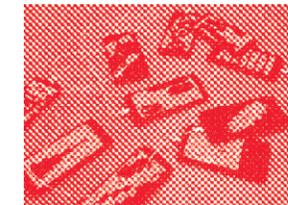
PR05 100-106 +1 (320) 313-1312 is an interactive smartphone installation—an array of visualizations of ourselves, and how we are eternally entrapped in them. Everything we are curious about, places we go to, and people we communicate with, are fossilized in these highly personalized devices—miniature catalogues of ourselves.

ourselves, or control when and how often they enter our lives.

The installation features an adaptable number of smartphones. By texting +1 (320) 313-1312, the viewer assigns a task to a smartphone and has control over when the devices operate. The command “text,” for instance, instructs a device to compose messages. The abstracted animations that show up once a device is activated are inspired by the original interactions and underlaid with their original sounds. Any number of individuals are able to interact with the setup. Thus, only one smartphone can be changed at the same time.



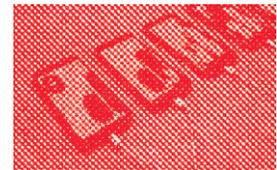
PR05-001



PR05-002



PR05-003



PR05-004

Due to the fact that controlling the screens is dependent on the audience interacting with them, an unlimited number of combinations of animations and soundscapes of the installation are possible. It may become irregular and reminiscent of busy urban environments or switch to complete silence.

INTUITIONAL

EXPRESSIONS

ODD

NORMS

P.172

P.173



PR06-001



PR06-002



PR06-003



PR06-004



PR06-005



PR06-006

PR06 125-131 Atlas showcases a collection of typographic and illustrative artworks and photographs, inspired by store signs and commercial advertisements found in the neighborhoods of Providence, Rhode Island. Both type and illustrations are informed by the handcrafted visual aesthetics the artworks originate from.

PR07A 132-134 Depending on the viewer's distance, a giant poster—measuring eight by five feet—changes its visual appearance. From far away, words seem to be formed from shiny, metal bars. Viewed up close, the metal effect disappears. Instead, delicate grain textures appear.

PR07B 134-137 Abstract, three-dimensional objects and shapes were translated into two-dimensional drawings during formal exploration. The artworks are abstract and to be interpreted by the viewer and their individual impressions and associations. In other words, there is no pre-defined story that directs the viewer to think and experience the pieces.

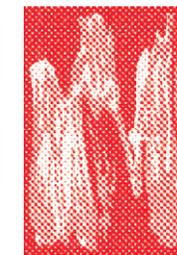
Two artworks ↗PR07B-002 & ↗PR07B-004 are based on organic sculptures. The physics and logic of three-dimensionality were ignored in order to freely experiment. By smoothing the entire artwork unevenly, depth was created, reminiscent of close and distant shadows that appear when positioning objects behind opaque glass.



PR07A-001



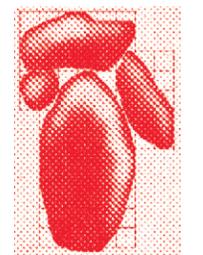
PR07A-002



PR07B-001



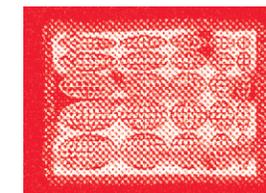
PR07B-002



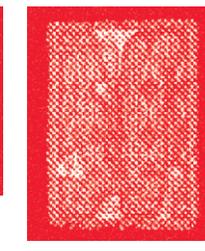
PR07B-003



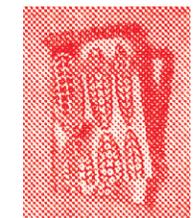
PR07B-004



PR07C-001



PR07C-002



PR07C-003

Another artwork ↗PR07B-001 reminds of wooden structures or the top of mountains. Irregular strokes and uneven shapes create distorted vertical movements, a feeling of up and down, sometimes strengthened, sometimes weakened.

Yet another artwork ↗PR07B-003 consists of four rounded, but uneven shapes on an irregular grid—a sort of rock formation. A lighter, grainy texture adds dimensionality to the otherwise flat shapes, with edges pushing against the border of the underlying grid. The weight of the shapes—which appear oddly stacked on top of each other—initiates a counterbalance in relation to the grid. If the border of the grid was removed—the

artwork's boundaries—physics would transform: move, rearrange, collapse, and change the meaning and potential experience.

