Visualizing Mental Illness Through Design

How can we visualize the unseen? The arts of mathematics, language, and science have, over the course of history, been compounded into visual symbols and systems that help us to understand the natural world around us.

Yet no such visual system exists, in complete, of the experience of emotion and mental illness. For this project I avoid telling viewers what or how emotion should be expressed visually, as emotion itself is such a varied and individualistic experience. Instead, using my own personal experiences and research on mental health and art, I am proposing a series of replicable visual systems that are evocative of the experiences of certain emotional states.

Through these systems, I aim to not only visualize a difficult to quantify element of human nature in a linear way, but to also visualize that which has been actively invisibilized by culture and societal standards. Mental illness is often met with shame and embarrassment. Among my generation, addiction, depression and anxiety have skyrocketed. I hope that through my practices as a designer I can not only show what we consciously have chosen to ignore, but also create a nuanced, personalized set of visual systems to quantify the abstraction of emotion.

Using text and image collection, my project this semester was to create a series of posters that effectively communicate what it feels to be mentally ill.

Contents

I. Past

04 Idea 1
05–11 Idea 1—Are.na sites
12–21 128 Images/1,000 Words Book
22 Idea 2
23–28 Idea 2—Are.na sites
29–45 Experiment 1
46–58 Experiment 2

II. Present

60–87 Experiment 3

III. Future

89 Statement
90–94 Inspiration

Past

Idea 1

My preliminary idea for this project was to explore the effects of technology on mental health.

How do the features and ready accessibility of smartphones and social media affect our well-being and understandings of the world?

Idea 1—Are.na sites

For my research collection on Are.na, I organized data collection into the following five channels:

Where We Have Been

The history of computer and cell phone technology, including platforms built on these devices

Where We Are

The current state of computer and smartphone technology, including recent developments; popular apps/programs, etc.

Where We Are Going

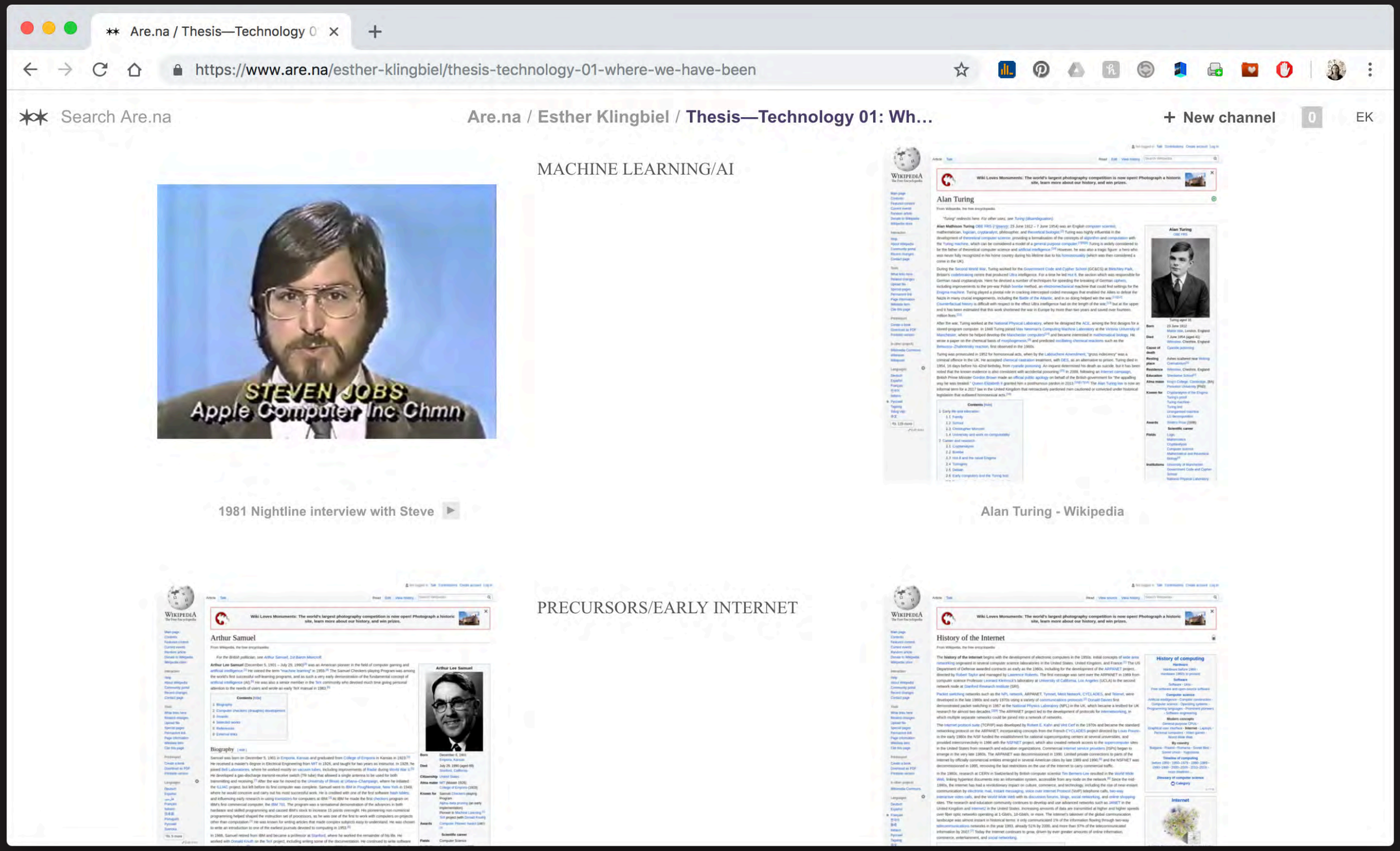
The future of smartphone and computer technology, including AI, VR/AR, and the implications of this new technology

How It's Affecting Us

The implications of computer and smartphone technology on attention, mental health (e.g. depression and anxiety), developmental health, stress, and self-esteem

What We're Doing About It

How we're dealing with the dangers and effects of current and future technology.



'Where We Have Been' Are.na channel

Are.na / Thesis—Technology 0

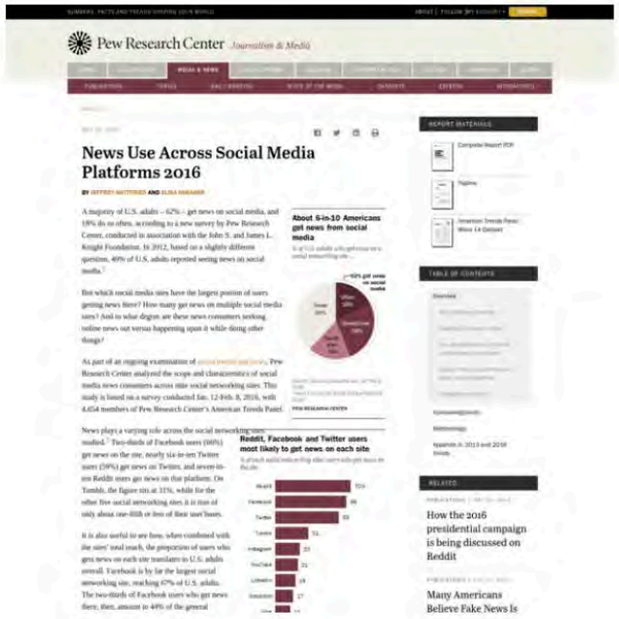
https://www.are.na/esther-klingbiel/thesis-technology-02-where-we-are

Search Are.na

Are.na / Esther Klingbiel / **Thesis—Technology 02: Wh…**

+ New channel

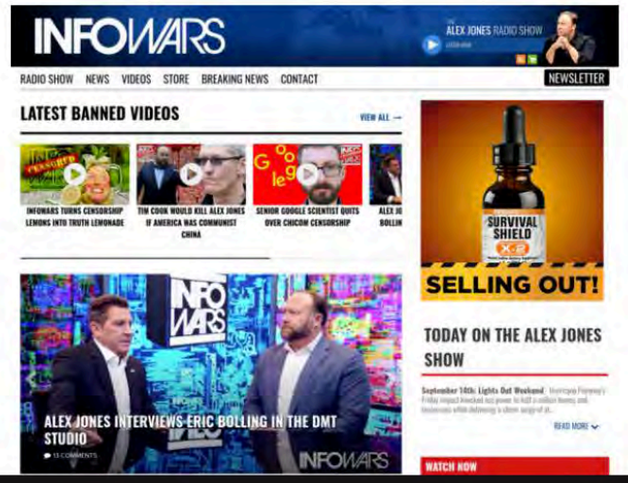
EK

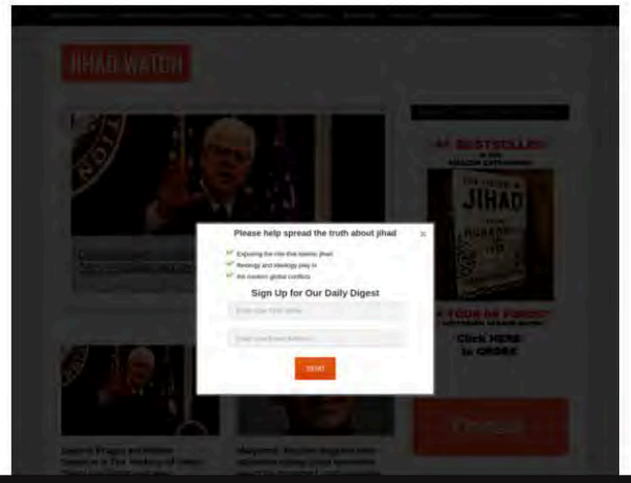


News Use Across Social Media Platforms...

