WRITING
WRITING

ALPHABETUM VII
2020

WRITING WRITING

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Alphabetum VII
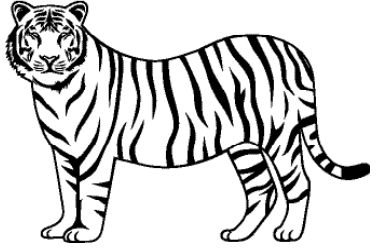August 29, 2020 – November 29, 2020
West Den Haag, The Netherlands

I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun.

Raymond Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, 1940

CONTENTS

Remaining Composed
An introduction

Parataxis is the way children talk.

Parataxis is how people tell stories orally.

Parataxis in writing is composed of short sentences that lie together, forming a greater narrative because they are placed in juxtaposition, not in an umbrella-like format.

Visually, parataxis is akin to taking two disparate images and placing them together in order to create new meaning. It is the jump between the meaning of one object and the meaning of another object, their collocation creating implied meaning.

Parataxis is much like how the margins between panels in a comic strip implicitly denote unseen, yet powerful actions that happen behind the scenes.

Parataxis is how many Japanese kanji often work together, for example 水(water) + 車 (wheel) = 水車 (waterwheel).

Parataxis is an approach to composition-making.

Compositions are how we make sense of the world: the means and methods of ordering our world and making it sensical. For artists and designers, it is often the arrangement of elements, visual or otherwise, to create something larger.

For most humans who can or may exert choices in these matters, composition is how we arrange ourselves socially and culturally, as well.

Composition as Poesis

We live in a constellation
Of patches and pitches,
Not in a single world

. . . .

The way, when we climb a mountain,
Vermont throws itself together

"July Mountain"
Wallace Stevens

The term "poesis" refers to two things—first, it is an antiquated term for "poetry", and that is not what we are talking about, though we present you with a literal poem here—one written by the Pulitzer Prize-winner Wallace Stevens, a man who broke his hand punching Ernest Hemingway in the mouth and got in screaming arguments with Robert Frost.

The second kind of poesis—the one we are interested in here—is *the production of culture*—the output of society and the assembly of how we reflect on culture.

Regarding this poem, the writer and educator Kathleen Stewart (loved by artists and hated by critical studies folks for her sappy, overly poetic take on the work of Eve Sedgwick and Queer Theory, in general) writes:

Disparate things come together differently in each instance and yet the repetition itself leaves a residue like a track or a habit. Each instance of 'Vermont'' coming together is a singularity of a cliche but that doesn't mean it's dead or just one example of the same. It remains an event—a moment when something happens to produce the quality of being in a scene. In other words, it's a composition—a poesis—and one that literally can't be seen as a simple repository of systemic effects imposed on an innocent world but has to be traced through the generative modalities of impulses, daydreams, ways of relating, distractions, strategies, failures, encounters, and worldings of all kinds.

This idea of composition as *world-building*, or assembling a conception of the world, is just one aspect of what a composition might be.

One of the strongest connecting threads of the collected work of the individuals involved in this catalogue and the adjacent exhibition is, quite literally, *Vermont*.

In 2011, contributor Matthew Monk founded the MFA Program in Graphic Design at Vermont College of Fine

Arts in Montpelier, Vermont—the smallest capital city in the United States. His vision was to create a program driven by inclusiveness, accessibility, exploration, curiosity, and intellectual rigor. Contributor Ian Lynam began teaching in the program the following year, and contributors Chris Ro, Gail Swanlund, and Randy Nakamura all lectured as guest critics in the program in 2015.

This small group of people is connected in that they operate in multiple and simultaneous modes of creative production, notably as researchers, designers, educators, writers, investigators, artists, and critics.

And they've all spent some time—for some shorter and for others longer—in Vermont and all her splendor.

Each contributor explores divergent juxtapositions of both the direct and the sidelong, various juxtapositions of the connotative and denotative through writing (e.g: literature) and writing (e.g.: visual composition). Each conjures lyrical/poetic form in both the text and how it is concocted—creating something that is 'haunted' (in the sense of Derrida's "hauntology") by a sense of the inchoate and the evanescent.

Using parataxis as operational strategy, each contributor has generated graceful "leaps of faiths" alongside individual subtly (or not so subtly) structured methodologies. If writing is the one activity that invites infinite and improvisational pathways in the contributors' visual work, each is committed to seeing how this language–forward undertaking manifests in, ferments, and/or embroiders, the work of the others.

Parataxis is "arranging side-by-side".

Parataxis is a bloodied knife lying next to a prone body.

Parataxis is a child and a Labrador Retriever.

Parataxis is a cold gaze and a bead of hot sweat.

Parataxis is an apple and a snake.

Parataxis is inviting the audience to draw their own conclusions from these arrangements.

Seaming
Gail Swanlund

It was a fifteen minute walk between houses on my road. I walked, biked or skied to and up the front steps of these homes many times, reporting for babysitting duty mostly[1], or selling flat boxes of paraffin-laden fundraising candy for the school band. But this time I was selling my own work: neck ties with typographic messages. At each front door, struck with terror, it's astonishing I was able to make any sales pitch at all. I was thirteen and had plans; while solidly booked for babysitting and daily stall-mucking, an increase in revenue was desired.[2]

The redwing blackbirds sang from the seasonal marshes. Alongside the hard-packed gravel road, swampy gusts wafted off the standing water.

I purchased the fabric in town at a shop whose windows displayed sturdy school shoes, awkwardly modest "Missy"

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1 It's startling that people trusted their children and infants with an eleven year-old. My knowledge of emergency first aid was slim.
2 I was trying to put together enough to buy a flute. Or a moped.
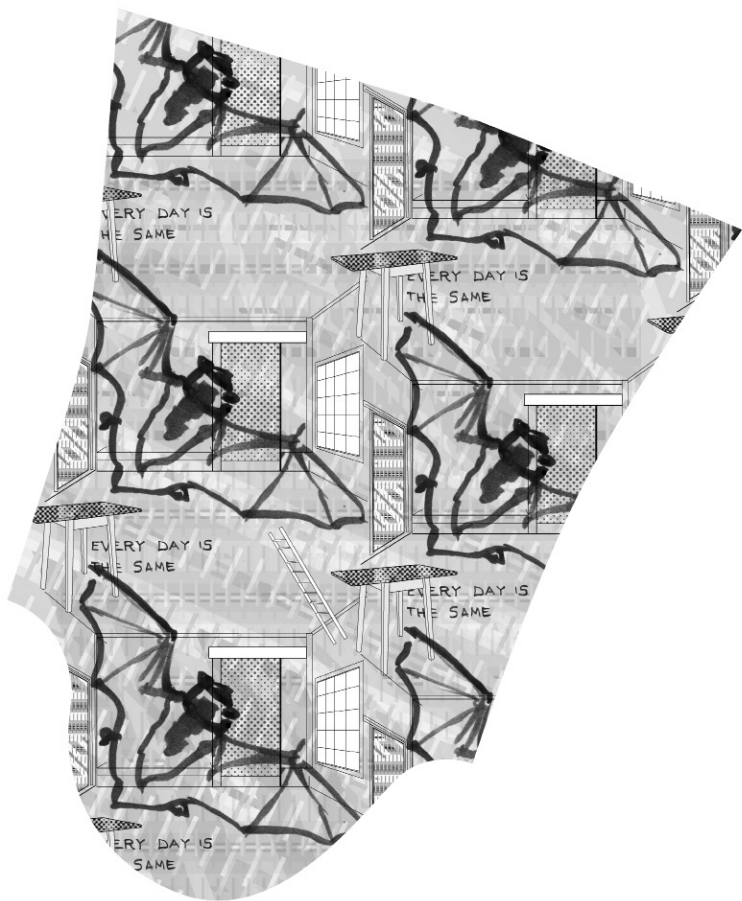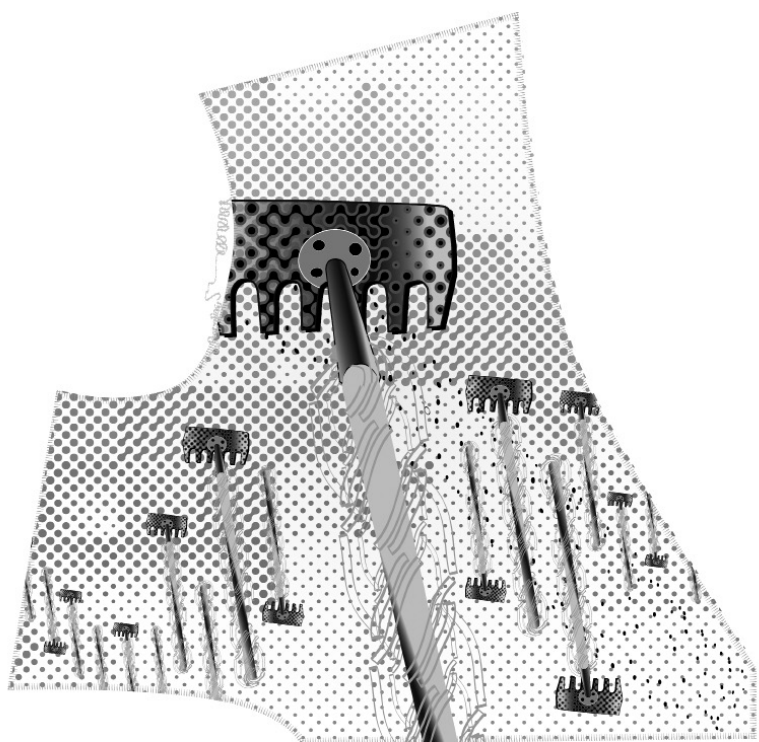
apparel, and rolled-up cloth remnants. I selected several synthetic silk pieces printed with sayings like "Right On!," "Copasetic," and "Respect Your Mother Nature." My sewing pattern made available two tie styles, wide and not-so-wide. The narrower tie variation was preferable, since I could cut more ties from one fabric piece, but I wasn't certain which width potential buyers might favor. The trickiest thing about constructing the ties was finding a way to lay out and cut to the sewing pattern to preserve a readable message at the same time minding the fabric grainline. If not plumb, the tie would never lie properly, always askew.

I sold three ties.[3]

For numerous reasons I swore off clothing purchases four years ago.[4] During this great global pause, or stopdown, it doesn't make a lot of sense to even get dressed, much less make something to wear. In this plague.

Since fourth grade, I've sewn clothes. And other things too—special jacket modifiers to carry surveillance tools, for instance—and while I don't sew well and lose patience a lot, it is a skill I somehow can call on.[5]

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3 Five dollars each. Even now I still don't know how to tie a tie. When one was required to complete various food service uniforms, the knot of my tie was never undone, just loosened. Seeing as I had never tried champagne nor dined in a fancy restaurant, the tuxedo shirt plus tie lent exceedingly unwarranted credibility to my recommendations for pairings. Among servers, it was considered stylish to tuck the tails of the tie into the button placket. A folded dinner linen over my arm indicated further grand refinement.

4 It's kind of a relief. But I have nothing on my great-uncle who tied cardboard around his knees with baling twine, to patch and extend the life of his work pants. The low-top converses received the same sort of mend.

Sewing is to piece together sections of cloth. It's remark-able, while at the same time completely and utterly or-dinary. Sewing starts with flat cloth, a thin line of thread is stitched around the edges and a sense of holding a volume emerges. The shapes of the paper patterns are laid out on, and pinned to the fabric, then cut. Seams and cuts will interrupt the fabric's continuous print. Stripes and plaids may match up over a seam, but an undeniable gap is pressed flat and hidden on the inside. Breaks in the continuity could seem like the jumps between comics frames. Or not. Maybe that's too much of a stretch. The fabric's reverse is called "the wrong side;" inside the gar-ment edges are raw and unraveling.

