



HARVARD GSD 02484: INTERDISCIPLINARY ART PRACTICES | FALL 2016

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breathe easy<sup>1</sup>  
adam m pere

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# statement

A panic attack begins with the experience of dyspnea | difficulty breathing | shortness of breath | the feeling of suffocation. These short frequent breaths, originating from the chest, create a lack of carbon dioxide in the blood stream. To compensate, the heart begins to beat faster and faster. The sensation of suffocation coupled with the pounding of the heart and the anxiety that sparked the attack can cripple even the strongest of minds. The key to conquering the panic attack lies with the initial symptom—the breath. By focusing on the breath and taking slow deep belly inhalations & exhalations, the mind is given a chance to calm allowing the symptoms of the panic attack to dissipate.

Breath—it is both a barometer and a tool for controlling one's mental wellbeing.

*Breathe Easy* is a sculpture; a projection; a sonic composition.

*Breathe Easy* is made to resemble a brown paper bag worn through a process of hyperventilation. The back features a video of my chest in various states of breath during a panic attack projected onto a screen fashioned out of a plastic bag. The opening on the front of the sculpture, the opening one would normally place to one's mouth and breathe into, is large enough to encompass the viewer's head—creating an immersive anxiety driven experience.

## Breath [breth]

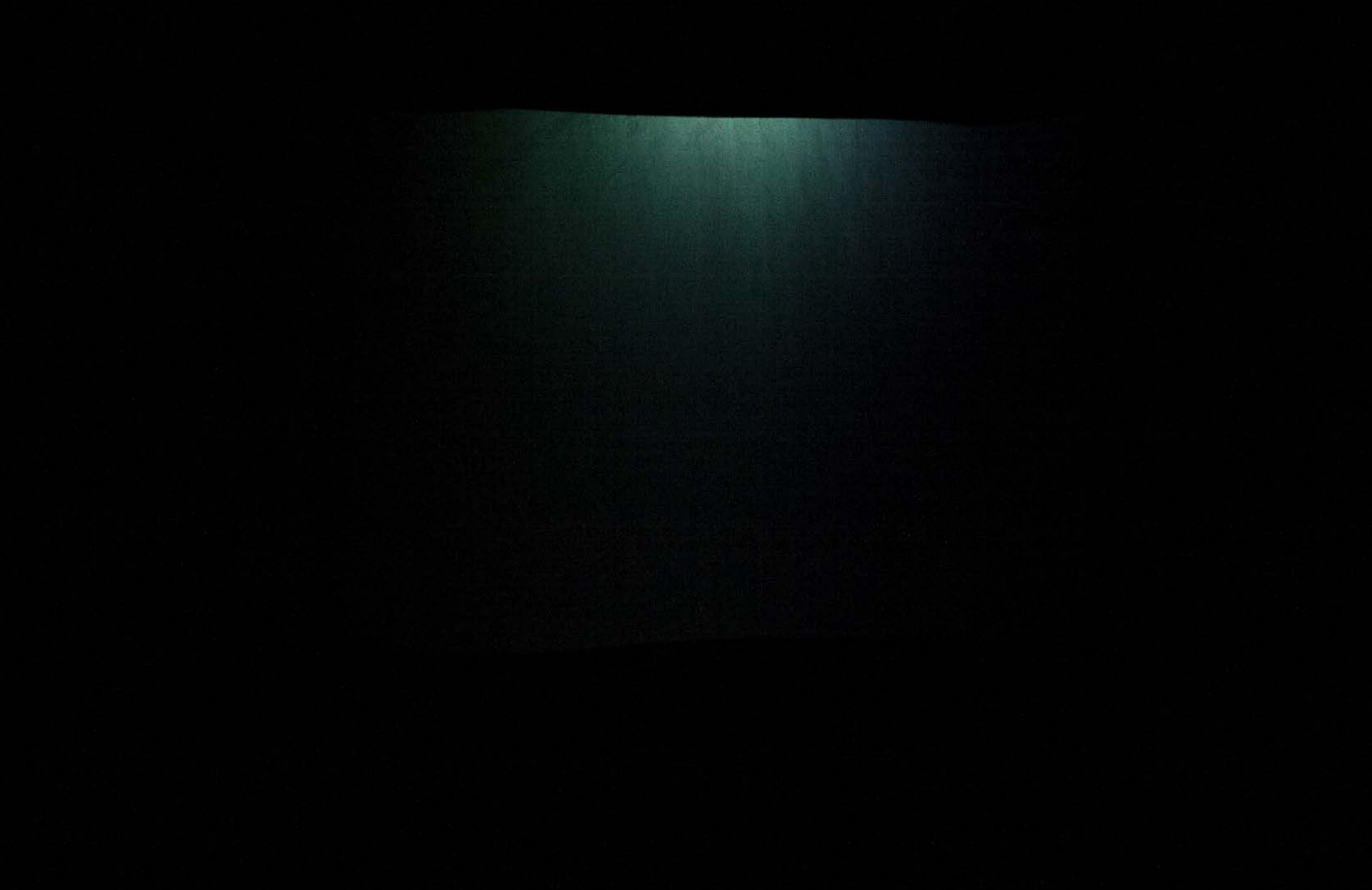
1. the air inhaled and exhaled in respiration.
2. respiration, especially as necessary to life.
3. time to breathe; pause or respite.
4. the brief time required for a single respiration; a moment or instant.