PR07C 137-
139

As part of an ongoing exploration into different materials and the effects of production processes, the blanket \rightarrow PR07C-001 - PR07C-003 shows a destructed symbol of a globe, combined with a seemingly random overlay of gradients and textures. Due to the weaving techniques, effects evolved that exceed the possibilities of purely digital creations.



PR07D-001



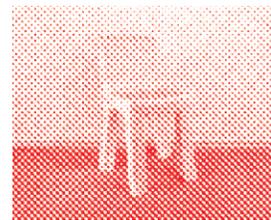
PR07E-001



PR07F-001



PR07G-001



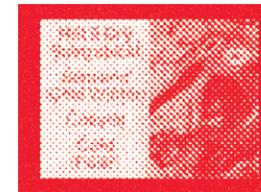
PR07H-001

PR07E 142-
143

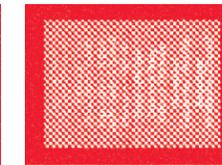
The poster (originally designed to announce a lecture) can be brought to life by projecting it on a surface and inviting the viewers to change it by moving and rearranging its elements via a web application. From the small mobile screen to the large scale projection, viewers become designers and can influence factors such as text alignment, color, and the position of shapes. Through interactivity and collaboration, an infinite number of versions of the poster can be generated.

PR07H 143

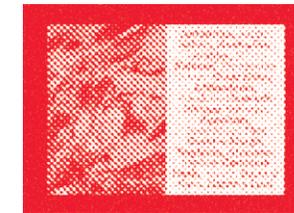
“Not A Chair” visually reminds of a chair: four square legs, attached to the corners of the bottom of the seat and a rectangular seatback. Thus, it is quite off, or somewhere



PR08A-001



PR08A-002



PR08A-003



PR08B-001



PR08B-002



PR08C-001



PR08C-002



PR08D-001



PR08E-001



PR08F-001



PR08F-002

PR08A 146-
149

between liquid and solid. The white fabric is filled with foam. The object collapses as soon as weight is applied to it, which removes the initial function of a chair.

Principal is a high-contrast sans serif typeface with roots in the nineteenth-century grotesques. Short descenders and long ascenders shift its baseline uncommonly low, suggesting a sense of strong (digital) gravity that particularly informs the heavier weights. The repetitive use of minor angles and slightly disproportionate terminals complement the otherwise rigid typeface.

PR08B 150-
152

Inspired by the unintended effects of metal typesetting, the inversion of ink traps characterize this typeface. Instead of creating spaces in order to generate optical harmony

ABSTRACT

of stroke widths—or, at the beginning of the 20th century, to prevent ink from spreading—every inner corner is over-proportionally rounded—“spread with ink.”

PR08C	152- 153	By laying out spaghetti noodles on a kitchen counter and digitally redrawing them, the typeface converts a ready-made, everyday object into a script typeface.
PR08D	153- 154	Based on and constructed by only deformed and asymmetrical rectangles, the rather edgy typeface is drawn without the use of curves.
PR08F	156- 158	Mue is a modular display typeface, characterized by the fusion of straight lines, perfect circles and elongated curves. Constructed by a limited set of shapes, it challenges constraints and questions the pre-defined notion of what visual appearance a letter should take on.

COUNTER-FORMATION
ESTABLISHES A FOUNDATION TO ENVISION A
MORE ACCURATE SHAPE
AND FIELD OF INTER-
RELATIONS ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND CONTEXTS
THAT ARE NOT ONLY RECEPTIVE BUT APPROPRIATIVE
AND ELABORATIVE.³⁷

BY APPROACHING THE
SPACE OF THE COUNTER-
FORM, MY AMBITION IS
TO GENERATE A RESPONSIVE
STRUCTURE AND AN
ARCHIVE OF FRAGMENTS
TO BUILD UPON—A BLANK
CANVAS WITH A VARIABLE
FORMAT TO RECAST VISION
AND ACTION.

COUNTER-FORMATION
PLACES EMPHASIS ON THE
TRANSFORMATIVE, LIMINAL
SPACE THAT ALLOWS
ONE TO ENCOUNTER CON-
TEXTS FROM WITHIN, BE-
TWEEN, AND AROUND TO
ORGANIZE OR BREAK THEM
IN A DIFFERENT FASHION.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS,
END
COLOPHON

NOTES,

To Mom, Dad, and Jasmin for always being supportive. I wish we could have celebrated my graduation together in Providence.