From the closet, I find a bundle of fabric—how long has it been in there?—printed with pine trees and silver snowflakes. Wrong sides together, I work the seam under the sewing machine foot, feeding the layers into a curve to make a cup for my chin and face. Turning the mask right-side out, I stitch another line, following along the edge of the seam. The machine registers each stitch with a soft tick.

<center>𝓔</center>

Every day is the same. It's ordinary, but at the same time, not at all common. Insipid, horrifying, and cruel in equal measures.

<center>𝓔</center>

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5 My mother is a fabulous seamstress and sewed all of my siblings' our back-to-school clothes and outfits that marked significant life and holiday milestones. Everyone in the family was expected to sew and mend; my brother made a algae-green puffy vest for me that I still wear today. The fabric color wasn't fashionable; it was no nonsense.
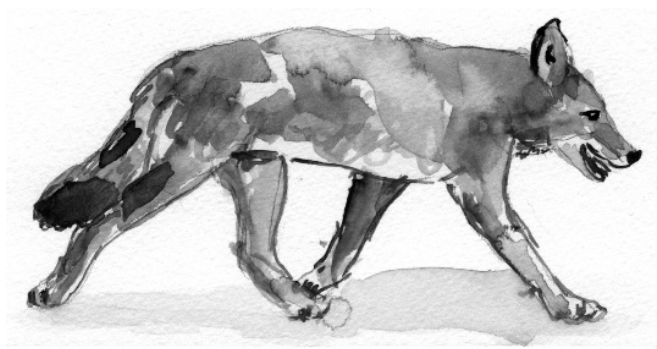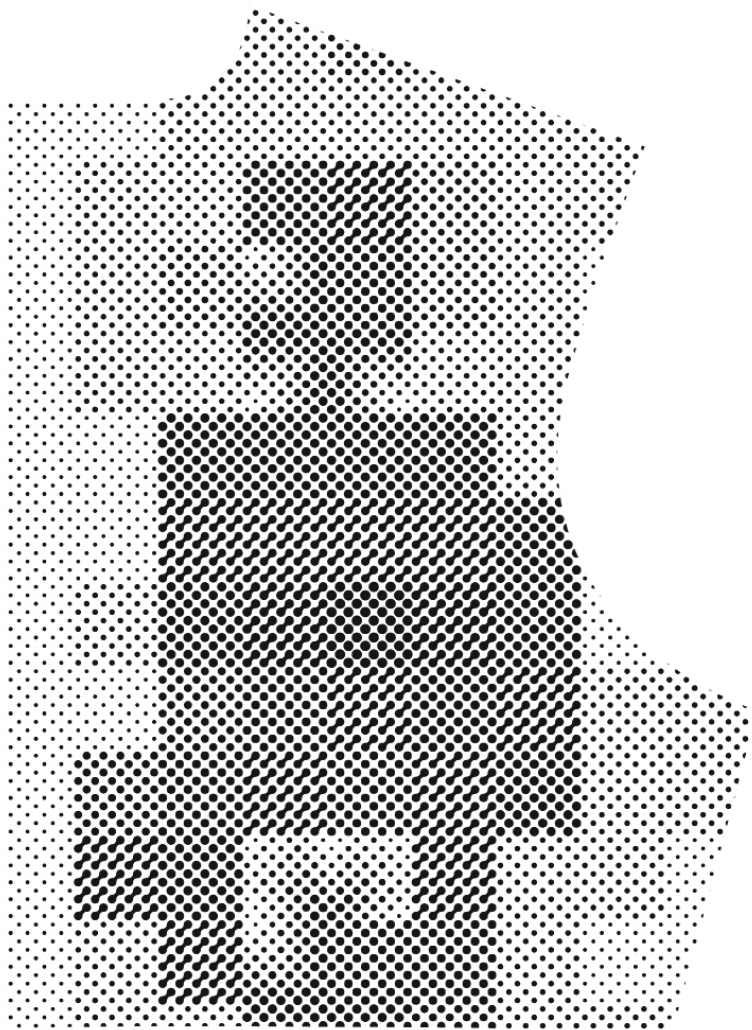
The habitat of the indoors: it's ant season. Try to not lean or brush up against counters in the dark. I open the fridge to illuminate and check the floor for swaths of ants streaming in and swarming the cat's dish, or wandering and hunting across the bathroom tub and sink. I feel very lucky to have a place to quarantine. It's very early, morning.

I wash the cat's bowl. And prepare his breakfast before I go out. He circles around my ankles and presses his forehead to my calf, and waits for me to finish drying his dish. The sun hasn't risen yet, but the street lights, more intense than the moon, brighter than the sun, flood through the windows into the kitchen with searing whiteness. Stepping outside, my shadow's edges are sharp. Cool air brushes my arms.[6] The birds are silent except for the metallic peeps of the towhee. A slow drone of freeway traffic and the signal of the train from not so far away. Indistinct shouting, not angry, is amplified and carried up the canyon. A driver taps a car's horn to announce themselves to someone. No quiet can be found in the city, even during the lockdown.

The line I'll run; the route is visible in my head. Larger loop with smaller loops around blocks, following along streets to the arroyo and back.

A dark thin shadow in the street; a coyote looks over a shoulder at me. This coyote was here last week; has a limp. Maybe she's a she, based on no facts at all. I don't

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6 A quadriplegic with feeling limited to his head, one of the last letters my dad mailed to me described a breeze touching his face and the crackling sensation of beer bubbles moving down his throat. Often we ran together, along the creek and the mighty Mississippi, before the accident.
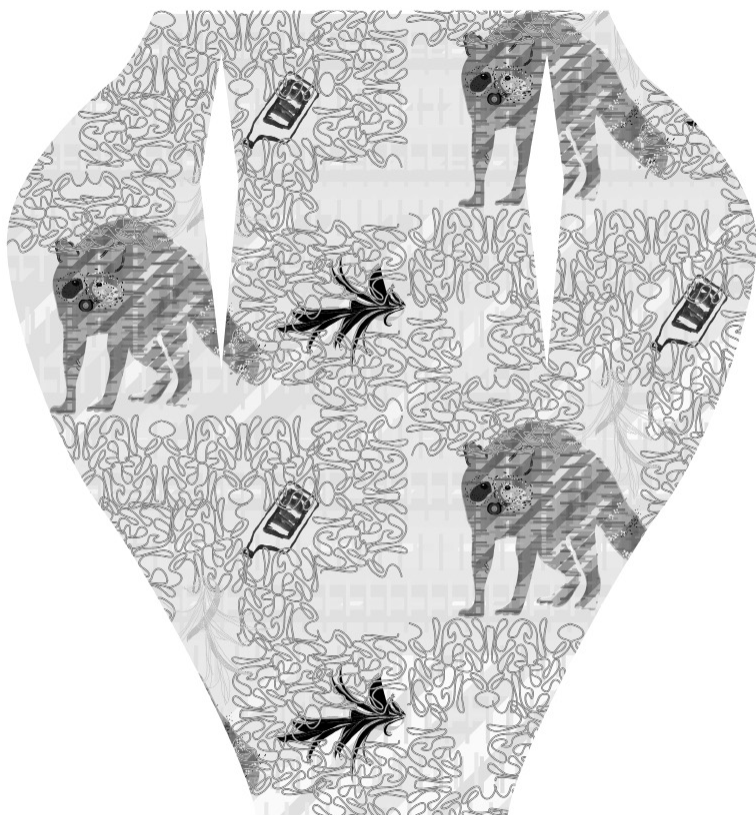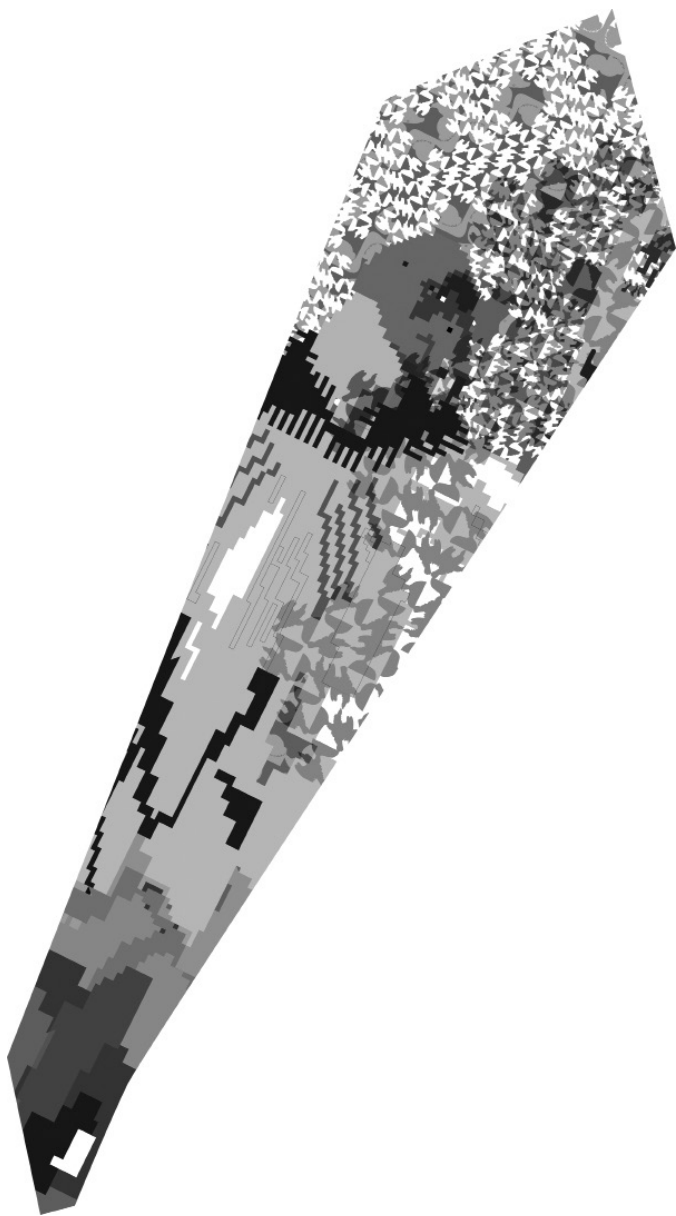
mean to follow, but we're heading in the same direction. The coyote waits, turns to look back again before loping around the corner. When I reach the corner, she has vanished.

Colors are soft greys, distinct tones and values, but not blues, greens, reds. Inhaling, the fabric mask sucks in against and into my mouth and nostrils.

The neighborhood is slowly waking up. Seeing into people's homes, some kitchens are lit, and other interiors glow blue, lighted from expansive flat screens. Every two or three blocks, I come upon a vehicle, engine idling, someone sitting at the wheel, perhaps smoking. My shoes slap on the pavement. Odors of frying bacon and weed drift across the streets. With first light, residents in bathrobes step out onto the stoop and the earliest dog-walkers are out. Outside dogs are quiet; in the daytime, these same dogs are ferocious, lunge, hurl themselves at the fence. Crossing and running along the main street for a block, I run past men sleeping in shop entrance alcoves, wrapped in a blanket or not. A man lies prone in the street next to the curb. As if swimming, as if reaching, he extends an arm and lifts one leg up behind him. I pass by wide, my head full with excuses and reasons; I am ashamed I don't stop to ask if he is OK.

Over several blocks, I count five refrigerators and nine mattresses set out on sidewalks. Wary, since stop signs have become notional for drivers since the plague arrived, I run in the street.