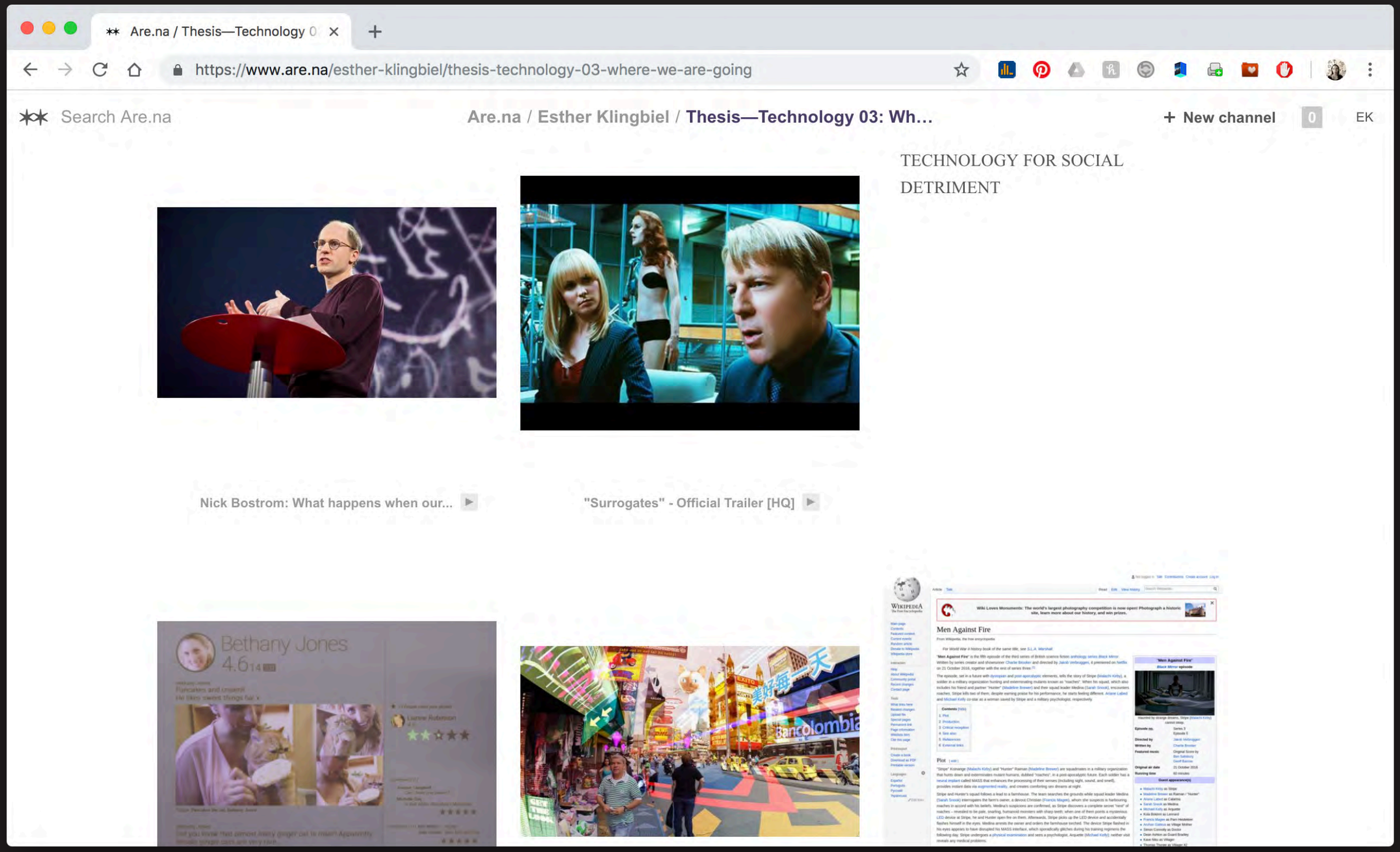
"A BuzzFeed analysis found that the 20 top-performing fake election stories, led by the lie that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump, gained more reactions, shares, and comments than the 20 top-performing stories from 19 major news outlets in the last three months of the campaign (Facebook said the stories represented a tiny part of total news consumption on the platform). The fake stories were overwhelmingly partisan, playing to Facebook's tendency to extend the reach of

Facebook's Uneven Enforcement of Hate...





'Where We Are' Are.na channel



‘Where We Are Going’ Are.na channel

Are.na / Thesis—Technology 0

https://www.are.na/esther-klingbiel/thesis-technology-04-how-it-s-affecting-us

Search Are.na

Are.na / Esther Klingbiel / **Thesis—Technology 04: Ho…**

+ New channel

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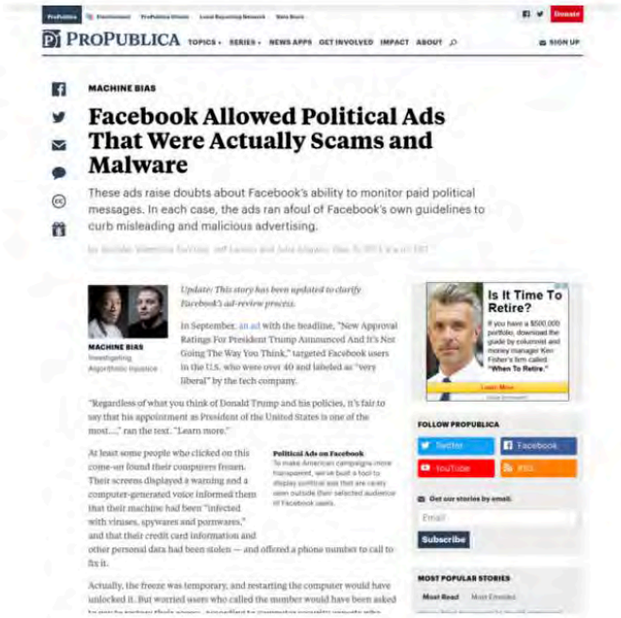
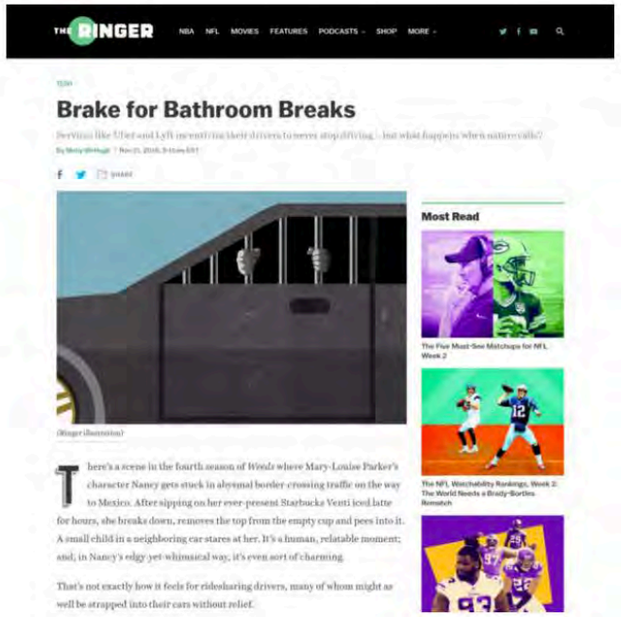
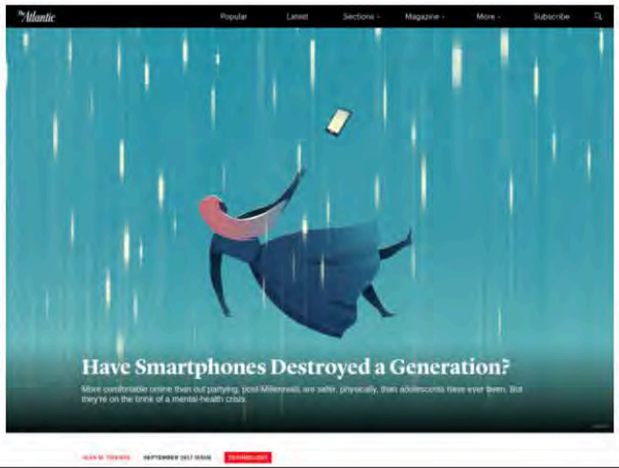


Facebook Allowed Political Ads That...