To Aleks, Bobby Joe, Calle, Caroline, Elena, Emily, Hilary, Mukul, Seyong, Sophie, Vai, Yoon, and Weixi for being the most amazing cohort. Y'all will be missed!

To Bethany Johns for literally everything. Thanks for accepting me into this program and giving me the chance to have such an incredible experience and meet so many wonderful people.

To Eva Laporte for your help and generosity. Thanks again for the four dollars you gave me when your dog ate my bread.

To Anne West for always finding the most terrific words. Also, thank you for all the readings that helped me find some of them, too.

To Kelsey Elder and Minkyung Kim for being a fantastic thesis team. From now on I will need to find something else to every Friday at 11.30.

To Everett Epstein for your incredible writing support and your magnificent Google Docs skills.

To James Goggin and Paul Soulellis for your brilliant and inspiring classes and your patience when I didn't know what I was doing.

To Hammett Nurosi for your kindness and all the after-class bar field trips.

To Will and Joel for being so chill. I hope we can have a few 'Gansetts together soon.

To the class of 2019. You are amazing.

To the class of 2021 and 2022. I'm excited to see what y'all do!

To Nate Brown and Joe Perez for two wonderful conversations.

To the Fulbright Program, the German Academic Exchange Service, and the Germanistic Society of America for your generous support.

To Meriem for keeping me company in my quarantine studio a.k.a. kitchen.

To Tim Maly, Kathleen and Chris Sleboda, Doug Scott, Ryan Waller, and everyone who taught and inspired me and contributed to my thesis.

To all the other RISD kids. You are such an exceptional community. I wish we could have had a Fletcher party one more time.

And to anyone I forgot. If you call me out I will include you in future editions.

- 1 Usvamaa-Routila, Sirk-
— kaliisa. "Form and Counterform in Graphic Design: A Phenomenological Approach." Jyväskylä, Finland: Society for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (2003). Web-published at o-p-o.net.
- 2 The Editors of Scholar-
— pedia. "Gestalt Principles." Scholarpedia. Accessed February 17, 2020. scholarpedia.org/article/Gestalt_principles
- 3 Foucault, Michel. "Of
— Other Spaces." In "The Visual Culture Reader." London and New York: Routledge (1998). Pages 238-244.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Meagher, Mark. "Design-
— ing for change: The poetic potential of responsive architecture." In "Frontiers of Architectural Research," Volume 4, Issue 2. Beijing, China: Higher Education Press (2015). Pages 159-165.
- 7 Ayres, Phil. "Prairie
— House: House for a Fashion Pattern Maker and Fiber Artist." Orambra. Accessed February 23, 2020. orambra.com/~prairie-House.html
- 8 Cixous, Hélène and
— MacGillivray, Catherine A. F. "Without End no State of Drawingness no, rather: The Executioner's Taking off." In "New Literary History," Volume 24, No. 1. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1993). Pages 91-103.
- 9 Benson, Bruce Ellis.
— "The Fundamental Heteronomy of Jazz Improvisation." Ciarn. Accessed March 8, 2020. cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2006-4-page-453.htm
- 10 Share, Don. "Lines of
— Affinity." In "Poetry Magazine," Volume 204, No. 3. Chicago, IL: Poetry Foundation (2014). Pages 231-233.
- 11 Darling, Michael.
— "Virgil Abloh: Figures of Speech." New York: Prestel (2019).
- 12 The Editors of Phaidon.
— "Sterling Ruby Puts His Workwear On Show." Phaidon. Accessed February 28, 2020. phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/march/10/sterling-ruby-puts-his-workwear-on-show/
- 13 The Editors of Sprüth
— Magers. "Work Wear: Garment and Textile Archive 2008-2016." Sprüth Magers London. Accessed February 28, 2020. spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/403@press_en
- 14 Stephanson, Annie. "What
— is Soft Matter?" Softbites. Accessed October 7, 2019. softbites.org/2019/01/03/what-is-soft-matter
- 15 The Editors of MoMA.
— "Mark Rothko, No. 3/No. 13, 1949." The Museum of Modern Art. Accessed February 29, 2020. moma.org/collection/works/79687
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Kedmey, Karen. "Mark
— Rothko." The Museum of Modern Art. Accessed February 29, 2020. moma.org/artists/5047
- 18 The Editors of Carré
— d'Artistes. "Mark Rothko, So Simple, So Complicated." Carré d'Artistes. Accessed February 29, 2020.