Another runner approaches from the opposite direction. A black shape rushes at him and circles, jumps up, paws
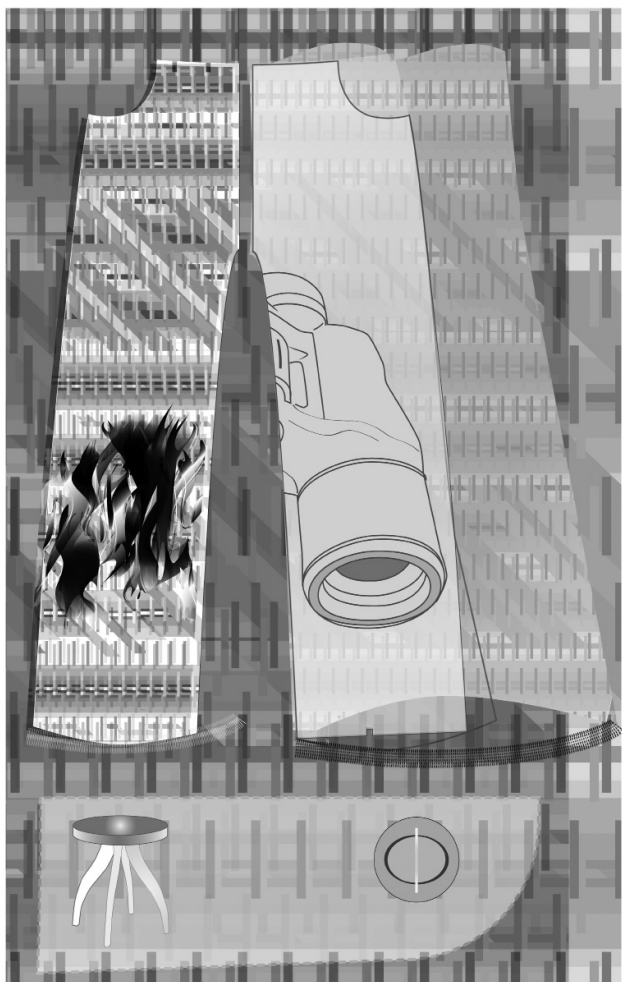
on his chest, frenzied, snapping, snarling, teeth. The runner kicks at him and the dog twists under his lifted leg, circles behind him and jumps at the runner's back. A woman runs to them, yelling and crying. The three of them are tight together, screaming, growling, barking, bellowing, kicking. The woman fumbles then holds the collar, lifting the dog off its front legs, pulling back.

Two, then three, then one, five, four bushtits rise out of a mahogany. Beating ahead, alongside, and jagging and wobbling lines of flight, with and past me. From full bush to another; calls and cheeps form a loose cloud of sound around them.

Keeping clear of two walkers heading straight for me, I follow a ridge that was paved over in the 1920s, up a hill on a narrow street of loosened concrete floaters and asphalt patches.

At the crest, the mountains become visible but muted by a layer of brown–grey particles suspended in vapor; the sun a diffuse disc suspended in the haze.
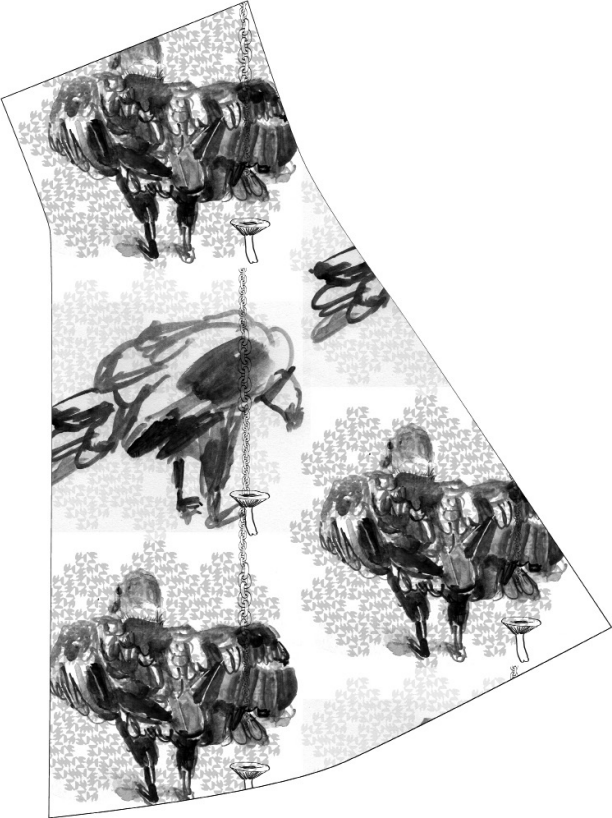
Understanding Dark Media/Writing Between Intervals
Randy Nakamura

We live in times of dark media. The world awash in digital virality has been transformed in a parallel fashion, into a pandemic world literally awash in a virus. Call it the revenge of the universal. Ubiquity, persistence, and invisibility. This passage from Eugene Thacker seems unusually relevant:

Dark media have, as their aim, the mediation of that which is unavailable or inaccessible to the senses, and thus that of which we are normally "in the dark" about. But beyond this, dark media have, as another aim, the investigation into the ways in which all mediation harbors within itself this blind spot, the minimal distance that persists in any instance of mediation, however successful or complete it may be. Dark media inhabit this twofold movement— seeing something in nothing (e.g., the animate images appearing on the screen or the alchemical glass), and finding nothing in each something (the paradoxical absence or presence of the "demon" behind each thing).

Here darkness is not synonymous with blackness, it is a

kind of absence of light, a pareidolia or hallucination, an unknowingness, an epistemic gap. It also seems to be a perfect description of the current state of reality as of August 2020. The "crisis" of the pandemic has no clear visualization or representation. There are renderings, phylogenies, statistics, personifications, summaries, and endlessly scrolling updates but all seem to be outlining a hellscape that is either ephemeral or out-of-date.

Thacker's understanding of dark media is also closely connected to horror, both as a genre of narrative but also as a state of being. Thacker again:

Perhaps we can even understand this in a post-secular context, in which there is a religo *specific to dark media: the relation between the human and the nonhuman, but a nonhuman that is not necessarily outside the human or separate from it. With dark media there is an "anti-humanism" at work, a form of mediation that ultimately does away with the terms of mediation itself.*

Unlike humans, viruses need to reproduce constantly to retain their undead status. Virulence is synonymous with reproduction. And in the case of a virus humans are *the media* of reproduction. A binding of the human and non-human. The horror here is that of infection, of becoming only a medium for the undead to propagate.

The human body as a kind of medium assumes a certain kind of decay or disembodiment, either through death, illness or lack of control. In a more positive sense the body can produce media, most notably images and sound. Both the ear and eye act as input and output for the nervous system. Most famously this was explored by

electronic composer Maryanne Amacher, doyenne of dark media, through the "making of the third ear." The "third ear" was her term for the tiny amplifier in the inner ear that produced sound when stimulated with the proper sonic frequencies (otoacoustic emissions.) Also known as ghost tones, third tones or Tartini tones after the 18th century Italian composer Giuseppe Tartini who discovered them, these tones cannot be recorded, they only can be reproduced with the biomechanical hardware wired into the human brain. In a profound way the only media here is the perceptual apparatus of human beings.

Amacher unsurprisingly was never really a "recording artist" but designed building-sized installations that took advantage of both the sonic qualities of architectural space and what she called structure-borne sound, where sound was propagated through the materials of the building itself. One of her few CD releases *Sound Characters (making the third ear)* was a compilation of excerpts from these installations, re-mixed and translated into the more subdued form of two-track audio. These sounds that can be virtually generated from human ears have unique autonomous qualities that Amacher called "sound characters." Sounds that had distinct personalities. These characters appear to be an example of what Thacker (following Schopenhauer) classifies as "things" as opposed to objects. Whereas objects have a kind of tangible, accessible quality, things are opaque, withdrawn and inaccessible. Things have qualities that are ultimately occulted, all content or knowledge has been obscured to the point of oblivion. The word for this is apophatic, knowledge of the transcendental received only through negation. Things come into being, but they have no explanation.

A more illuminating example of this occulted quality in Amacher's work was a 1974 installation at the Walker Art Center. Paul Kaiser (a one-time Amacher collaborator) recounts Amacher's description of the installation like this:

The first piece I remember her describing to me, perhaps when we met .... was a live superimposition of sounds from spaces unlike each other in every way but for their having near-identical acoustics. Maryanne had matched an art gallery to a car rental office so that, as I imagined it, her gallery audience would find themselves startled by such invisible occurrences as a conversation conducted nearby or some footsteps approaching from across the room or a car horn echoing off walls that seemed but could not possibly be the ones right there.

This installation transformed space through sound or as Amacher put it in an interview, created a "virtual meta-space," a space of spaces that maps to nothing but itself. The perception of footsteps or a car horn echo match the acoustic environment but are produced by an entirely different space. In this mismatch a spectral presence is created that is both physically present but withdrawn. It sounds like the conceit for a horror movie, where media suddenly is inhabited by unexplained and unfathomable entities. Except these are benign ghosts.

In a contemporary sense, these benign ghosts are mirrored by other less benign specters, whose virtuality hides contagion, disrupts relationships and establishes other forms of connectivity. The point here is not existential horror, or to dwell on the impossibility of communication. How can writing commit to "seeing something in

nothing" or "finding nothing in each something?"

Writing Between Intervals

▶ It is a strange process to deliberately avoid connecting two things together. This deliberate inaction or denial of connectivity results in two problems: you are creating a negation and trying to create something positive out of the negation!

▶ The term ekphrasis originally described the somewhat tortured process of describing visual art in a literary language. But it hints at the general problem of using one medium to render or describe another. Or in an even more bizarre sense the use of one medium to record the inessential qualities of another, thereby making those inessential qualities essential.

▶ Ambience which is almost exclusively related to shape, sound, and space, becomes an exercise in futility in writing. There is no such thing as distracted reading. Well perhaps on the web, but that is a type of scanning, a sort of pattern recognition on steroids. A real form of distracted reading would be a kind of subliminal reading, where meaning somehow went directly into your subconscious.

▶ Combinatorics exploit the fact that anything can make sense as a sequence, because any sequence can seem like a narrative. Three different pieces can be combined for 6 different combinations, potentially 6 different implied narratives. This is a technique that is an outgrowth of what Viktor Shklovsky described as an "energy of delusion," the unescapable drive to make difficulties for oneself.

▶ Saying something is like something else is a shortcut. A metaphor or simile is triadic, attempting to impose a relationship between two different things through a trick of language. It is this third thing that is difficult. Every analogical relationship is latently stupid or absurd. Darkness is not a blanket, no one ever steps up to the plate, if your smile can be mistaken for a flaming ball of plasma 93 million miles away, then you have serious problems.

▶ Despite the absurdity of analogical language, it is almost impossible to communicate without it. Completely banning analogy from your everyday speech would come off as robotic or incoherent. Yet this third, relational part of language functions as the dark matter of communication. Relationships are established between this and that constantly, piling on cliches as if they were the detritus of meaning.

▶ Problems arise when you can only use analogy. For instance, how does one narrate the effects of sounds that are purely neurological, not empirical? This is not effectively simulated by free indirect discourse, where a third-person narrator meshes narration with a character's interior monologue. Sound functions as a thing (apophatic, inaccessible) not as an object (accessible, empirical.) There is no speech here. But language can simulate these effects with a deliberate misuse of simile. The focus isn't on how "something is like that other thing," instead the comparison or relation is the thing. A differential between unlike things.

▶ Every interval is a gap to be filled. By reflex, by the stopgap invention of a connection, a relation between

this picture and that picture. This connection is sub-
jective, a permutation between two things, a screen
for projection, another way of thinking, a dead-end to
39,916,800 worlds.

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Donald Trump High & Low
Matthew Monk

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Interpreters convert information from one spoken language into another.... The goal of an interpreter is to have people hear the interpretation as if it were the original language."