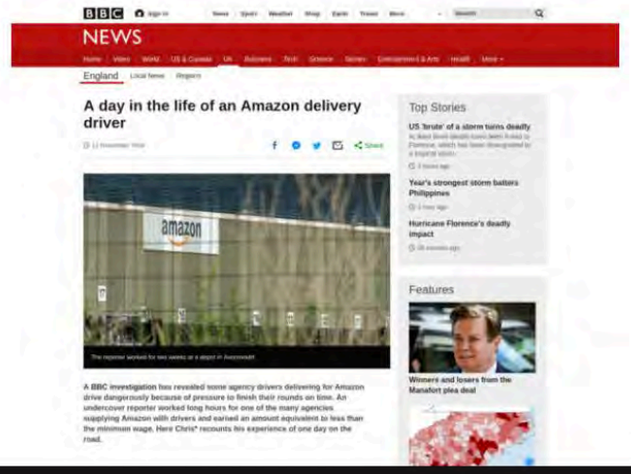
MENTAL HEALTH



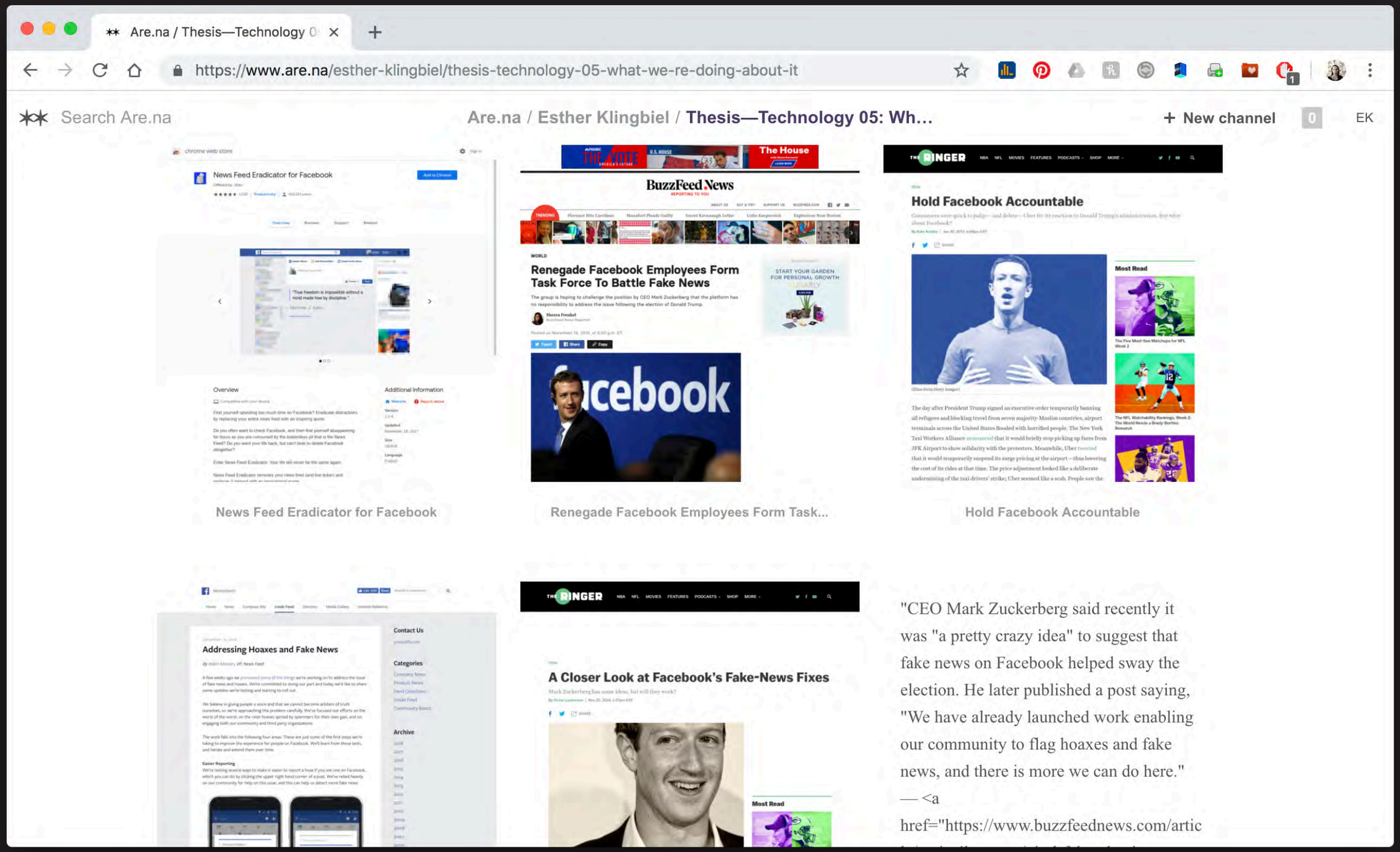
Brake for Bathroom Breaks



"I'm trying to talk to them about something, and they don't actually look at my face," she said. "They're looking at their phone, or they're looking at their Apple Watch." "What does that feel like, when you're trying to talk to somebody face-to-face and they're not looking at you?," I asked. "It kind of hurts," she said. "It hurts. I know my parents' generation



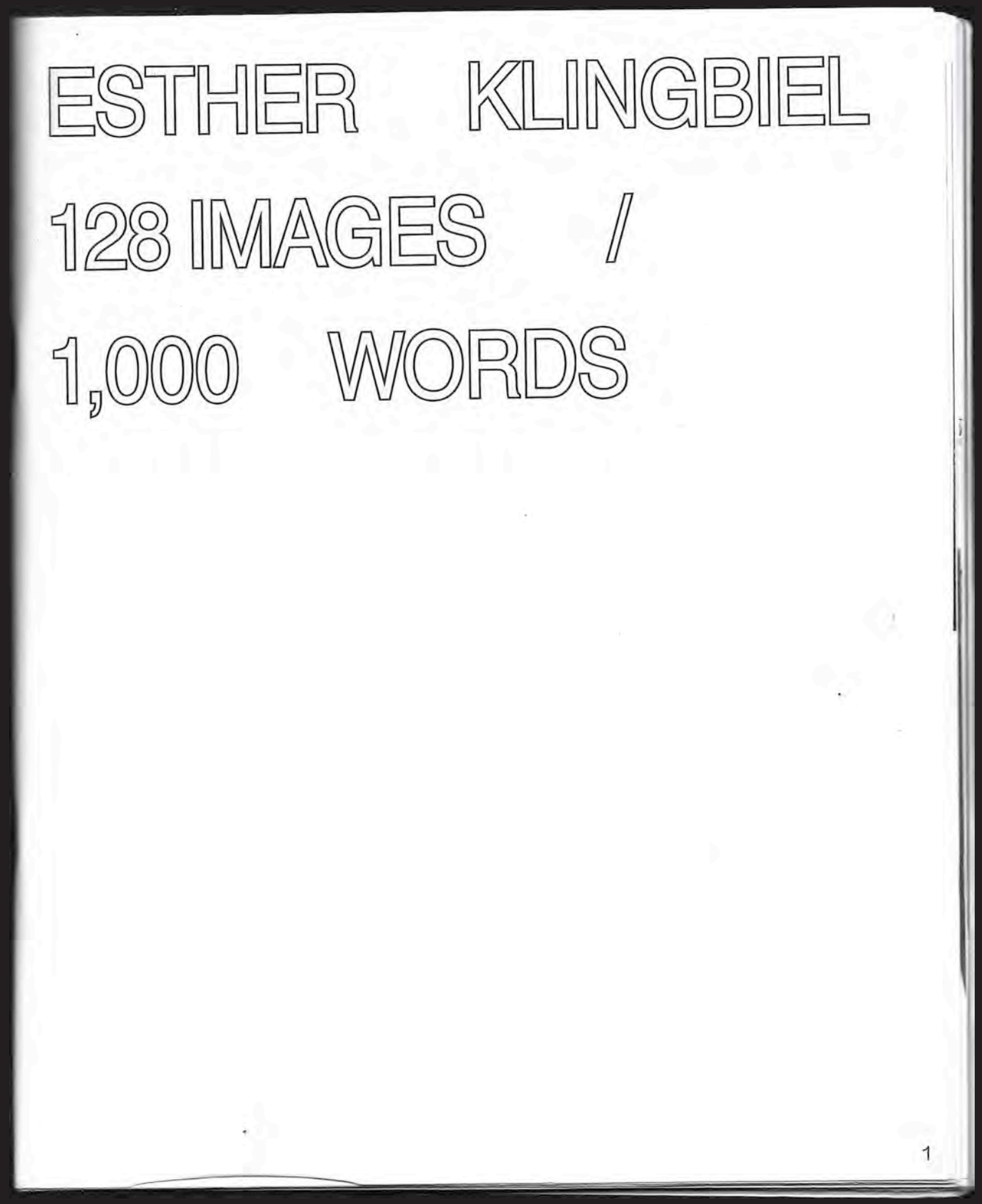
'How It's Affecting Us' Are.na channel



'What We're Doing About It' Are.na channel

128 Images/1,000 Words Book

The content of this book was partially based on research compiled through Are.na, but was mostly a collection of memories and images detailing my own relationship with personal technology (games, smartphones, and social media) throughout the various developmental stages of my life.



Front cover

PART I

CONTENTS: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES / EARLY TECH / TECH TODAY / WHY I'M WRITING THIS

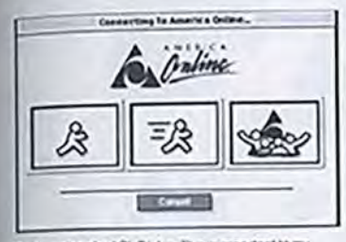
I was born in 1996. Many people would consider me – as I do myself – a Millennial. We are generation of people born, generally, from the late 1970s through the mid-90s. Technically, though, I'm Generation Z, which comprises people born from 1995–2010.[1] So I missed the cutoff by a year.

Millennials were born before the Internet was a ubiquitous part of life. They grew up with TV and rudimentary video games, but personal computers and smart technology as we know them today didn't exist. Millennials engage with the Internet now, and know how to use it well, but they knew a time without it. Gen-Zs, in contrast, were born into the Age of Information. The Internet existed before they did. Kids in this generation grew up with computer technology – it was a part of their childhood. They engaged with the stuff early on. And, because of it, Gen-Zers may be worse for wear in ways other generations are not (I'll get into *that* later).[2]

From the perspective of computers and smart devices and their grand entrances into our lives, 1996 was an interesting time to be born. I'm on the cusp of two generations – just like I'm on the cusp between the Capricorn and Aquarius Zodiac signs – a bit of both, some more than the other (And I'm *def* an Aquarius girl).

But generation cutoffs aside, I do consider myself a Millennial. That's because when I was growing up – until I was about twelve or so – computer technology wasn't a significant part of my life. This is partly because my parents were strict with screen time, but also because – compared to now – the technology we had back then *sucked*. Both my parents had computers, but they only made appearances when strictly necessary. Computers took ten minutes to even turn on and get fully loaded up. Using dial-up took another five (remember the sweet, terrifying sounds of the AOL dialup?). And then, when you actually got online, each webpage would take ages to load, to scroll through, to interact with. So in this sense, computers failed to engage us the way they do now, because back then they constantly provided us with stopping rules[3] – moments in time where we could disengage from what we were doing and stop. Today, stopping rules are rapidly disappearing (and this is by intentional design). The internet is lightning fast and accessible from anywhere; webpages can support a multitude of high quality media; the games we play and the websites we use are pretty and highly responsive. They make us want to keep doing whatever we're doing because it's highly engaging and satisfying. But they can quickly suck hours out of us before we even realize what we're doing.

Since I was born on January 22, I am technically on the cusp of Capricorn and Aquarius. This is important to my research because here, I make an analogy of zodiac signs to generations, which recently have been divided based upon the progress made during the Age of Information.



Dialogue box for AOL Dialup. This is important to my research because it was one of the ways we used to connect to the internet during the early days.

Sesame Street was a TV show I watched on PBS. This is important to my research because it is an example of modern technology helping me to learn as a child.

Because of the sleek allure of modern technology, I feel bad for young children today. If just watching public programs on a shitty TV with a screen the same size of my laptop was addictive (as it was in my day), I can't imagine the ways smartphones and iPads hook kids the way they do now. Tech use can obviously be controlled by parents, but it's difficult in a world where everyone is always carrying around a computer in their pocket. And it makes it even more difficult when a parent knows they can pacify their child in any situation by giving them a screen. For these kids, technology use so early on might be leading to a generation-wide, life-long addiction.