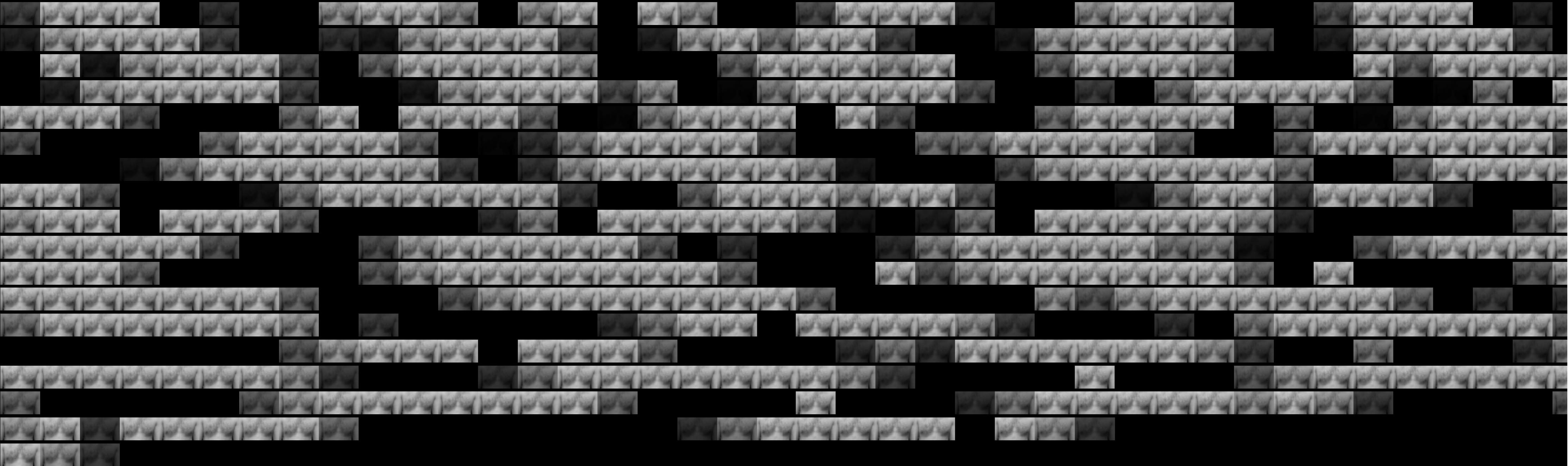
*dictionary.com*









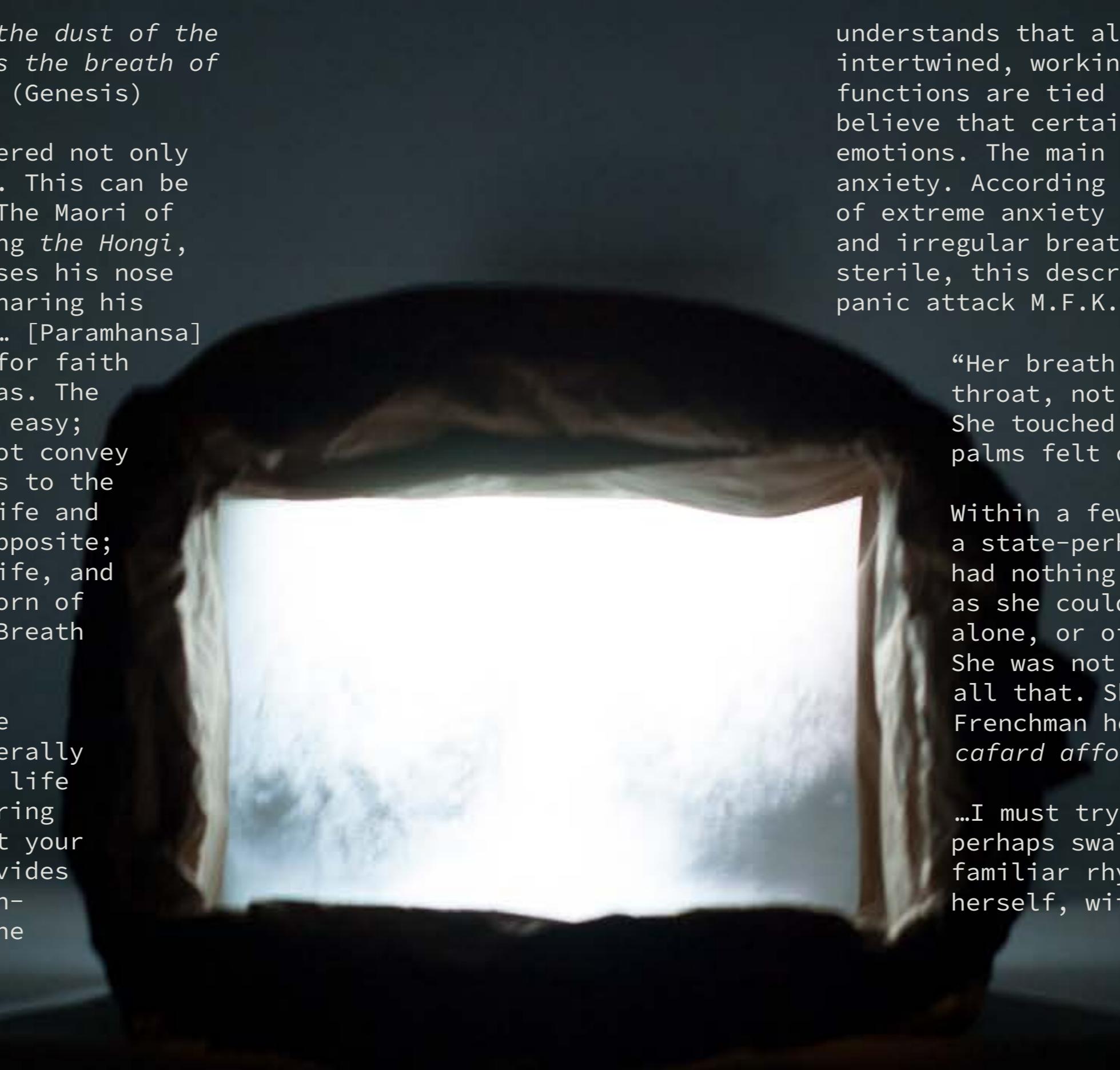


# critical reflection

*“Then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”* (Genesis)