I once saw video of an international press conference at which US President Donald Trump rambled incoherently—as he does—while an interpreter attempted to capture the essence of his speech, with a look of horror... even panic, on her face. If you have heard him speak, you may have noticed that Trump's rhetoric often meanders in incomplete sentences, interrupting one thought with another, splicing non-sequiturs into a meaningless patchwork of incomprehensible fragments. When he does manage to produce grammatically acceptable language his messages often very openly defy logic and sense. This poor interpreter was struggling to translate nonsense.

The US president is often called "the leader of the free world," and "the most powerful person in the world."

Ordinarily, the words of the US president have broad and lasting importance. But what happens when our leader's words, comprising meaninglessness, incoherence, nonsense, illogic, and lies, take on the broad and lasting importance that is their due?

Donald Trump's presidency is marked by high and low. While he occupies the country's highest office, he exemplifies the absolute lowest morals and ethics of any US president to date. The highest treason and tyranny accompany the lowest regard for anything or anyone other than his own self-interest and that of his family and associates as long as they support him. It would be tempting to say Trump has low intelligence and low cognitive ability, however one does not get to be president by being stupid. There are many kinds of intelligence. Trump's particular kind of intelligence seems to be at manipulation, obfuscation, extortion, bullying, evasion, and deceit. He has the very highest skill at the very lowest qualities.

In February 2020, the Trump administration re-wrote the guidelines for the architecture of federal buildings in a draft executive order mandate titled "Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again." Wired ran a story whose headline and subhead read, "The Trump Administration and the New Architects of Fear: The government's plan to mandate 'neoclassical' buildings might be one of the most blatantly authoritarian things it has yet attempted." The article points out, "Neoclassicism was fundamentally inauthentic, a façadism that pretended to represent glory and truth. That might be why, in the 1930s and 1940s, it became the house style for Albert Speer, official architect of the Nazi government."

As a graphic designer interested in the history of ty‑pography, I have always loved monumental, Classical inscriptions, particularly Roman frieze inscriptions. I marvel at the way these inscriptions elevate language, thought, ideals, and values to eternal significance. I love the physicality and permanence—or heroic attempt at permanence—of massive, timeless letterforms chiseled into solid stone. There is also something powerful about the age and history of the Latin language, the ways it is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar.

In an attempt to explore the high/low nature of Donald Trump's language, I Googled "stupidest things Trump has said" and found countless articles and lists. From some of these I took several quotes by Trump and, using Google Translate, converted them into Latin. It was entertaining to see that, when I asked Google to translate the Latin text back into English, the results were incomprehensible. I have been using the resulting Latin texts as the basis for "monumental" typographic explorations.

One piece attempts to suggest the color and materiality of stone with massive, inscribed letterforms. Other pieces suggest the frivolity of party banners. But these typo‑graphic works contradict themselves; the piece suggest‑ing stone uses paint and collage with trash and found materials. The festive associations of party banners are contrasted with the use of a stiff, mechanical font printed on sober gray paper. Both solutions attempt to call atten‑tion to the absurdity of Donald Trump's language and in fact his presidency. His language, like his presidency, is at best hollow, nonsensical, and lame, and at worst evil, profoundly harmful, and enduring.

THE ANSWER IS THERE HAS TO BE SOME FORM OF PUNISHMENT

RESPONSUM
EST ESSE ILLIC
EST ALIQUID
POENALITATIS

I THINK IF THIS
COUNTRY GETS
ANY KINDER OR
GENTLER,
IT IS LITERALLY
GOING TO CEASE
TO EXIST

PUTO, SI QUIS
ACCIPIT PATRIA
CONTINGAT
AMICIUS ARVUM,
AUT MOLLIOR EST,
QUOAD LITTERAM
NIHIL ESSET
FACTURUS

WE ARE
ROUNDING
THEM UP IN A
VERY HUMANE
WAY, IN A VERY
NICE WAY

NOS ENIM IPSUM
HUMANUM IN
FLECTENDIS
PROMUNTURIIS
EIS VIA, PER VIAM,
VALDE NICE

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING AND WHAT YOU'RE READING IS NOT WHAT'S HAPPENING

QUAM PRAE
OCULIS HABES
QUID LEGERE
ET QUAE
NON EST
QUID FIERI

I WILL BUILD A
GREAT, GREAT
WALL ON OUR
SOUTHERN
BORDER,
AND I WILL
HAVE MEXICO
PAY FOR THAT
WALL.
MARK MY
WORDS

FACIAMUS,
MAGNA
NOBIS SEPEM
MERIDIANA ET
ERIT MERCES
MEXICUM
MURUM.
VOCES PERCIPE
MENTE MEAS

MAN, WE
COULD USE A
BIG FAT DOSE
OF GLOBAL
WARMING

HOMO, NON
POSSET UTOR
A MAGNUS
PINGUIS
ET RUBORE
LAUDABUNT
CALEFA-
CTIONEM
CUNCTAM

I AM THE MOST
SUCCESSFUL
PERSON EVER
TO RUN
FOR THE
PRESIDENCY,
BY FAR

EGO SUM
MAXIME
FELIX HOMO
AD SEMPER
CURRERE
PRAESIDIS,
MULTO

I LIKE PEOPLE
THAT WERE
NOT CAPTURED

ET SICUT POPULUS, QUI NON CAPI

SHOW ME
SOMEONE
WITH NO EGO
AND I WILL
SHOW YOU A
BIG LOSER

NEC ALIQUIS
PER ME: EGO
OSTENDAM
TIBI ET ERIT
VIR MAGNUS
VICTUS

I COULD
STAND IN THE
MIDDLE OF
FIFTH AVENUE
AND SHOOT
SOMEBODY
AND I WOULD
NOT LOSE
VOTERS

MEDIUM ET
MITTENTES
POSSEM
ALIQUID
NOLO
PERDERE
ELECTORUM
QUINTO
AVENUE

BLOOD COMING OUT OF HER WHEREVER

VENIENS
E QUA
SANGUIS
EIUS

I AM THE LEAST RACIST PERSON YOU WILL EVER INTERVIEW

ET EGO
MINIMUS
PERSONA
SEMPER
TEMPOR
RACIST

WE HAVE THE WORST LAWS

HABEMUS LEGES PESSIMI
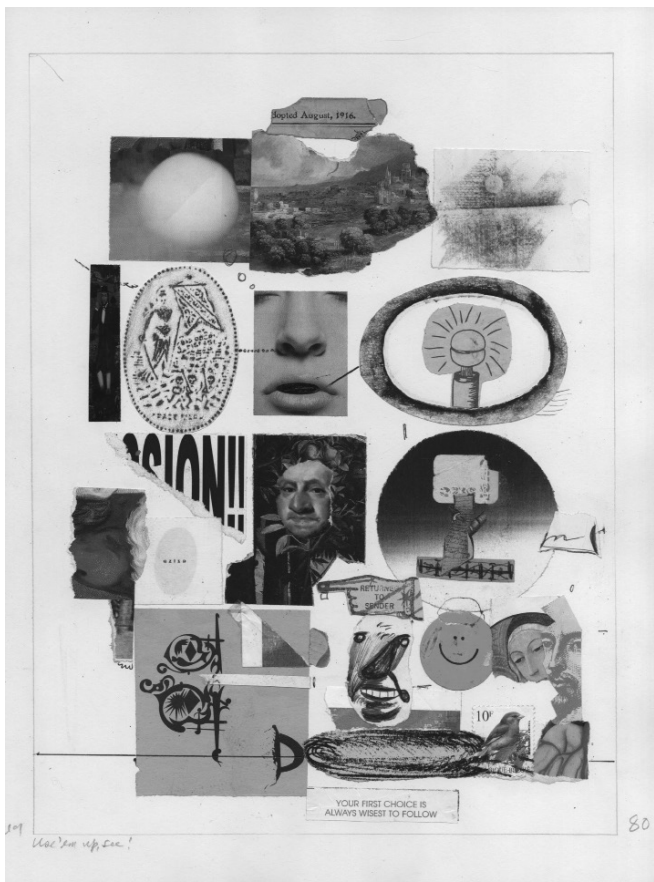
Fig. 1: "Use 'em up, see!", Ed Fella, 1980.

~~I'm a lover not a fighter.~~
I'm a fighter not a painter.
Ian Lynam

I grew up in the United States, a country in which many, many people experience a large portion of their lives inside of automobiles peering out through windshields. The windshield itself is a framing device, akin to an HD screen in its 16:9 aspect ratio. This framing is something that I used to think about a lot while stuck in traffic in the three years that I lived in Los Angeles. For two of the three years that I was there, I studied under legendary designer Edward Fella (and a number of others) at CalArts. During critiques, Ed was constantly drawing/lettering paper-based compositions which included hand-ruled borders, always setting the frame of engagement in his work.

With the rise of HD screens attached to the desktop computers used in graphic design work, I feel like a sense of margins is something that has been eroded from graphic form-making. With the dissolution of grids and the ever-increasing speed with which graphics can be generated, there has been an erasure of true margins in large

part, largely replaced by literal and figurative safe areas around the edges of compositions that are the residue of broadcast-based screen conventions. Margins have largely become hazy and indeterminate.

Here, much as in Ed's work, the margins are what makes the work worthwhile, to me, at least.

This is a private practice that I do when I can, but which I don't give enough time to.

Each of these compositions is an exploration of graphic and semantics days comprised of analphabetic characters, as well as rules, text, and shapes from the dry transfer lettering sheets.

Contextually, I thought it'd be interesting to bring a chunk of this body of work—disparate from the work physically presented in the *Writing Writing* exhibition, notably an edition of booklets with a lengthy series of essays about authenticity titled *The Letter I*, alongside some flags that serve as exterior illustrations of the concepts in the books.

In a way, this strategy is an example of parataxis: another body of work to lay alongside what has already been made. Additionally, missing version of putting a body of work that is not in the exhibition, but only in the catalog, helps to extend the metaphor, making the catalog itself a site and perhaps a mini-exhibition within catalog for an exhibition.

Alphabetum is dedicated to letters. The letter I is a letter. The works shown here are not comprised of letters, yet

they are the things that lie next to letters and help give letters meaning through their presence.

These are fake paintings. They are made with dry transfer lettering such as Letraset, DecaDry, et al. Each has been composed within a piece of white A3 paper with pencil-ruled 5mm or so borders. The borders are important—they give boundaries—defining context—for me to work within. It is the most simple of things, drawing these borders, but I think that creating boundaries on pieces of paper is something that a lot of us don't think about.

There is no direct meaning in any of them, nor is there any metaphoric meaning, nor anything intentionally typographic in regard to semiotic communication. Each of them is just an exploration of space.

Or, perhaps to put it a bit more eloquently, each of them is a bit of space exploration.

(With the aroma of art.)

One of my favorite pieces of graphic design is a certain poster by Jan Tschichold. When I first saw that poster, it struck me in its beauty due to the sheer power of how negative space was employed in the composition. I did not understand it at the time, but as I have aged, I understand it more now. That poster is an exercise in restraint, tension, and subtlety.

These compositions are attempts to explore graphic space in much the same way, though this is predicated on the arrangement of elements more than on an underlying grid or structure. It is the relationship of all of the correspond-

Fig. 2: "Konstruktivisten", Jan Tschichold, 1937.

ing elements in coordination with the rules that frame each composition that I hope imbue each of them with aspects of visual dynamism.

Dry transfer lettering is a medium that I have an intimate relationship with. I spent a lot of time using it in the 1990s designing zines prior to returning to school to study graphic design. I would ride my bicycle around Oakland and Berkeley, California scouring junk shops and recycling centers for Letraset as designers en masse were dumping their stocks and turning to desktop computers. Obtained for as little as five cents per sheet, I collected a healthy amount which I would use for the assorted small publications, posters, flyers, and record sleeves that I was then designing. Somewhere along the way, I was given a plastic Letraset storage box with a purchase of a few dozen sheets, and I still have that box today, filled with Letraset that is rapidly being depleted of the letterforms within.