Pages 4–5

PART II

CONTENTS: TECHNOLOGY OF MY EARLY CHILDHOOD

As I've written earlier, I don't remember a lot of computer technology early in life – not until about 2006 or 2007 (when I was eleven or twelve). My dad had a cellphone, but I don't remember it at all. My mom refused to get one (saying she didn't have use for it – imagine someone today saying that?) until about 2005. When she would take my brother and I out on trips across the city, she'd occasionally check in with my dad on a payphone. The phones themselves were plastic, but they smelled like years and years of people's oily hands and faces. The pleasurable experience of talking on a payphone, of course, was dependent on the fact one could chance upon one that was actually working, which didn't happen much.

Example of an NYC payphone. This is relevant to my research because it was how people communicated before cell phones were popular.

My parents did have computers, as I've mentioned, but I was too young to be able to type well or navigate the internet. I did have a couple computer games – namely, Pajama Sam and Freddi Fish. When I was allowed to play them – rarely – the entire world around me ceased to exist. I felt like I had only been playing for a few minutes when time was up. In school, too, we usually had a computer in the classroom – all of them were installed with Kid Pix. If there ever existed an addicting game in the early 2000s (that's on par with the stuff children have today), it's Kid Pix. Basically, it was Microsoft Paint for kids. It was interactive and engaging. Every tool had a corresponding sound when you used it, too. That was by far the best part.

The Pajama Sam computer game. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of computer game technology that was around when I was a kid.

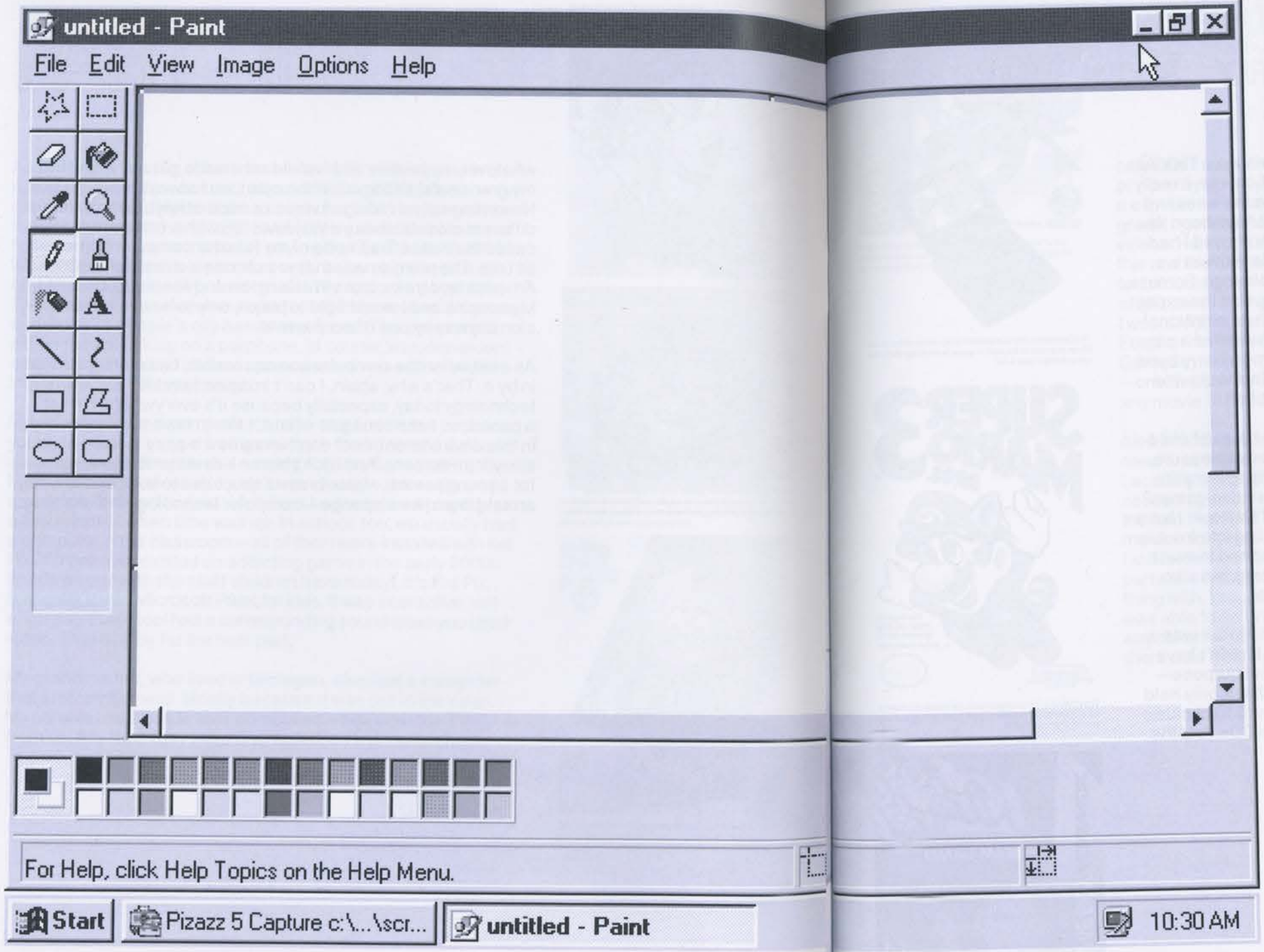
My grandmother, who lived in Michigan, also had a computer that I remember well. Mostly because it was out in the open. My parents used to hide their computers – and even the TV – from us. Any time they were distracted, on a different floor,

The Kid Pix computer game. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of computer game technology that was around when I was a kid.

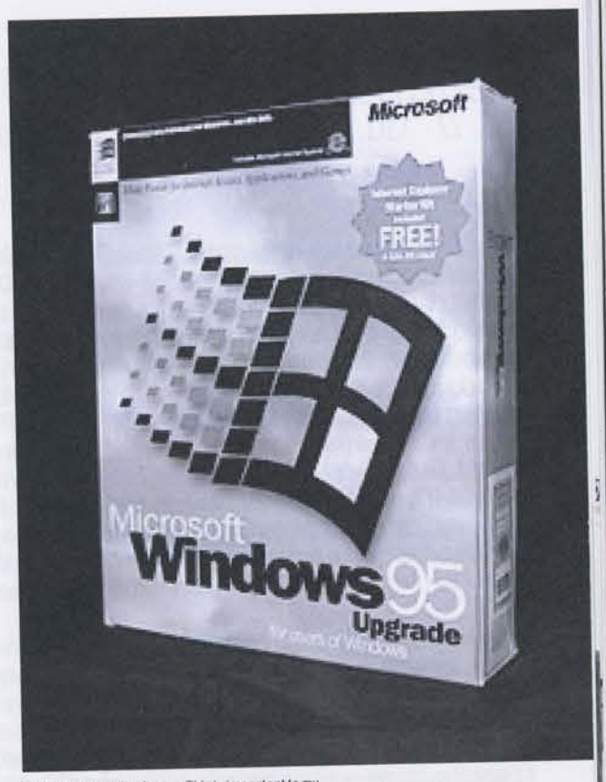
whatever, my brother and I would scheme to get at the stuff. But my grandma's, sitting out in the open, was always ready for use. No setting up, no hiding of wires or mice or keyboards in three different closets. It was a Windows '95 with a computer game called the Yukon Trail – one of my favorite computer games of all time. The premise was that you choose a character in 1800s America and trek across Washington and Alaska to find gold. My cousins and I would fight to play it, only to be denied permission anyway by one of our parents.

As a kid, when the computer was accessible, I was totally sucked in by it. That's why, again, I can't imagine how kids experience technology today, especially because it's everywhere. I'm not a parent, so I can't imagine what it's like to have to raise a child in this environment, but I don't imagine it's easy to keep a kid away from screens. And I don't blame kids either for wanting it – for a young person, whose brain is structured to soak up the world around them like a sponge – computer technology is like a drug.

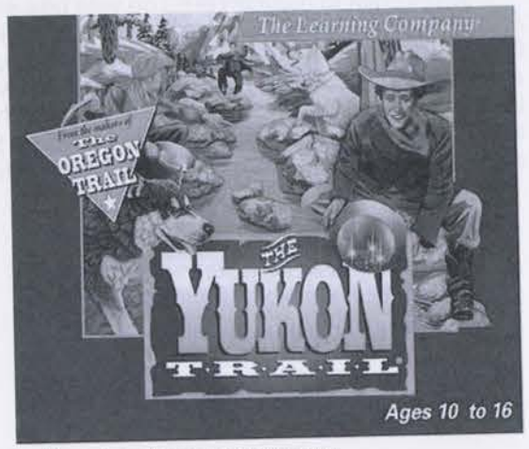
Pages 16–17



The Microsoft Paint computer application. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of computer technology that was around when I was a kid.



The Windows '95 software. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of computer technology that was around when I was a kid.



The Yukon Trail computer game. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of computer technology that was around when I was a kid.

Pages 18–19

PART III

CONTENTS: MY FIRST TECHNOLOGICAL DEVICES/ EARLY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

When I was 9 years old, I got a GameBoy for Christmas. This was the first screen I'd ever owned – it was *mine*. Of course, it really wasn't. I was allowed to play for a few hours on the weekend or during car rides. But I think, for me, this might have been the beginning of the end. Up until that point my friends and I had entertained ourselves by engaging with real life. Now all we wanted to do was play Super Mario or Kirby or Pokemon. Screens, like I've said, can suck me in better than anything else I've experienced. But they're like popcorn – filling, but with no nutritional benefit. The GameBoy was the same thing. At the end of a playdate, my friends and I would look up from our games, blurry eyed and headachy, as a parent rang the doorbell. We always wondered to ourselves if time could really go by that fast.

The GameBoy. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of game technology that was around when I was a kid.

I know I was young, but I can't help regret all the hours of childhood I began to waste on short-term, instantaneous pleasure. What kind of person would I have been, if everything in my life was exactly the same – just without computers or video games? Would I be more creative? Smarter? Better-read? Or would I have spent that time – especially in high school – getting into trouble or fighting with my brother? It's not something I spend to much time thinking about, mostly because it's depressing, but also because I'll never have an answer to that question.