For centuries, breath has been considered not only essential for life but as life itself. This can be seen in cultures all over the world. The Maori of New Zealand have a traditional greeting *the Hongi*, or the breath of life, where one presses his nose to the forehead of another, thereby sharing his life. “*In Journey to Self-Realization...* [Paramhansa] Yoganda [writes]... ‘The Sanskrit word for faith is wonderfully expressive. It is visvas. The common literal rendering, ‘to breathe easy; have trust be free from fear,’ does not convey the full meaning. Sanskrit svas refers to the motions of breath, implying thereby life and feeling. Vi conveys the meaning of ‘opposite; without.’ That is, he whose breath, life, and feeling are calm, he can have faith born of intuition.’” (*The Hindu Tradition of Breath Meditation*)

The main tenant of traditional Chinese medicine is the idea of Qi, which literally translates to breath or gas, or one’s life force. The belief is that the lungs bring in natural air qi is spread throughout your body via the blood stream. The qi provides the energy for movement of blood ([shen-nong.com](#)). Traditional Chinese medicine



understands that all of the body’s functions are intertwined, working in harmony and that the body’s functions are tied to the mind. For instance, they believe that certain organs are related to specific emotions. The main emotion tied with the lungs is anxiety. According to their literature, “common symptoms of extreme anxiety are retention of breath, shallow, and irregular breathing” ([shen-nong.com](#)). Although very sterile, this description is strikingly similar to the panic attack M.F.K. Fisher wrote about in *The Chill Factor*

“Her breath was caught in a kind of net in her throat, not going in and not down fast enough. She touched her body and it was hot, but her palms felt clammy and stuck to her.

Within a few seconds she knew that she was in a state—perhaps dangerous—of pure panic. It had nothing to do with physical fear, as far as she could tell. She was not afraid of being alone, or of being on the dunes in a storm. She was not afraid of bodily attack, rape all that. She was simply in panic, or what Frenchman home from the Sahara used to call *le cafard affole*.

...I must try to breathe more slowly, and perhaps swallow something to get back my more familiar rhythms. She was speaking slowly to herself, with silent but precise enunciation.”



In *The Chill Factor*, Fisher is experiencing a panic attack for the first time. She doesn't have the skills to work through it but her intuition leads her in the right direction when she says to herself "I must try to breathe more slowly, and perhaps swallow something to get back my more familiar rhythms". She understands that this feeling of suffocation is not real and that in order for her to overcome her panic, she must take control of her breath, she must return to her "familiar rhythms".

The concept of controlling one's mind through one's breath is an idea heavily explored in meditation and mindfulness. In one of his meditations Thich Nhat Han, a Vietnamese Buddhist Monk, tells the listener "Breathe you are alive. Just breathing and becoming aware that we are still alive can bring us great happiness. When we breathe mindfully, we reclaim our territory of body and mind and we encounter life in the present moment." By focusing on our breath, we have the ability to rid our mind of all anxieties, putting a stop to the body's fight or flight response to anxious thoughts.

The control of breath can also be used to gain a feeling of connectedness with other people. This can be seen in many spiritual practices all over the world through chanting and singing. Bjorn Vickhoff ran a study where they tracked people's breath and pulse as they sang in a choir. Vickhoff found that "when you sing phrases, it is a form of guided breathing. You Exhale on the phrases and breath in between the phrases. When you exhale, the heart slows down.... The members of the choir are synchronizing externally with the melody and the rhythm, and ... it has an internal counterpart" (Vickhoff). By melodically breathing together, the choir singers are able to synchronize their breath and therefore their emotions, creating a spiritual connection throughout the group.

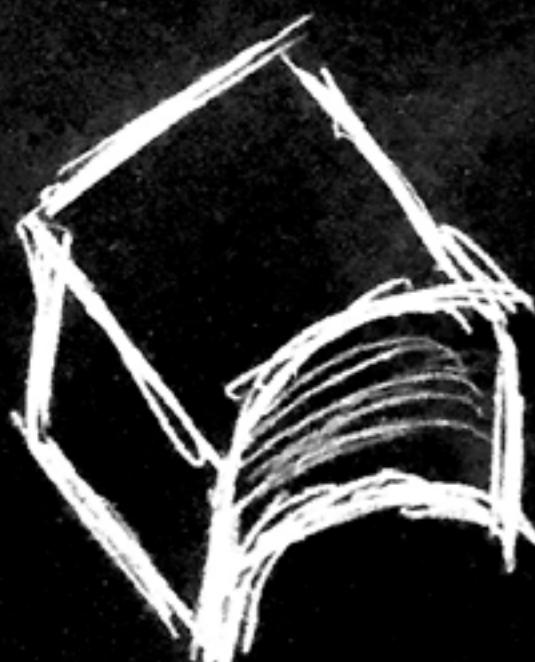
Breath is seemingly both a barometer and a controller for our emotions.