I use Letraset to teach my undergraduate, trade school and Continuing Education students about connotative typography—they are able to create compelling, meaning-filled typographic compositions far more quickly with dry transfer lettering than they could with a computer. Most are excited to use it after they are introduced, and I am excited to see literally the very same tools that first drove me to typography in the hands of others.

I scout out musty art supply stores for dry transfer lettering when I travel. Recent stops in Yokohama, Toronto and Vienna yielded hundreds of off-brand typefaces from the 1970s that have never been digitized. As I and my students use these sheets—me for the fake paintings and the

students for coursework, we activate forgotten typefaces and at the same time, deprive the world of what might be the only extant artifacts, rubbing out history.

Each composition is a series of intimate acts: ruling the A3 sheet of paper in pencil, setting a few sheets of paper on a table to create the appropriate surface tension beneath the composition, positioning the dry transfer lettering, shifting between different burnishing tools depending on the lettering being used, stepping back between each application and considering the overall work-in-process. It is meditative, soothing, and creates a mental space for me to slow down and immerse myself in each iteration toward the final composition.

There is a kind of radical trust that I feel in making these compositions due to the great empathy, or *mono no aware* in Japanese, that I have for the materials. They are old and often faulty, as dry transfer lettering does not age well. The burnisher punches through the plastic sheets sometimes, and often, the lettering resists transfer, but there are always other sheets willing to work properly, though it is a matter of trial and error.

The reproductions here are missing the surface sheen that the instant lettering contains in regard to surface quality, and thus, their representation here is not wholly accurate. Then again, some of these fake paintings have been created by layering photocopies of fake paintings on top of other fake paintings, building up chance compositions that also miss that sheen. This additive process is also important, as it reflects my decades-long fascination with xerography and reprographics, as well.

Working with photocopiers is something that I have always enjoyed, particularly the myriad ways that reproduction degrades a composition, though contemporary copiers are far more accurate than twenty years ago. I was speaking with a fellow Tokyo-based designer named Suzuki-san over beers outside of a convenience store the other night and he told me how he'd purchased a 1970s photocopy machine for ¥3000 and deadstock of toner in order to work in the way that he likes, with images and text that are altered through reproduction.

It sounded like a dream to me, for space is a premium in Tokyo. My home office, and my home itself, is full, and making the space for a photocopier feels like a daunting task... it always comes back to space, whether compositional, literal, or metaphoric.
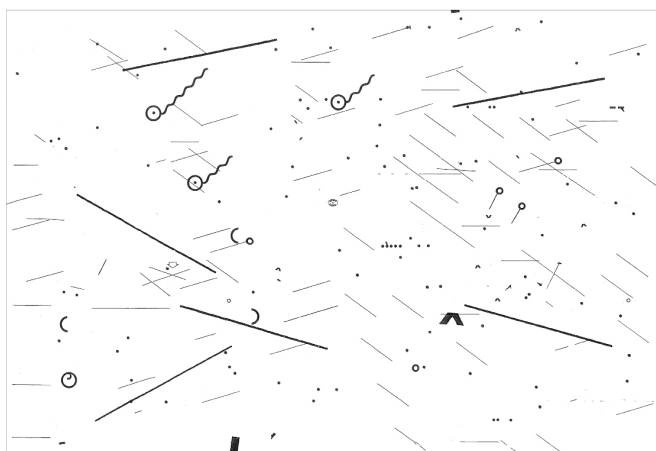
It is the space between things that give them meaning, and in that way, we are all astronauts if we allow ourselves to trust in space.
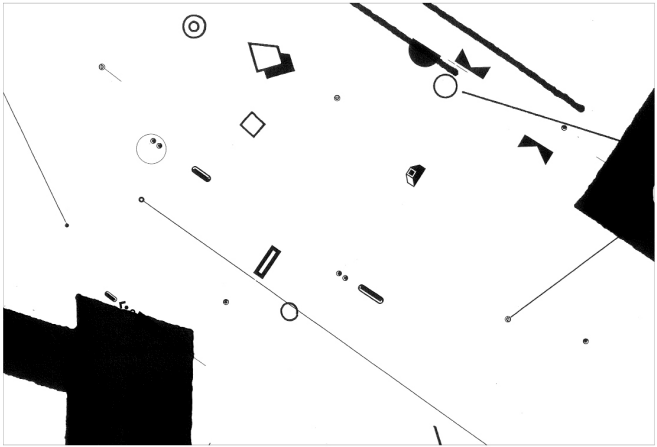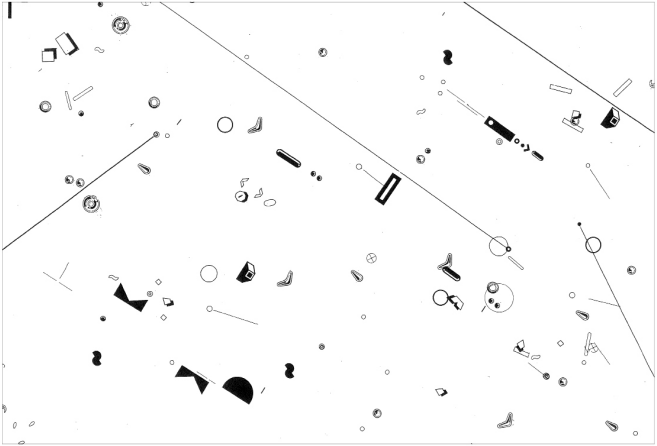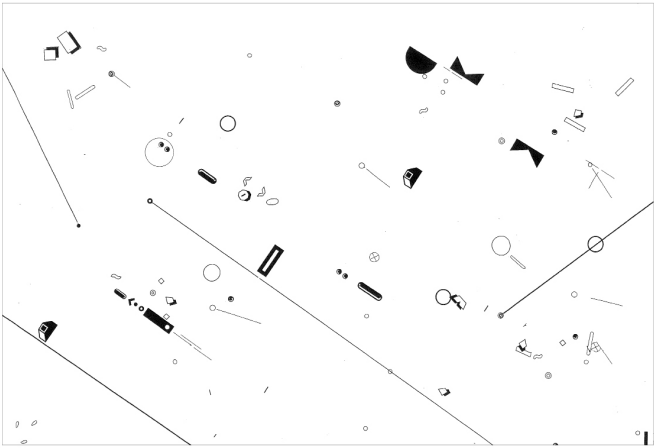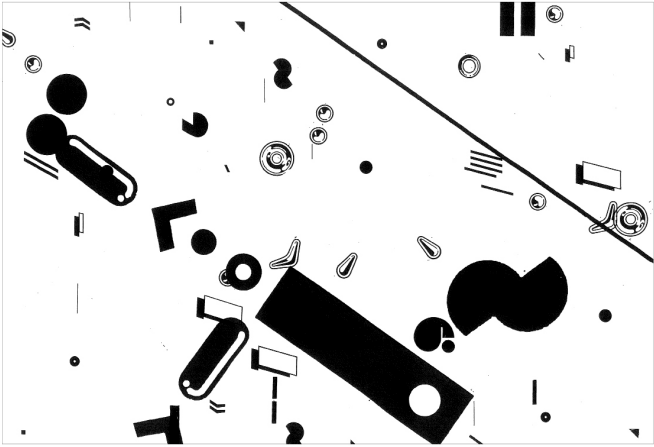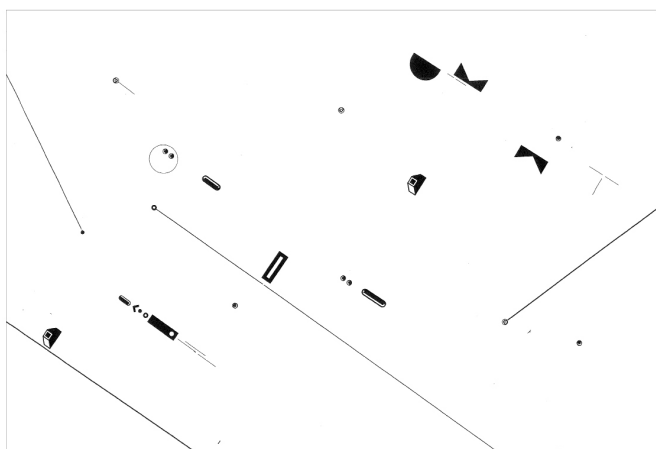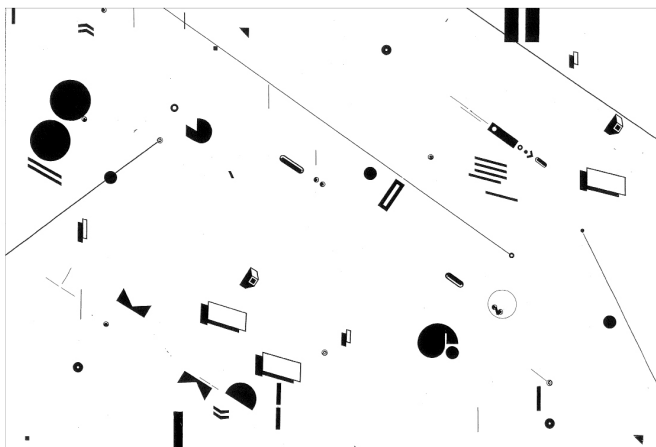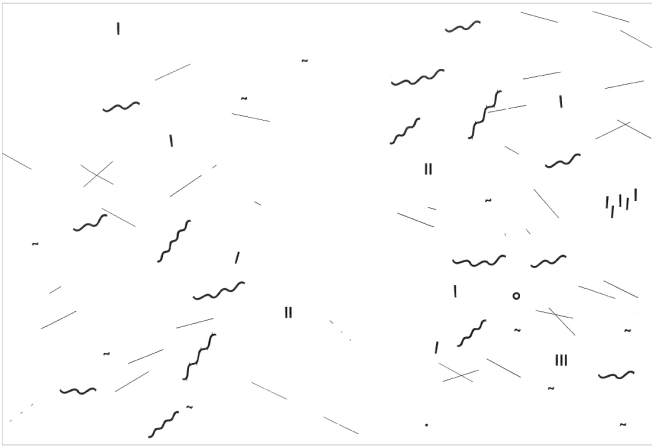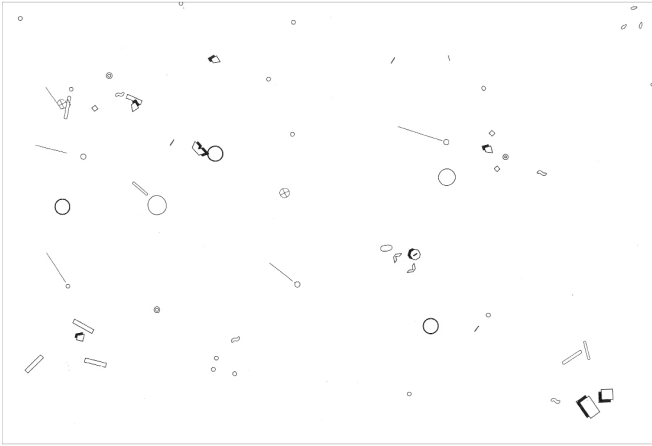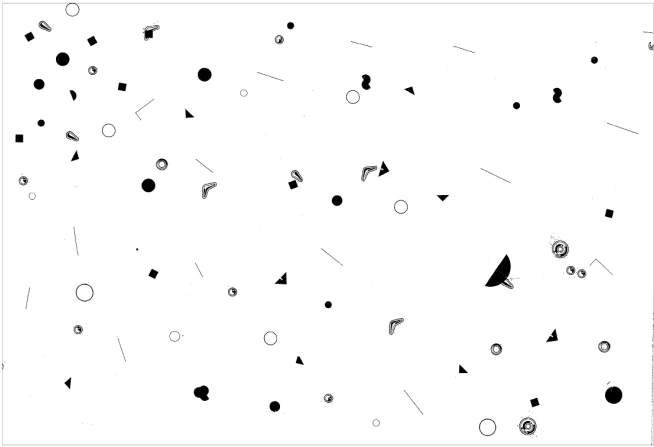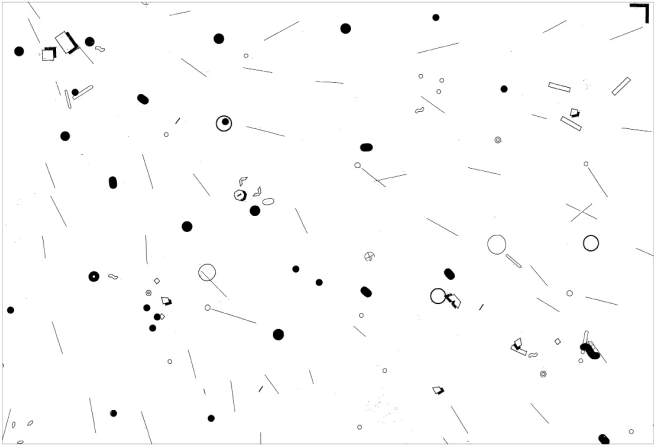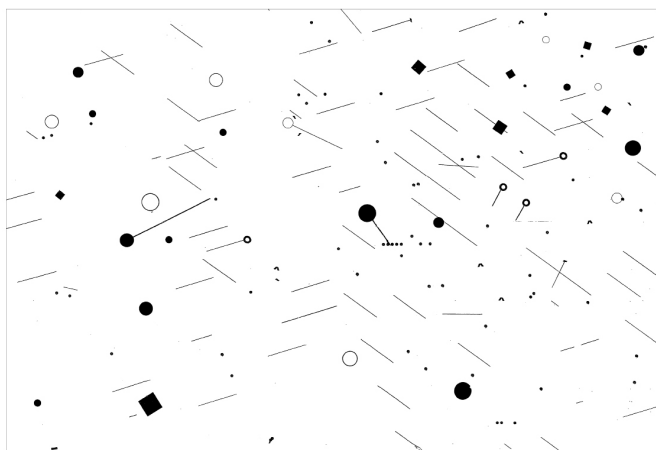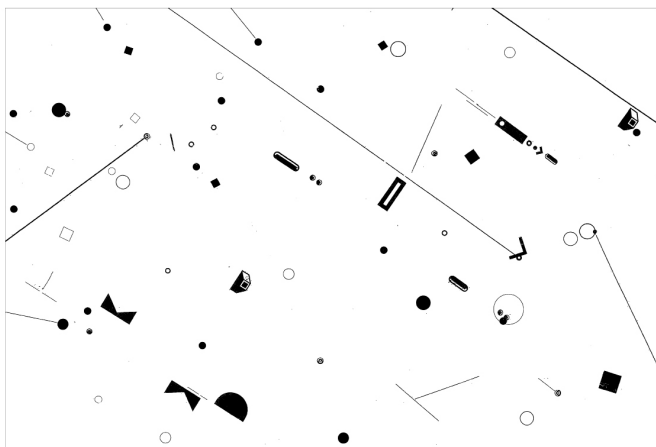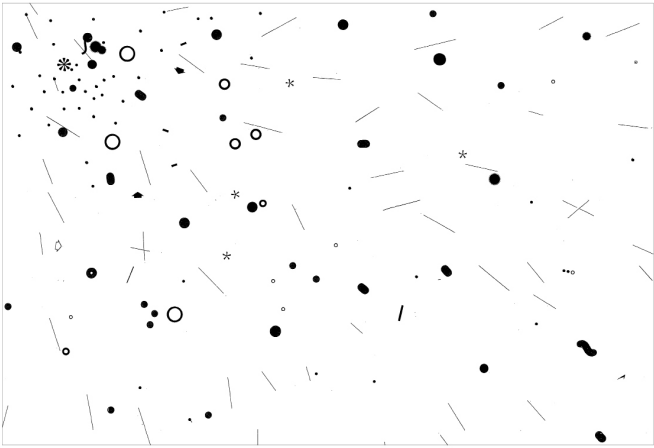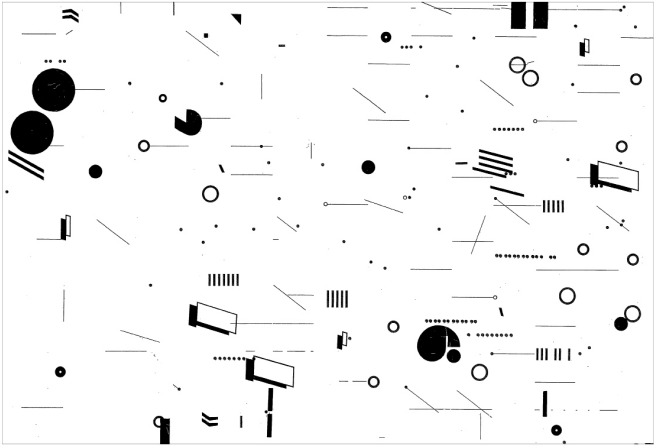
Yesteryear. Both Past and Future.
Chris Ro