Super Mario 3. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of game technology that was around when I was a kid.

A few years after I got a GameBoy, I got my first iPod. It was a Nano – the one that looks like a pregnancy test. It didn't have a screen, so I could only engage with it via its real purpose – listening to music. The real issue was, though, that it only held about 100 songs. I wasn't allowed to buy more than $10 of music a month on iTunes, so most of the music was from CDs. And the

Kirby: Nightmare in Dream Land. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of game technology that was around when I was a kid.

Pokemon: Emerald Version. This is important to my research because it's an example of the kind of game technology that was around when I was a kid.

only CDs I owned were the Beatles. So, suffice to say, I got sick of it pretty quickly. After that, I got another Nano, the one with a clip. Same issues there. Little space, no screen. But in sixth grade, I got the iPod Mini – the first one released that could play videos. Here, again, was another screen. The difference between this and the GameBoy, though, was that it offered limitless content. I could go on iTunes and buy whatever I wanted with an influx of gift cards from people who didn't know me that well. At night, I would hide under the covers and watch episodes of Gossip Girl. For the first time ever, I could binge-watch TV. So after the GameBoy, I had now developed another technological bad habit – one that's effortless to sustain, with the ability to find virtually any movie or TV show somewhere on the internet.

Also in sixth grade I got my first computer. In truth, I actually did need one, unlike my other devices. It was around this time that I actually started to get real homework – the type of stuff that needed to be typed up on the computer. This was combined with the fact that I had been badgering and pestering my parents to get me one for years. The computer was a white plastic Macbook. I still remember the smell – of new, clean little plastic and metal parts all combined to make this shiny object that I could do anything with. Yes, I did write assignments on the laptop, but I also was able to go online and play on Club Penguin or MiniClip or any other number of gaming sites catered to 12-year-olds. But there was a highly social aspect to it as well.

Pages 20–21

PART IV

CONTENTS: TECH USE IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE / HOW IT FUCKED ME UP

From my memory, the iPhone took a couple of years to really catch on. When the first model came out, people saw it as more of a pretty signifier of status than a real tool. Before the iPhone was cool, the Blackberry dominated the high school market. The Blackberry itself wasn't particularly different from any other rudimentary 'smart phone.' It had a full keyboard, took high-ish resolution photos, could access the internet (data at this time was still so slow though, that no one would really use it without WiFi. That, and mobile versions of websites were still in their infancy). The real difference between the Blackberry and everything else was Blackberry Messenger (BBM). With BBM, you could chat with your friends more easily. It was faster. You could set statuses depending on your availability. But the best part was that *you could tell if other people had read your messages.* This feature was (and I imagine, still is), an extremely important part of social life in high school. 'Leaving someone on read' had profound implications – it was almost like a type of body language. It could signify that you were angry at someone or ignoring them (and wanting them to know), or a way of playing hard to get. A lot of discussions were inspired over the *exact* meaning of why so-and-so decided not to respond.

By 10th grade (2011), the Blackberry had fallen out of fashion, mostly because of the fact that it was actually a really shitty phone (aside from BBM, of course). Apple had developed the 'read' or 'delivered' status of messages, and offered an option to turn it off, and that aspect of texting ceased to matter. Technology was getting better – data was faster, WiFi grew in coverage, mobile websites got better. Now iPhones had front cameras (and we all know the results of that). Facebook

The first iPhone ever released. This is important to my research because the iPhone profoundly impacted the future of mobile technology.

The BlackBerry Bold. This is important to my research because it was the first 'smart phone' I ever owned.

BlackBerry Messenger (BBM). This is important to my research because it was the first mobile IM service I ever used.

Emily Ratajkowski, an Instagam model. This is important to my research because social media is known for promoting unrealistic beauty standards.

developed an app. Instagram and Snapchat were released. More and more, socializing online bled into socializing in person. You weren't cool or 'in the know' if you didn't have a social media account.

The other major shift in high school was that Facebook really became a signifier of your status in real life. The more likes you got on your photos (especially your profile pictures), the more popular in real life you were. I spent hours 'stalking' the popular girls in my grade, desperately wishing I could be as pretty and self-confident as they appeared to be. Such constant self-flagellation, I think, has really damaged my psyche in the long run. I still struggle with self-esteem, social awkwardness. Part of it is that by nature, I am intensely introverted and abhor being the center of attention – but I think my insecurities were exacerbated by the rise of social media at such a critical and sensitive period in my development.

When I started college, Facebook and Instagram didn't matter to me anymore they way they did in high school. Facebook got boring and people, for the most part, abandoned it. Instagram became fun, just a place to post things I liked. I pride myself on being to stop myself from engaging so intensely with these platforms, but I am not independent of them. Sometimes I still go through the feeds of 'Instagram models' and the like, simultaneously berating them for being so shallow and at the same time wishing I could look like them.

Pages 32–33

COMPUTERS I'VE OWNED

MacBook, 2006

MacBook Pro, 2012

MacBook Pro, 2014

Pages 68–69

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IMAGE INDEX

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PAGES 82–83

http://www.techtree.com/content/news/2215/download-subway-surfers-android-ios.html

https://www.amazon.com/Electronic-Arts-TETRIS/dp/B0094N0H70

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/app-reviews/sallys-spa

PAGES 84–85 https://appadvice.com/appnn/2013/07/hatchis-latest-update-adds-a-brand-new-botanical-egg

http://theaverageconsumer.com/2013/06/app-of-the-week-ruzzle/

http://www.androidapp101.com/akinator-android-app-2647.html

PAGES 86–87 https://www.justin.my/2012/06/bag-it-walkthrough/

http://coolappsman.com/candy-crush-saga-review/

https://toucharcade.com/2014/11/21/crossy-road-review/

https://www.thedailybeast.com/inside-kim-kardashian-hollywood-the-reality-stars-aspirational-app-and-vainest-project-yet

PAGES 88–89 https://play.google.com/store/apps/topic?id=campaign_editorial_3002d8a_games_yearend2017_deal7_cep

https://www.usgamer.net/articles/20-09-2018-pokemon-go-mewtwo-guide-mewtwo-best-counters-mewtwo-raid-weaknesses-best-moveset-shiny-mewtwo

https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/two-dots/id880178264?mt=8

https://www.amazon.com/Cheetah-Mobile-Rolling-Sky/dp/B01MPXUXHO

Back cover

Idea 2

At this point in the semester, I decided to change my focus. Continuing down the path I had started would require me to invest more time in research than design.

Moving forward, I decided to continue with thinking about mental health, and asked myself how we could utilize design to 'see' emotion and experiences of mental illness when they are by definition non-visual entities.

It is important to note here that I am not trying to speak for others by creating a visual system by visualizing mental illness. All experiences of symptoms are unique and individual. As such, the content in the following slides are drawn from my own personal experiences, research, working habits, and aesthetic.

Idea 2—Are.na sites

In order to condense my research and help others understand my goals for this project, I created new Are.na channels:

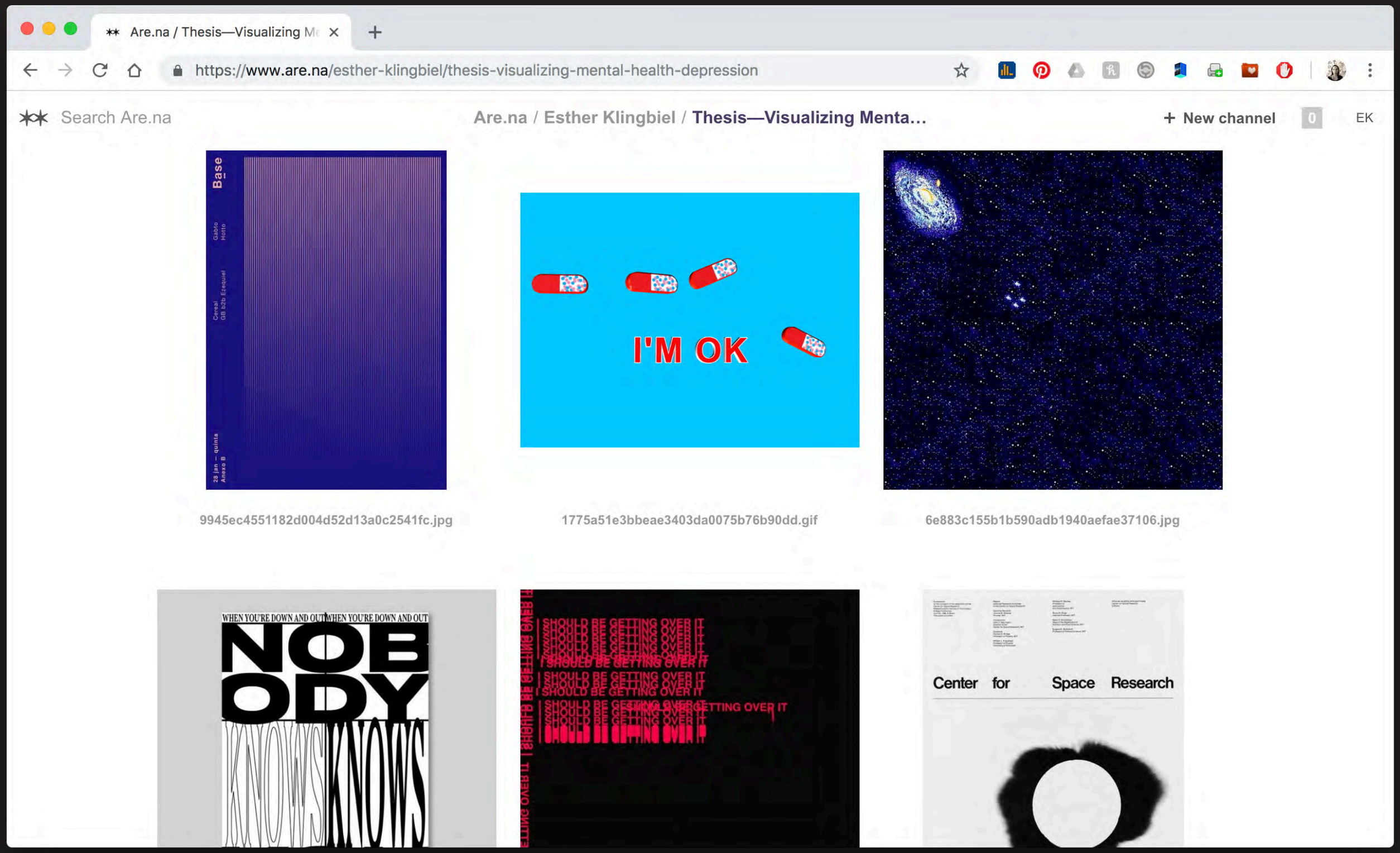
Visualizing Depression

Visualizing Anxiety

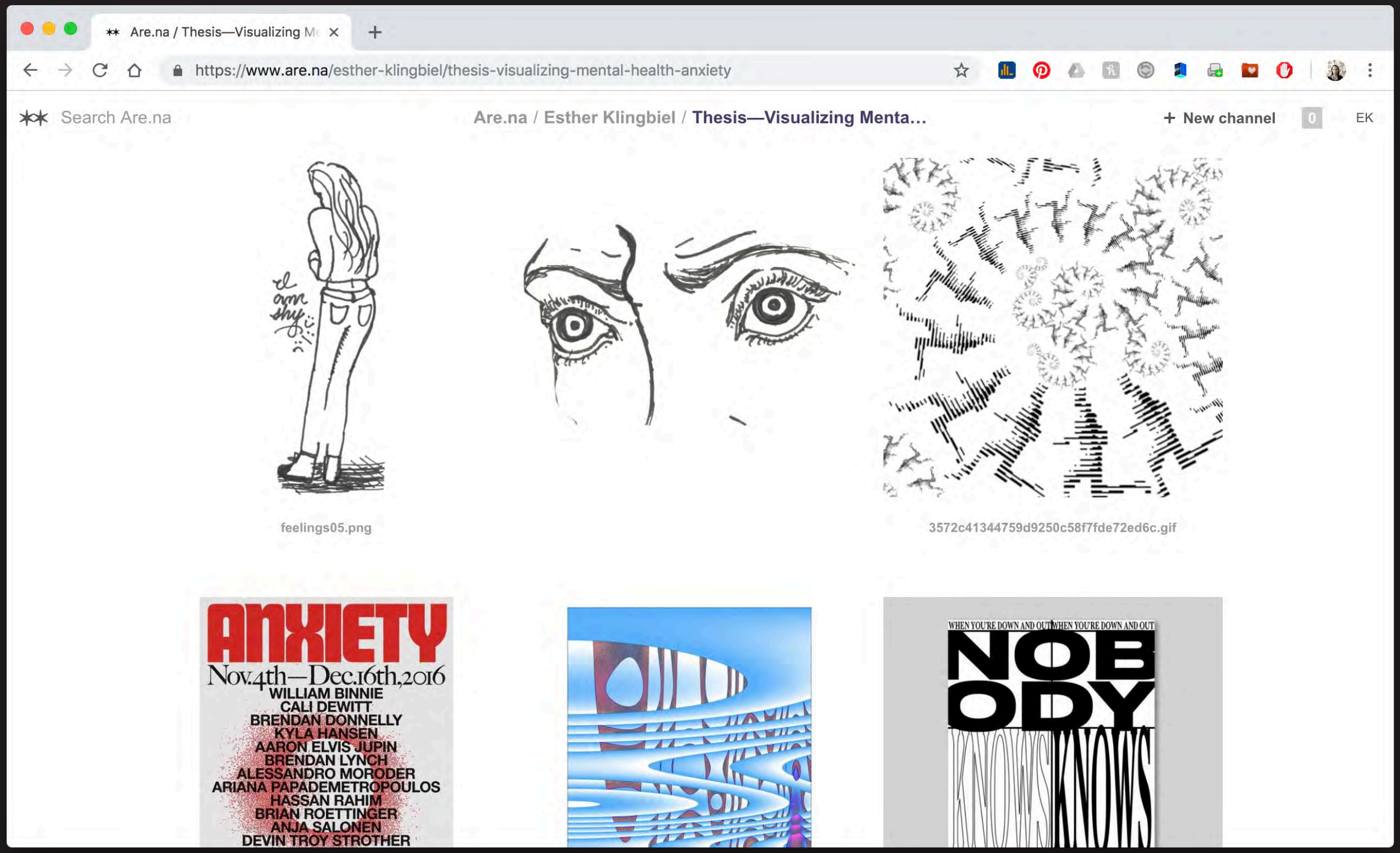
Visualizing Obsessive Compulsion

Visualizing Mania

Visualizing Hallucinations



'Visualizing Depression' Are.na channel



'Visualizing Anxiety' Are.na channel

Are.na / Thesis—Visualizing M

https://www.are.na/esther-klingbiel/thesis-visualizing-mental-health-obsessive-compulsion

Search Are.na

Are.na / Esther Klingbiel / **Thesis—Visualizing Menta…**

+ New channel 0 EK

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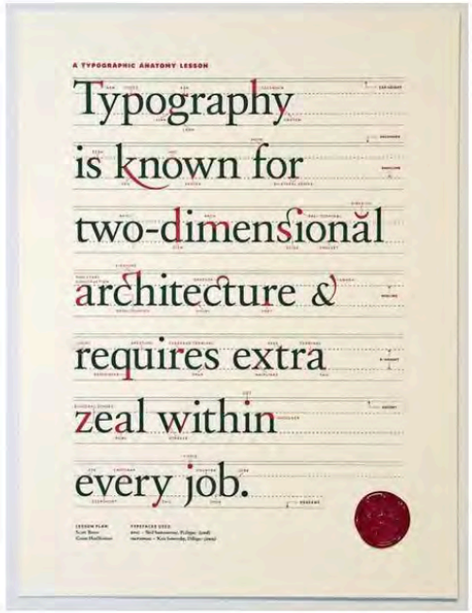

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'Visualizing Obsessive Compulsion' Are.na channel

Are.na / Thesis—Visualizing M

https://www.are.na/esther-klingbiel/thesis-visualizing-mental-health-mania

Search Are.na

Are.na / Esther Klingbiel / **Thesis—Visualizing Menta…**

+ New channel 0 EK

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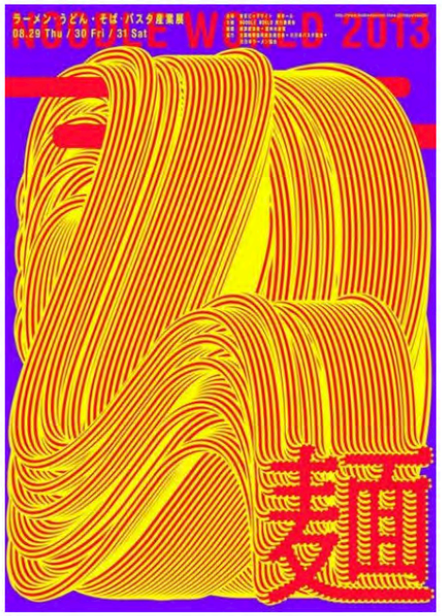

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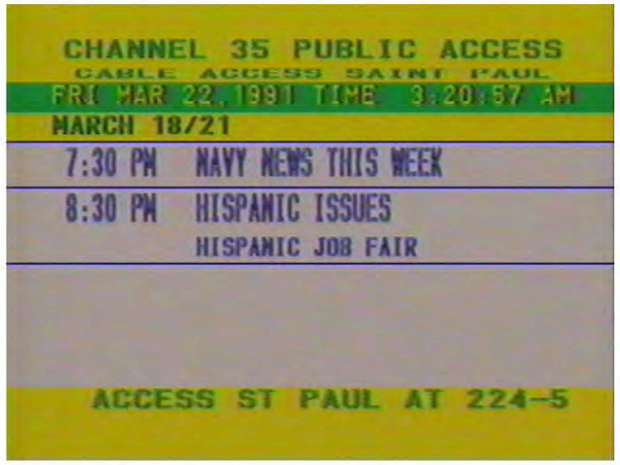