What is it about our breath, about air, that makes us aware? That makes us pause? That makes us rebalance? That makes us revitalize?

VISIBLE?

Does  
the  
pot  
cover?

? ?



SMALL  
SPEAKERS



PULSES OF PULSE



CONTAIN  
NARRATIVE

SWEAT

HEART

BREATH

INFLUENCES

WITH FRAME

PLASTIC

BAU

SCREEN

MATERIAL

CLOSED  
CUBE  
MATERIAL?

SUBLIMATION?

MATERIALS?

WHY CUBE?

PROCESS

LOW TO THE GROUND?

OR

CHEST HEIGHT?

CLOUDY  
MISTY  
EPHEMERAL  
SPIRIT/  
GHOST LIKE

CROUCH  
TO SEE  
INTIMATE



[ previous page ]

Original sketches. Highlights the use of projections;  
the cinematic box; dimensions 1:1 box-width:chest-width;  
use of plastic bag as screen; heart & breath; pulse;

[ above ]

A paper bag;  
A tool used to cease hyperventillating:

Wrap one hand around the paper bag 1.5" from the  
opening. Bring the opening to one's mouth while  
breathing in. Exhale into the bag; Inhale from the bag;  
repeat last two steps while necessary.



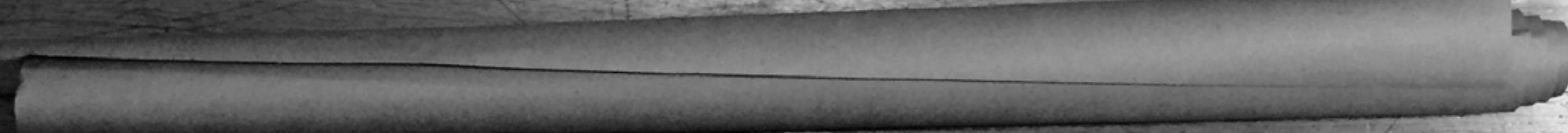
[ projector ]

200 lumen  
P300 Pico Projector



[ tape ]

0.25" white artists tape  
0.5" masking tape  
1" double sided tape



[ brown paper ]

1 meter roll



[ metal wire frame ]