Consider the three-legged chair.

Is it a symbol of instability? A chair that can bare-
ly stand? Unable to provide stable footing? Or is it an
enlightened chair? One that can stand, alone, unlike its
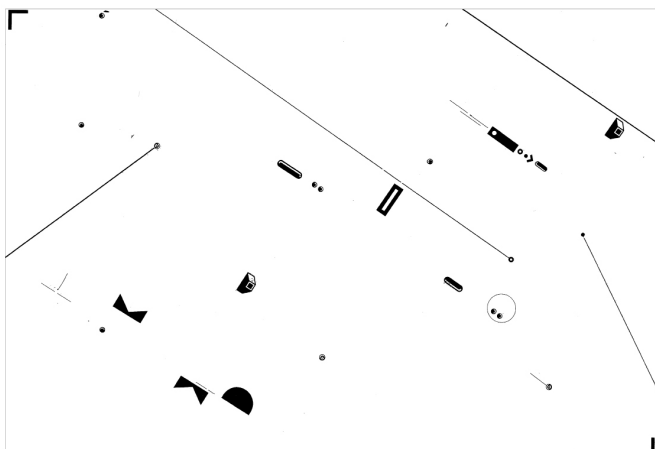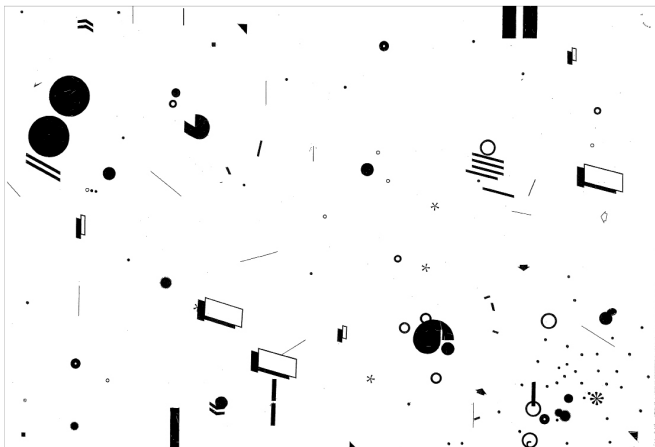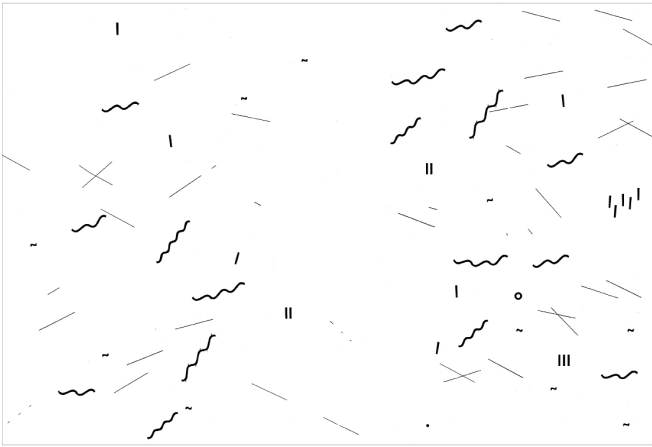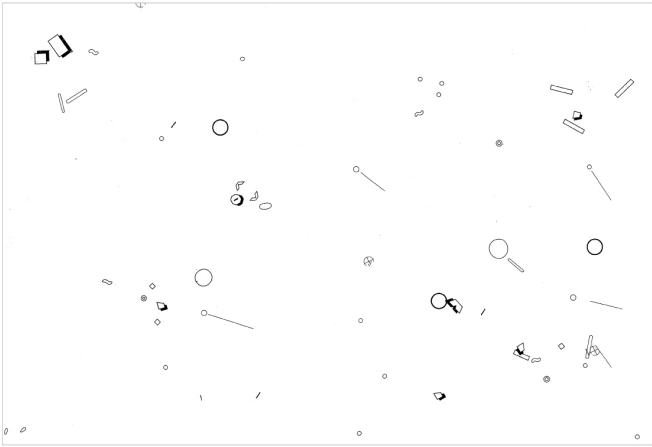two-legged predecessor. A chair one step closer to the
sun. The three-legged chair: both questionable and un-
questionable.

The roots of this project reside in some of the thinking of
architect Christopher Alexander.[1] I became familiar with
the writing of Mr. Alexander in college and for whatev-
er reason, those things he thought and was absolutely
convinced of found a strange home in my psyche. There
was a couch, sofa and mattress in my upper brain lobe
and these thoughts just came in without knocking and
made themselves at home. And I didn't change the lock.

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1 Christopher Alexander is an architect and architectural theorist. He
 taught architecture at the University of California at Berkeley. https://
 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Alexander

I was happy they were there and they began to inform of a set of convictions and observations of the world on a daily basis. As an observer of the ebb and flow of life, I had often mused and contemplated these things, but after becoming familiar with his writings, these thoughts become beliefs. My observations of design and the world have remained firmly the same ever since.

Looking back, it is still perplexing that such thoughts found residence in my psyche. Back then, I was, as some might say, heavy on form, light on theory, and light on conceptual thinking. For me, the works of say, the then-Diller/Scofidio or Morphosis[2] were all that really mattered. Captivating. Mind-boggling. Dramatic. In all ways. That work really got me excited. By the beauty. By the shapes. By the surfaces and the facades. At that point in time, I cared less about the rich world of thought that was often swishing around just outside my ears and my eyes. That was me then and sometimes, I have to admit, this is me still to this day.

Despite this proclivity, there was something that resonated with me though when I found Mr. Alexander in the letter-size Xerox re-prints of course readers that I purchased every semester. Most of the time from the same copy shop and at the same time every year. These readers had nothing exciting about them. No form here. No glorious pictures. No pictures of work. Just text with some random images of places, examples from around the world. But I remember it and it stuck and it's still here in my mind. I can firmly say, what stayed with me was

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2 Morphosis is an architectural design firm based in Los Angeles, California. Famous for their dramatic flair for form. https://www.morphosis.com

definitely not necessarily visual or form-based. Seeing the actual built work of Mr. Alexander did not nor does it still create the same excitement. I can't jive with it in all honesty. It is missing 'that' form which excited me at the time. But what intrigues me exists in the bones that were there. The conceptual dirt and soil, that underlies his work and thoughts continue to fascinate me: the ideas he was convinced of. These sit with me still. And perhaps this is the core of this project.