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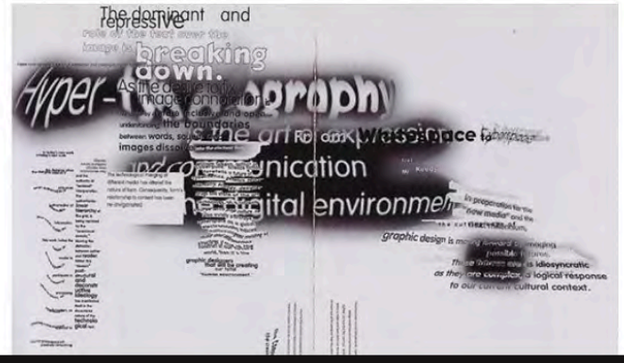
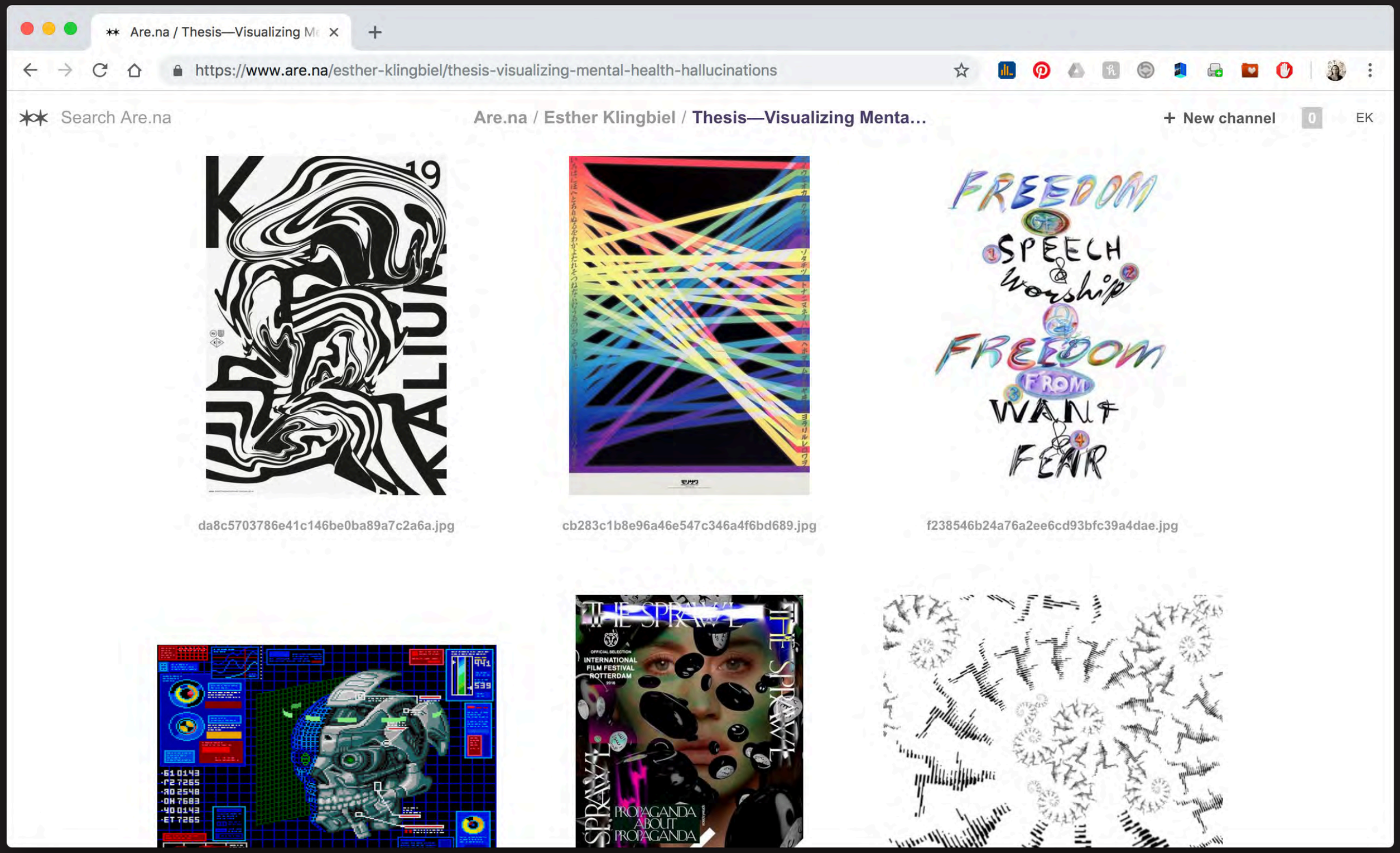


'Visualizing Mania' Are.na channel



'Visualizing Hallucinations' Are.na channel

Experiment 1

For the first foray into this new idea, I decided to create a series of five posters (22″ x 34″, vertically oriented), treating one set of text throughout the series purely through type, rule, and shape manipulation. Each poster represented one symptom of mental illness.

The key here was also to devise a set of instructions to treat the type and composition so that the communication of a certain symptom is applicable to any text, medium, and document size.

The final set of instructions can be found here.

The text I decided to use is the poem *Edge* (1960) by Sylvia Plath, who suffered from depression and often wrote about it.

The symptoms I decided to use (one per poster) were depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsion, mania, and hallucinations.

Depression

For the poster depicting depression, I set the type size on the smaller side, relative to the size of the poster.

I used gradients to ‘box in’ the text, creating a feeling of weight and being trapped. No color was used here, to depict the monotonous experience of life many people with depression have described as their realities.

Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

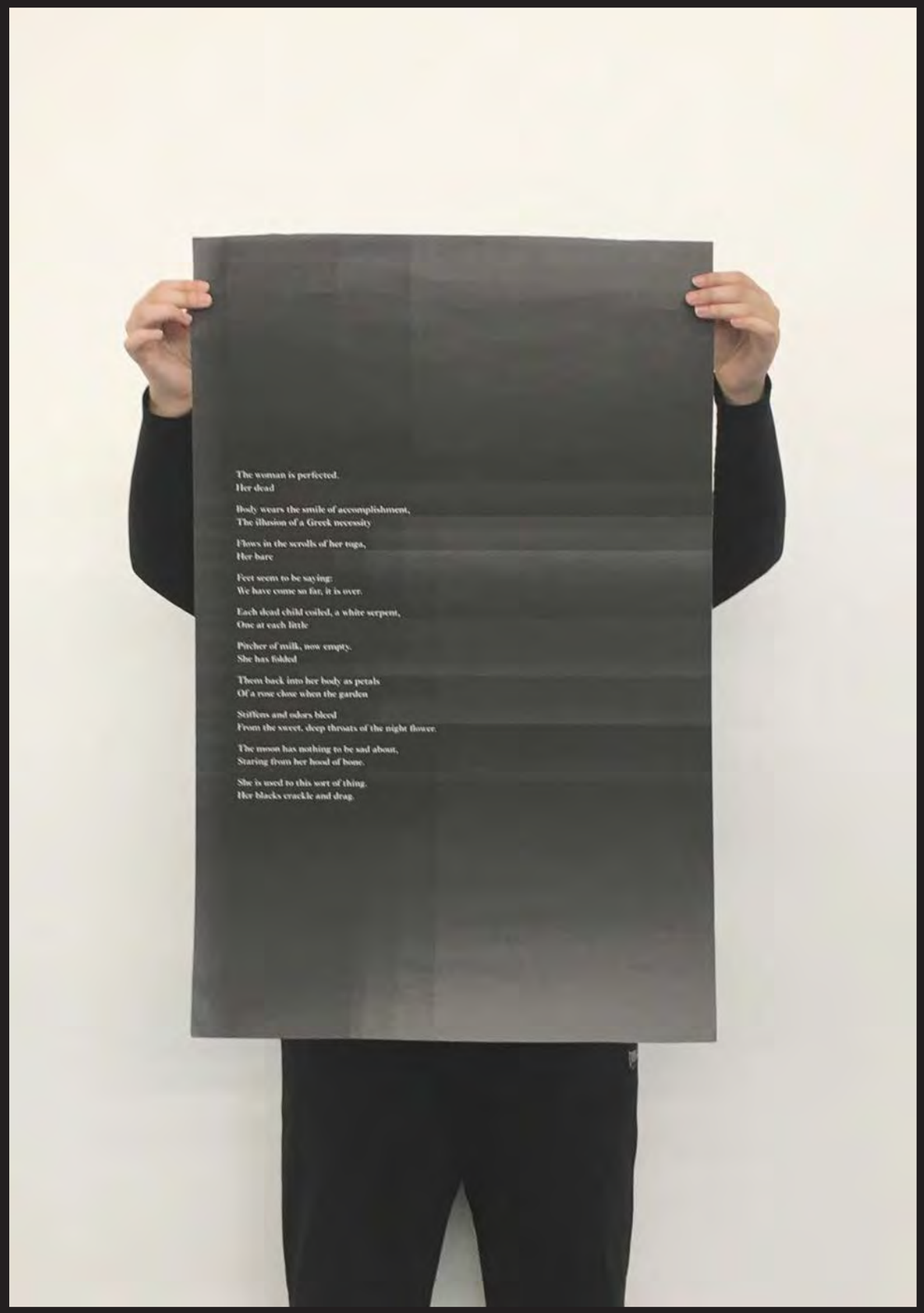
Them back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