- carredartistes.com/en/blog/mark-rothko-so-simple-so-complicated-n132
- 19 The Editors of MoMA.
— "Mark Rothko, No. 3/No. 13, 1949." Prize. "Biography: Tadao Ando." The Pritzker Architecture Prize. Accessed February 20, 2020. pritzker-prize.com/biography-tadao-ando
- 20 Jain, Mayank. "How to
— Understand Art—A Mark Rothko Case Study." Mayank Jain. Accessed February 29, 2020. mayankja.in/blog/how-to-understand-art-a-mark-rothko-case-study
- 21 The Editors of Radford
— University. "Mark Rothko: The Artist's Reality." Radford University. Accessed February 29, 2020. radford.edu/rbarris/art428/mark%20rothko.html
- 22 Kedmey, Karen. "Mark
— Rothko." Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing (2011). Pages 81-85.
- 23 Kroll, Andrew. "AD
— Classics: Church of the Light." Arch Daily. Accessed February 29, 2020. archdaily.com/101260/ad-classics-church-of-the-light-tadao-ando
- 24 Kroll, Andrew. "AD
— Classics: Church of the Light." English, Bonnie. "Sartorial Deconstruction: The Nature of Conceptualism in Postmodernist Japanese Fashion Design." The New York Times Style Magazine. Accessed March 1, 2020. nytimes.com/2017/04/28/t-magazine/fashion/rei-kawakubo-comme-des-garcons-themes.html
- 25 The Editors of The
— Pritzker Architecture Prize. "Biography: Tadao Ando." The Pritzker Architecture Prize. Accessed February 20, 2020. pritzker-prize.com/biography-tadao-ando
- 26 Schielke, Thomas. "When
— Sunlight Meets Tadao Ando's Concrete." Arch Daily. Accessed February 29, 2020. archdaily.com/915270/when-sunlight-meets-tadao-andos-concrete
- 27 English, Bonnie.
— "Sartorial Deconstruction: The Nature of Conceptualism in Postmodernist Japanese Fashion Design." In "The International Journal of the Humanities," Volume 9, Issue 2. Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing (2011). Pages 81-85.
- 28 Fury, Alexander. "7 Key
— Themes in Rei Kawakubo's Career." The New York Times Style Magazine. Accessed March 1, 2020. nytimes.com/2017/04/28/t-magazine/fashion/rei-kawakubo-comme-des-garcons-themes.html
- 29 English, Bonnie.
— "Sartorial Deconstruction: The Nature of Conceptualism in Postmodernist Japanese Fashion Design." The Editors of The Met Fifth Avenue. "Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: The Art of the In-Between." The Met Fifth Avenue. Accessed March 1, 2020. metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2017/rei-kawakubo
- 30 The Editors of The Met
— Fifth Avenue. "Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: The Art of the In-Between." The Met Fifth Avenue. Accessed March 1, 2020. metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2017/rei-kawakubo
- 31 Foucault, Michel.
— "The Archaeology of Knowledge." New York: Pantheon Books, (1976). Pages 126-31.
- 32 Foster, Hal. "An
— Archival Impulse." In "October," No. 110. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2004). Pages 3-22.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Van Haften-Schick,
— Lauren. "What is the Shape and Feel of the In-between?" In "What Now? The Politics of Listening: The Politics of Listening." London: Black Dog Publishing (2016). Pages 34-37.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.

COLOPHON

P. 188

© 2020

FABIAN FOHRER

HELLO@

FABIANFOHRER.COM

WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY
FABIAN FOHRER

COLOPHON

P. 189

EDITED BY

ANNE WEST, EVERETT EPSTEIN,

KELSEY ELDER, MINKYOUNG

KIM, BETHANY JOHNS

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL
OF DESIGN

MASTER OF FINE ARTS,
GRAPHIC DESIGN

COLOPHON

Kelsey Elder
Assistant Professor, Graphic Design
Primary Advisor

Minkyung Kim
Assistant Professor, Graphic Design
Secondary Advisor

Bethany Johns
Professor, Graphic Design
Graduate Program Director

Timothy Maly
Senior Lead, Center for Complexity at RISD
External Thesis Critic

P. 190

This thesis is created for academic purposes only. Image use is for educational purposes only. Unless otherwise noted, all images were reproduced without permission. If there are objections to the use of any images, I will be happy to remove from further editions. Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the Department of Graphic Design of the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island.

FABIAN FOHRER
COUNTERFORMATION.
COM