Seoul, is a city of what I would call a kind of 'invisible' garbage culture.

There is garbage. Lots of garbage. We throw it away, but we don't see what becomes of it. It is invisible. And this leaves us feeling less responsible—less worried about its outcome and where it may be going. And in turn, this drives a certain kind of behavior which I would like to call "re-start culture". Erase, throw away and *re-start*.

Seoul is definitely not alone in this. To say that it only exists here is not my intention. Actually, we all kind of live in cultures like these all over the world. Out of sight, out of mind. When it is gone, it is gone. But I currently reside here in Seoul and the observations and my thoughts on both design, space and life are here in this city. And to me, this kind of 'invisible' culture seems to have a particular manifestation here that is quite palpable and sits with me particularly in tandem with Alexander's thoughts.

So, let's continue to talk about Seoul.

Mr. Alexander often ponders the existence of buildings

that can grow. Cities that can grow. Architecture that can age with time. That can fit into its environment. That is one with its surroundings. The basis of this, as I have learned, is also very deep in Korean society and traditional aesthetic thinking: harmony with the landscape and harmony with the environment. I think it's such a beautiful sentiment: a building that can grow and become old with its place.

The concept is so simple. What we create is not waste. What we create is something that becomes a permanent part of the earth. The world. It is a really beautiful idea. But this concept was something more akin to behavior and life, before industrialized Korea. Right now, just like the past seventy years, the raging hormones of rapid economic growth, expansion and wealth have created a concrete jungle with very little sense of place. It's an environment that continues the aforementioned 'invisible' garbage culture. Build and delete. Build and delete. Build and delete. We put up buildings that do not grow. They exist and then they cease to exist, whether they are there or not.

There is a concept here called *jae-gaebal*[3] in Korean, which can be perhaps best explained as a type or variant of 'urban re-development'. One could interpret it as a somewhat mutant variation of gentrification, though it's a different breed of development or gentrification in my eyes. Many of the residents of particular neighborhoods which might be up for re-development welcome

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3 Jaegaebal is a term for what can be described as a public residential redevelopment program. It began in the 1970s as a means to handle squatting and illegal housing developments and has now come to define a wide variety of redevelopment concepts.

it—they welcome a change and welcome development. In the jae-gaebal process, a typical situation is that the developing company/conglomerate purchases the home/building/properties of existing residents. The residents are provided pure cash. Their former buildings are then bulldozed and the entire neighborhood vanishes instantaneously.

All that is left is dirt. Build and delete. Start completely over again.

What comes in the former neighborhood's place is a giant complex with apartments/condominiums up top and some kind of plaza/commercial/retail development down below. The former residents are happy. They accrue wealth with the snap of a few fingers. There is no complicated re-modeling, reconfiguring out of property lines, or any such fussing about. It is just a clean wipe. It is also a modest win, as their previous property was on the edge of being unsellable—most likely in a part of town with nothing particularly bright headed its way and the value of their homes not on the rise. But through this great generosity known as real estate development, they are able to sell and move on. They might sell at a decent price, use this money to move to another neighborhood, and perhaps start the cycle all over again.

Build and delete.

So, what happens here? Neighborhood after neighborhood disappears in entirety. First comes the dirt then shortly thereafter, an apartment complex stands in this space with no connection to any past. No connection to anywhere—something that came out of nowhere. And
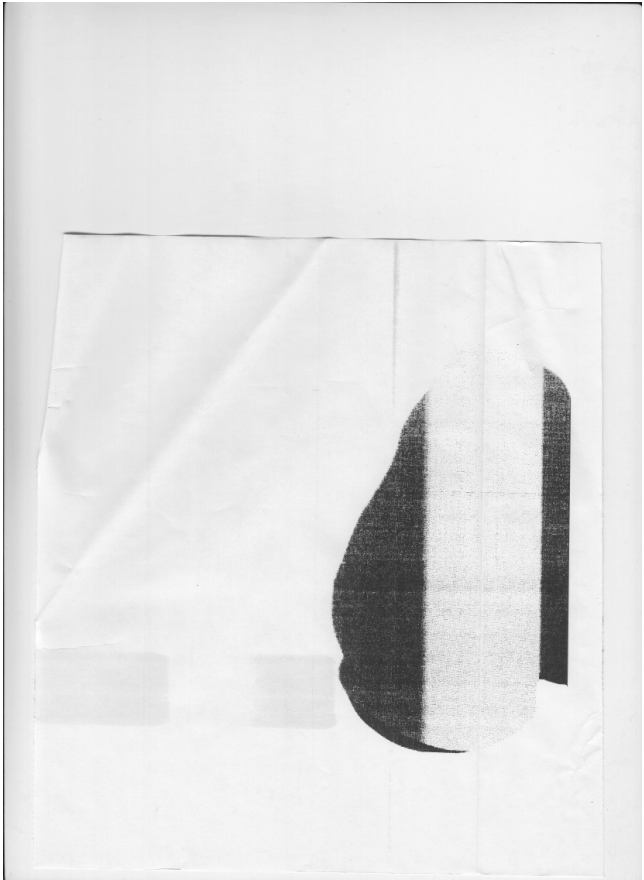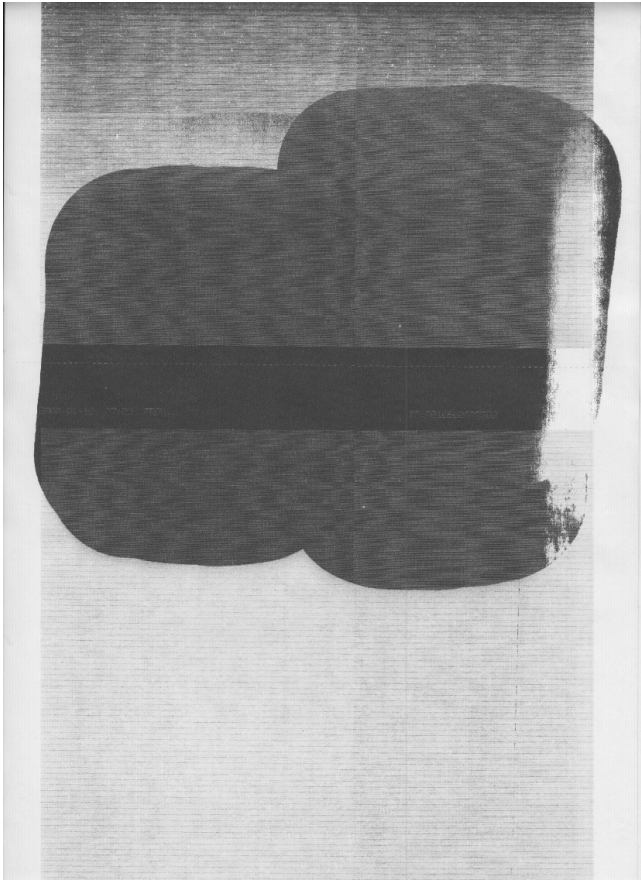
perhaps, along the lines of Alexander's thinking, something with no future either.

The new complex exists for this time being and most likely, will also one day be destroyed or replaced. It is, in essence, a building that cannot grow. A building that cannot blend with its environment. I see this in countless examples of Korea's *shin doshi*—satellite cities outside of preexisting urban areas that began completely from scratch with no existing residencies or structures in that area beforehand—similarly rapidly-developed complexes/ urban developments rising out of nothing.

They age poorly. They age fast. They would need to be wiped rather than built up or built out. This is the type of design that Alexander was concerned about: buildings with no past and, again, no future.

So, what sits opposed to this in contemporary culture? How did we get here? And how does this connect in any form, any manner, to graphic design?

It is a stretch, for sure.

As far back as I can remember, the pure exploration of form was something that always captivated me. Perhaps one of my small, precious moments in graphic design is the time of making, and exploring just visual form and visual form alone.

Seeing where it goes.

Feeling where it goes.

Allowing the process to take over.

Recently, my explorations have also integrated that which I think is missing in this world of "build and delete".

Signs of life.

Signs of texture.

Signs of being.

Things that resonate or could perhaps grow and *withstand* the signs of time or change.

In Alexander's writings he often notes the importance in what he describes as moments of life. He calls them "Centers"[4]. Centers may be places, spaces, or structures that allow for life to pass in or pass through. I tend to envision Centers as 'layers' in some ways: Texture. Grit. The things that happen over time or through time, for this is what happens in life: Steps. Gradients. It is not direct or hard lines that create these connections—progression occurs through transitions. Transitions take place in steps. In motion. Over time.

My favorite neighborhoods here in Seoul have this quality of the transitional. They are sitting someplace between the past and the present. These neighborhoods ironically were 'unlucky' and were not suitable or eligible for re-development, or there was some other issue that prevented the build and the delete. These neighborhoods often con-

4 Alexander, Christopher. The Nature of Order. The Phenomenon of Life. Pg. 83. The Center for Environmental Structure. 2002.

sist of winding paths, alleys, *danduk jutaek* and *villas*[5].

Danduk jutaek are single-family homes and they span the spectrum in terms of size and value. The ones that I am mentioning here are very functional often two-story houses that are divided into several units and house multiple families. Villas are often the unlucky bastard children of the high-rise apartment, as they are never given the recognition as a 'real' residence of value. The "villa", in the Korean parlance, is typically a multi-unit building consisting of residences for families and individuals. They typically are considered less valuable than apartment/condominium units as they do not rise in value over time. This inability to rise in value continues to perplex me to this day. I think there is a perception that these types of residences are poor investments and ones that have a certain limit in maximum value over time.

Both the villa and the slightly less grandiose version of the danduk jutaek are types of residences for the slightly-less-than-middle class, but these structures have become home to some of the wonderful layering and textures that only time and life can provide: the grit of wear and tear. They are not torn down but grow into different manifestations. Sometimes the lower units become cafes or shops. Sometimes the parking lots become artist studios. Their original purposes are not completely kept and they become something else. Over time. These neighborhoods were not subject to Build and Delete Culture but somehow got the better of it. As mentioned above, they are

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5 The Villa is typically a several unit building consisting of residences for families and sometimes individuals. They typically are considered less valuable than apartment/condominium units as they do not rise in value over time.

some of the most human, life-like spatial experiences in Seoul. I find the scale of the Villa to be much more suitable to humans. There is a closeness to the ground, closeness to the street. And the relationship with the alleys that they often sit in feel much more human scale as well.

Both residents and visitors love these neighborhoods, but the aforementioned mega-complexes are products of money and injected, seemingly alchemical value. But sadly, any new residents to a particular neighborhood would select to live in the mega-complex instead. Not because of the neighborhood experiences but more so because of the economics. Despite this, I remain fascinated by these more human neighborhoods: the sensations they provide, the particular humanity that I can feel in them, and the transition between past and future that are very alive here. I know there is something here that the apartment/condominium cannot provide.

These spaces make me think. And feel. And they are the reasons that I began to be curious about similar manifestations in graphic design.

I have recently been exploring different methods of form-making that deal with layers, space, and texture. How do you create things with the visual equivalents of transitions—attributes that take place not through distinction, but more so through the lens of fuzziness or softness?

Processes that are less direct.