skeleton



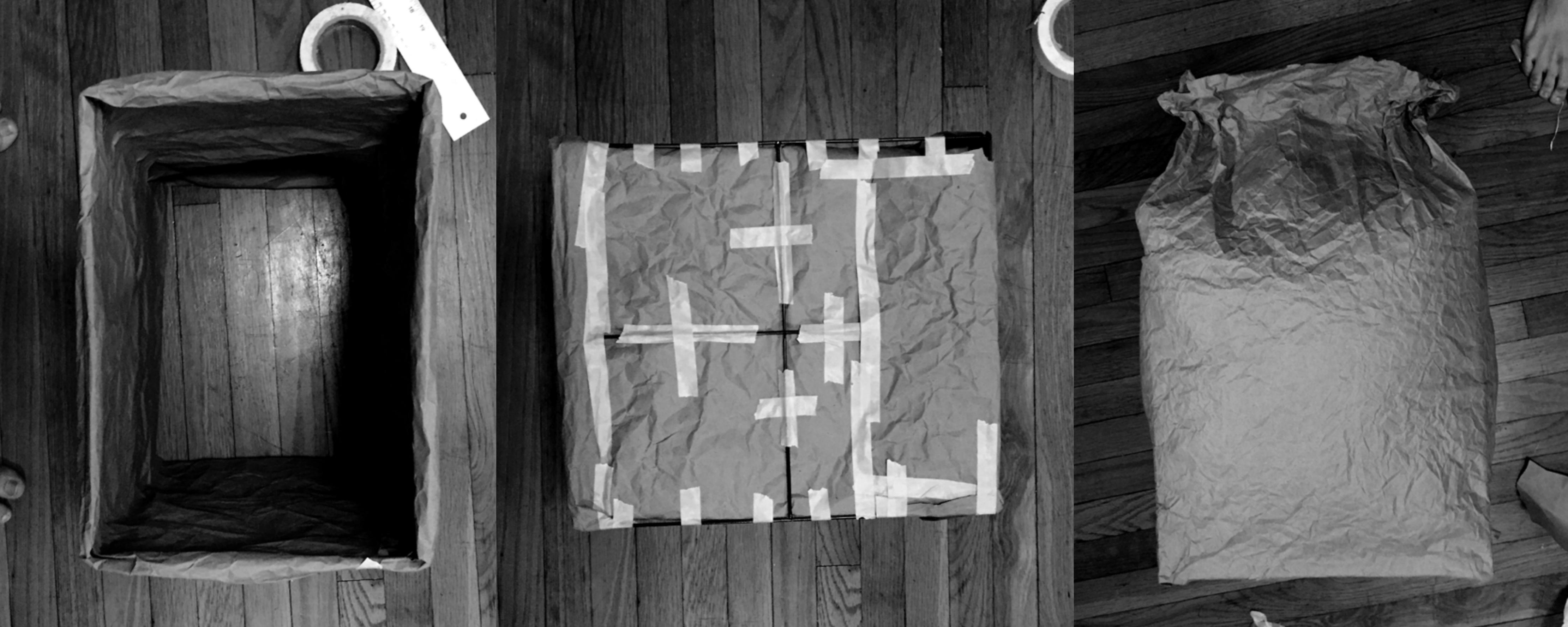
[ plastic bag ]

white plastic bags  
screen & stuffing



[ above ]

testing different plastic bags and taughness with  
light projection



[ previous page ]

list of materials used;

[ left ]

box after inner wrapping applied

[ center ]

box after innner wrapping applied

[ right ]

paper bag after outer wrapping and stuffing applied

# medium, format, site

light projection onto plastic bag

metal wire skeleton wrapped in one layer of brown paper  
stuffed with plastic bags  
wrapped in another layer of brown paper

sonic composition

the sculpture should rest on a platform at chest height

the opening facing outward

the viewer should bend down, restricting their breath,  
to place their head into the opening

the viewer should understand the confined space

the breathing is unsettling

the pauses in breath are unsettling

the flashes are unsettling

pulse. time.

anxiety.

# illustrations

[ cover ]

close-up of the interior/bottom of the sculpture

[ 1 ]

close-up of the front of the sculpture

[ 2-3 ]

exterior of the sculpture

[ 4-9 ]

view of the projection from the front at varying distances

[ 10-11 ]

view of the projection during a pause

[ 12-13 ]

screenshots from the projected video

[ 14-15 ]

view of the projection from the front

[ 16-17 ]

close-up of an interior corner of the sculpture w/  
projection

[ 18-19 ]

sketches from the original ideation

[ 20-21 ]

a brown paper bag stressed through the act of  
hyperventilation

[ 22-23 ]

materials used to construct the sculpture

[ 24-25 ]

testing various plastic bag and taughness with projection

[ 26a ]

side view of the sculpture after the first layer of brown  
paper

[ 26-27b ]

top view of the sculpture after the first layer of brown  
paper

[ 27c ]

top view of the sculpture after all layers of brown paper  
and stuffed with plastic bags

[ 28-29 ]

abstract image light from a projector

[ 30-31 ]

front view of the sculpture and projection

[ 32-33 ]

top-right interior corner of the sculpture

[ 34-35 ]

view of the projection from the front of the sculpture

[ 36-37 ]

view of the projection from the back of the sculpture



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