Less hard-edged.
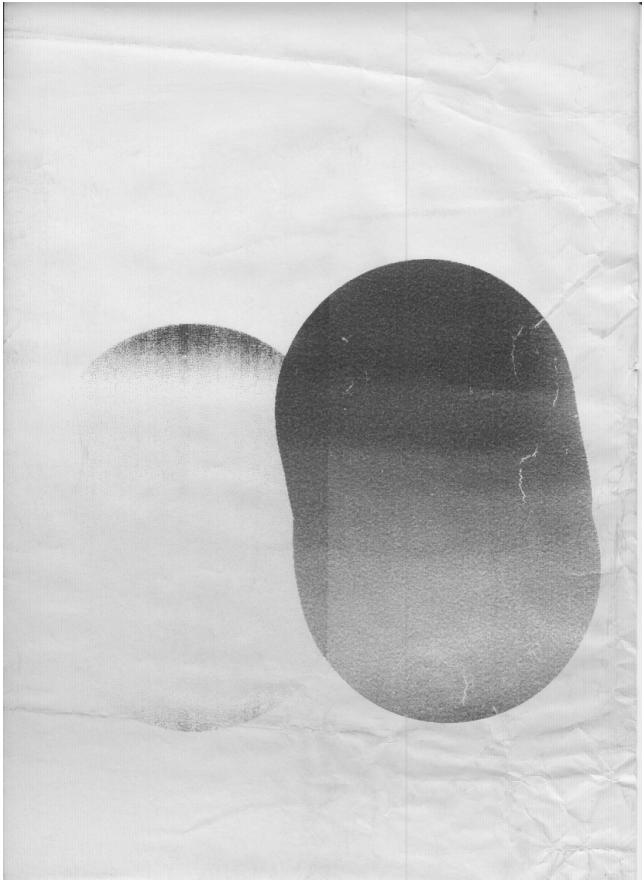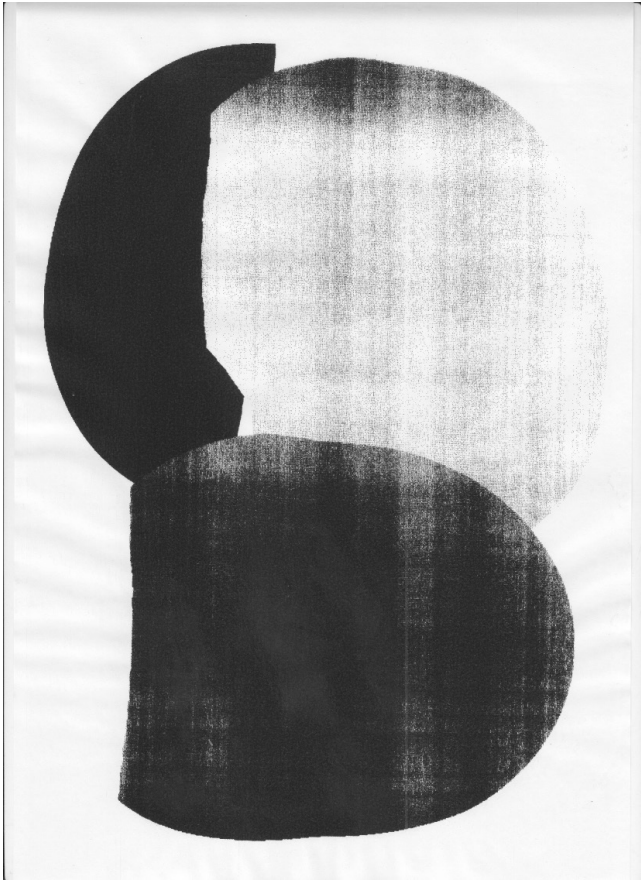
I think some of the push for this body of work comes after years of using the computer for *everything*: perhaps conceptually similar to the aforementioned buildings with no future or no past. Computers also work along the Build and Delete model. They are built for speed.

We discard and delete because it is so easy to make new things, and it seems like the opportunities to express the fuzziness of life are fewer and farther between. We all use similar computers. We are all using the same soft-ware. This software is specifically created for precision and speed.

It is as if Christopher Alexander is whispering silently to me here and there in the wee hours of the morning, as I began to want *something else*. I tire of the exactness of design, the precision of the computer, the acumen of our processes using the computer, the binary world of ones and zeroes tire me...

I began to long for a tertiary world.

A while back, an observant friend of mine, while perus-ing some of these recent fuzzy experiments I had been working on, remarked that he could 'hear' things from my work.

I was pleasantly astounded.

Hear *things*? Hear 'what'? There was no sound. What was he speaking of? He can hear things? How is that possible? If it might be possible, how *awesome* is that—the notion of hearing things with one's *eyes*—purely from observing

some form-based explorations that I had been sketching.

Working as I do in two dimensions, both static and in motion, there is no sound—or at least no conscious sound, but when he observed this, I thought it exciting and perhaps more important, *liberating*: creating sounds *without* sound.

For as far back as I can remember, for every piece of form that I made, people demanded a corresponding piece of *meaning*:

Why does this form exist?

Why did you make this thing like this?

What were you thinking when you made this form?

Why is this form like this?

And when I had no meaning, when I had no particularly deep thoughts, I always felt incredibly *guilty*.

I had created this thing with absolutely no thought in mind. I had just let it come to me. And I was made to feel guilty about such a process.

Everybody wanted something more: clients wanted to know what everything was *supposed to mean*. Whether my explanation was ever heard or not, to them, they wanted *meaning*. Similarly, teachers wanted to know what I was *thinking*.

Often, it made me feel terrible—for sometimes I just

make.

(And there may not be much more than that.)

(And thus, the liberation.)

Suddenly, the connection between *sound* and *form* was so emancipatory. I began to think of musicians and the processes by which they work. I began researching the thoughts of Bill Evans and Ryuichi Sakamoto and so many others. The deliverance came in these moments. People never asked these artists *why* this particular sound was created, what this sound *means*, or what they were trying to *say* with this particular sound. There is an acceptance of the sounds for *what they are* and an openness to *inter- pret* said sounds.

I found great freedom in this—perhaps I had created sound. Perhaps I had found sovereignty.

So, for the past year and more, I have been exploring this liminal world of sound without sound: Hear no evil. See no evil. Speak no evil. This whole process is counter-intu- itive in several ways. It makes no sense in some ways to explore things like this through print and motion. But for this, what I might call an Alexander-ian 'three', it felt like the right way to explore.

How do we feel things? How do we intuit transition? How do we create less finite lines, definitions, and divisions?

The process of exploring the crackles of the analogue and printing are also counter-intuitive, as they take time— time that the computer has deliberately sought to erad-

icate. It is the time that the computer wants no part of. Many of these studies have been both counter–intuitive and time–inefficient. The goal was to see where and how a certain sense of life might exist: a certain connection between past and future.

In *A Pattern Language*[6], Alexander poetically refers to a concept he calls, "something roughly in the middle"— middle places—places that allow layers these transitions to occur.

For this particular exhibition and space, I have created an assemblage of moments of 'sounds' based upon some-thing roughly in this liminal area: moments of transition that have found places on different materials; explora-tions of the layers, spaces and in–betweens that give this concept of 'life–giving' to a particular form or experience.

The roots of all of this all link back to Alexander.

I wanted something less precise.

I wanted to make something that was transitional— something that could grow over time. Something that could maybe be part of someone's environment. Some-thing that could be part of a *place*: a gradient in the flesh or better yet, something that could just *be itself*.

Not just to be thrown away.

Not built to be deleted.

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6 Alexander, A Pattern Language, Pg. 606. Oxford University Press. 1977.

Something with both a past and a future. And, perhaps...
just perhaps, this is the three-legged chair: both standing
and sitting at the same time.

Ian Lynam operates the Tokyo, Japan design studio Ian Lynam Design, working across identity, typography, and interior design. He is faculty at Temple University Japan, as well as at Vermont College of Fine Arts in the MFA in Graphic Design Program, and is Visiting Critic at CalArts. Ian writes for *Idea* (JP), *Slanted* (DE), and *Modes of Criticism* (PT) and has written a number of books about design and culture. Originally hailing from New York, Lynam has a BS in Graphic Design from Portland State University and an MFA in Graphic Design from CalArts. He is co-founder of the critical cultural online journal *Néojaponisme* and the associated print journal NJP. Ian runs Wordshape, a hybrid type foundry, publishing entity, distributor, and occasional software company. *ianlynam.com*

Matthew Monk is a visual artist, graphic designer, and educator, currently serving as Academic Dean at Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier. He is on the faculty in the MFA in Graphic Design program at VCFA and previously taught for twenty years at Rhode Island School of Design as a tenured full professor in the Graphic Design department. Matthew exhibits his collage and mixed-media works extensively and is in collections across the United States and abroad. His book design practice has earned numerous awards for clients including The National Gallery of Art, Yale University Press, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Metropolis Books, The Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design, and Wellesley College, among others. *matthewmonk.net/*

Randy Nakamura is a writer, designer, and researcher who teaches at California College of Art (CCA) in San Francisco. He is currently a Ph.D candidate in the Critical Studies program at UCLA Architecture and Urban Design. As a researcher he has contributed to the 2013 *Pacific Standard Time* exhibition *Everything Loose will Land* for the MAK Center and Getty Foundation focusing on the art and architecture of Los Angeles in the 1970s. His writing has been published in *Design Observer*, *Emigre*, *Task*, *Modes of Criticism*, and *Idea*. Previously he was the Director of Design for The Grateful Palate.

Chris Ro is a graphic designer based in Seoul, South Korea working on projects spanning both the cultural and commercial sector. Originally educated at UC Berkeley and the Rhode Island School of Design, the thinking behind Chris' work connects a diverse range of concepts spanning architecture, graphic design, typography, motion, photography and form making. His work has been honored by the Type Directors Club of New York, Communication Arts Typography Annual, Print Magazine Regional Design Annual, The Korean Society of Typography, Output, The Cannes Cyber Lions, The Webby Awards and The Favorite Website Awards. He was formerly a chief curator for the Typojanchi 2015 International Typography Biennale. Chris has exhibited his work around the world—most recently at Die Neue

Sammlung in Munich and the Paris Museum of Arts Decoratifs where his work is now part of both of their permanent collections. Chris' work is also part of the permanent collection of the National Hangul Museum in Seoul. Chris currently teaches design, typography and form–making at Hongik University in Seoul, South Korea. Chris is also a member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale(AGI). *adearfriend.com*

Gail Swanlund's creative work has been exhibited at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMo–MA), Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), CAM Raleigh, Pomona College, the Biennial of Graphic Design in Brno, Czech Republic, and elsewhere. Her work may be found in public collections, including Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Merrill C. Berman Collection, and SFMoMA. She held a seat on DesignInquiry, a vanguard educational non–profit organization whose mission is to cultivate the collective goal of extra–disciplinary discourse, productive counter–pro–duction, and research of design, and is gearing to launch an ad hoc detachable semi–organized "Wild & Free Friends of DesignInquiry." Swanlund received her MFA from CalArts where she is an Art School faculty member in the Graphic De–sign program; she also co–teaches courses and workshops with faculty from other schools across the Insti–tute. *gailswanlund.com*

The **Alphabetum** is an artistic space to explore the formative and formal aspects of language. These aspects are mostly considered separate. Typographers and type-designers are primarily focused on the letterform and writers mostly do not pay attention to the forms of the letters they form into words. The ambition of the Alpha-betum is to reveal that these two properties of written language are much more interlinked than is commonly acknowledged. A letter is a letter because it resembles a letter; and because it resembles a letter it is a letter.

Joseph Beuys said that every human being is an artist. Hans Hollein translated this idea into space and time, suggesting that everything is architecture. John Cage proposed that everything we do is music. Would it therefore not be acceptable to declare that every thing is type? When we look at art, music and architecture from a more general point of view, we see that all three disciplines have emerged from the languages we created. We might even argue that art, architecture and music are themselves languages. It is noteworthy that Beuys's, Hollein's and Cage's statements are not formulated in art, architecture and music, but in letters, forming words, combined in statements. Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that the limits of our language are the limits of our world. Could it also be the case that the limits of the alphabet are the limits of our language? This would bring us back to the typographic tautology. A letter is a letter because it resembles a letter, and because it resembles a letter, it is a letter.

The Alphabetum, inaugurated in February 2019, is part of the program of the national art institution West Den Haag.

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