Poster visualizing depression



Documentation of size reference

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

Them back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

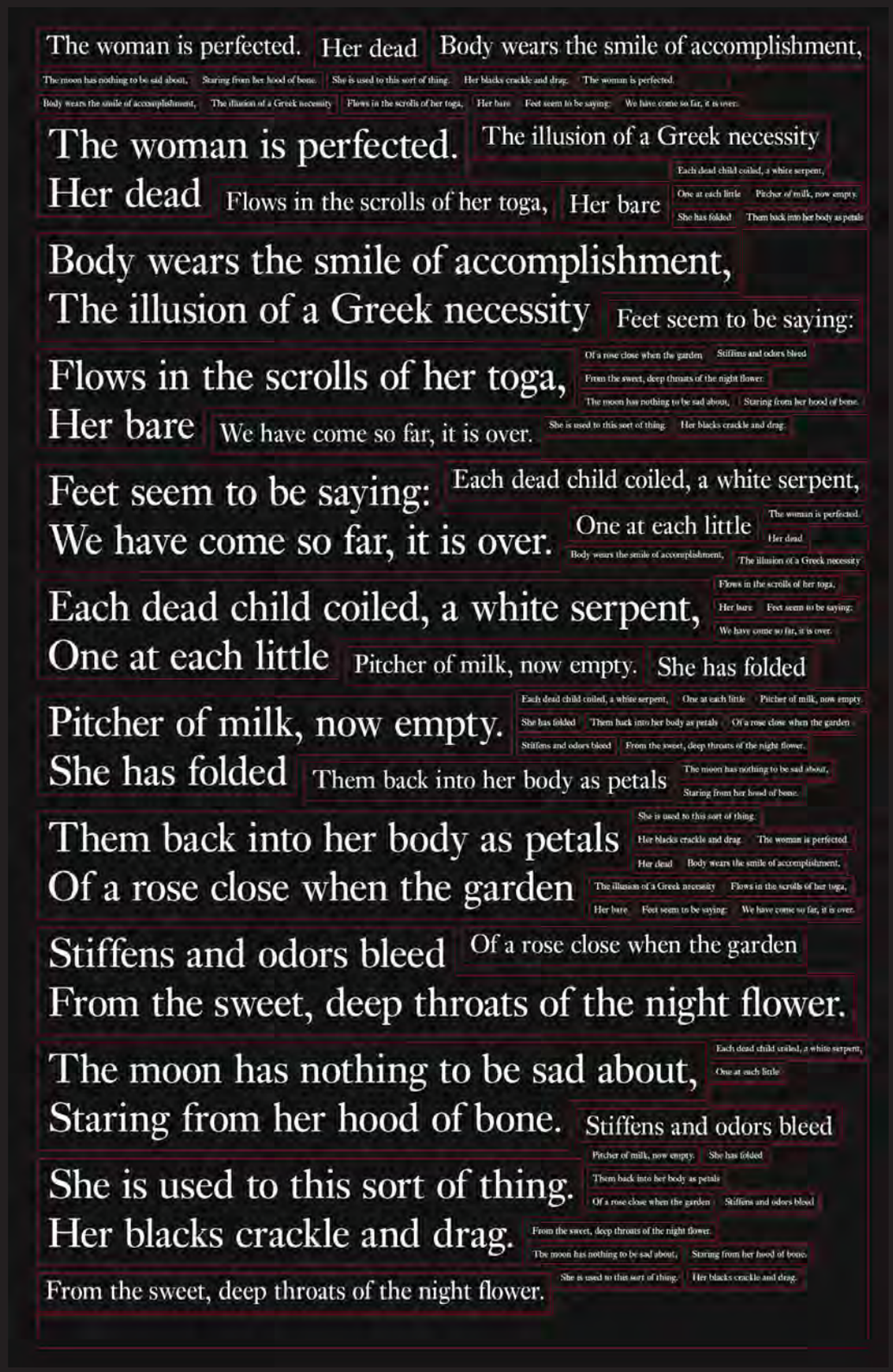
Detail of text

Anxiety

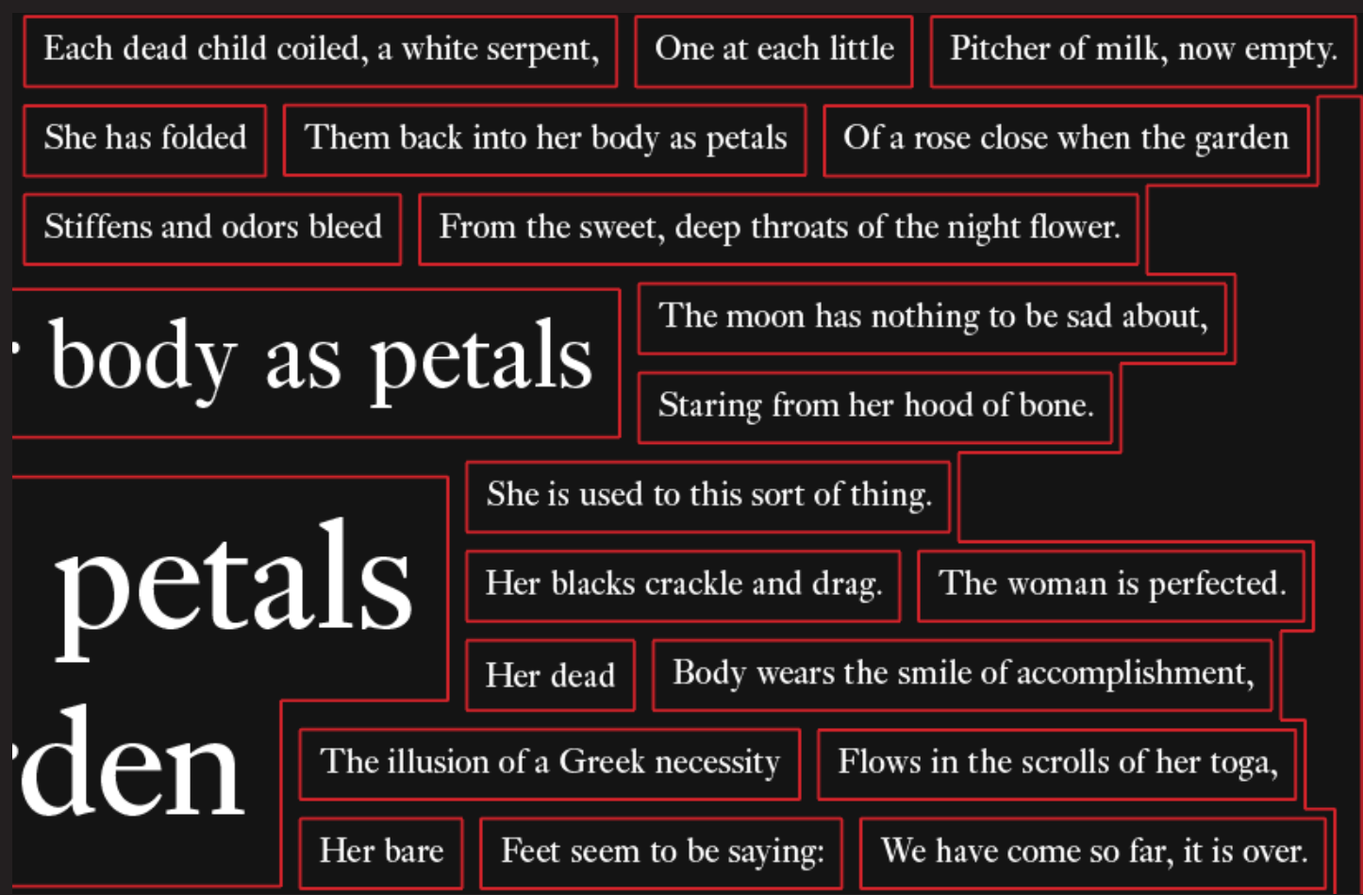
For the poster depicting anxiety, I set the poem to occupy as much space in the composition as possible. Each line of the poem was set inside a box, as well as significant negative spaces that were left over.

The repeated lines in the poem refer to the cycle of negative thoughts than anxiety can cause some people to fall into. The boxes serve a similar symbolic purpose as the gradient boxes do in the depression poster—the sense that those with anxiety feel trapped by their thoughts and will never escape them.

Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.



Poster visualizing anxiety



Details of text sizes and boxes

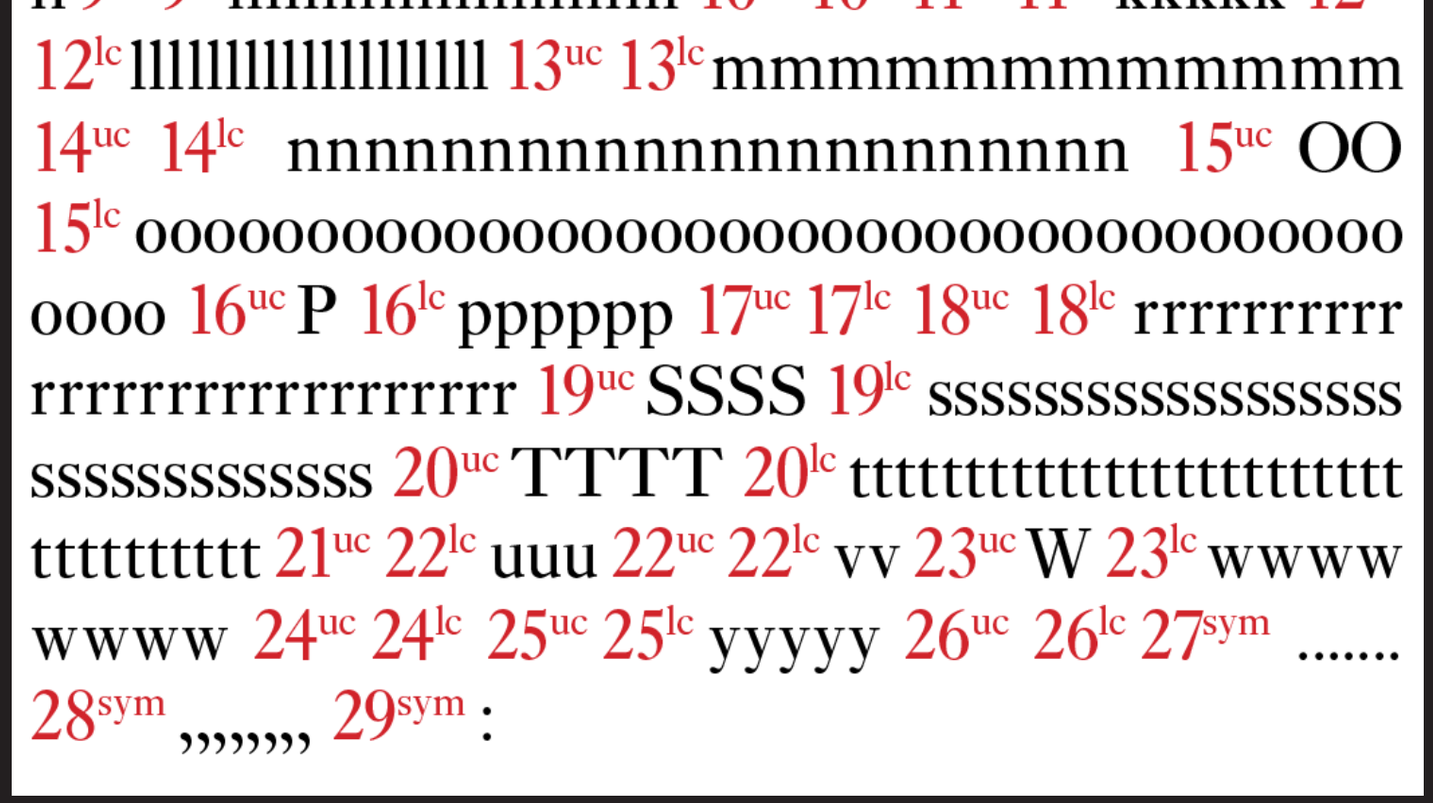
Obsessive Compulsion

For the poster depicting obsessive compulsion, I assigned numerical markers to each letter and symbol appearing in the text, then 'deconstructed' it so that the poem was an alphabetically organized list of all the letters and symbols that it was comprised of.

This 'deconstruction' is meant to show the arbitrariness of the rituals that many people with obsessive compulsions feel compelled to perform. Often they themselves recognize that what they do does not make logical sense or have any meaning (other than a means to alleviate anxiety).

Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.

Poster visualizing anxiety



Text detail, righthand column

12lc 15lc 12lc 4lc 20lc 16lc 20lc

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,

5uc 1lc 3lc 8lc 4lc 5lc 1lc 4lc 3lc 8lc 9lc 4lc 3lc 9lc 5lc 28sym 1lc 23lc 8lc 9lc 5lc 19lc 5lc 18lc 5lc 14lc 28sym

20lc 12lc 20lc 12lc

One at each little

15uc 14lc 5lc 1lc 5lc 1lc 3lc 8lc 9lc 20lc 5lc

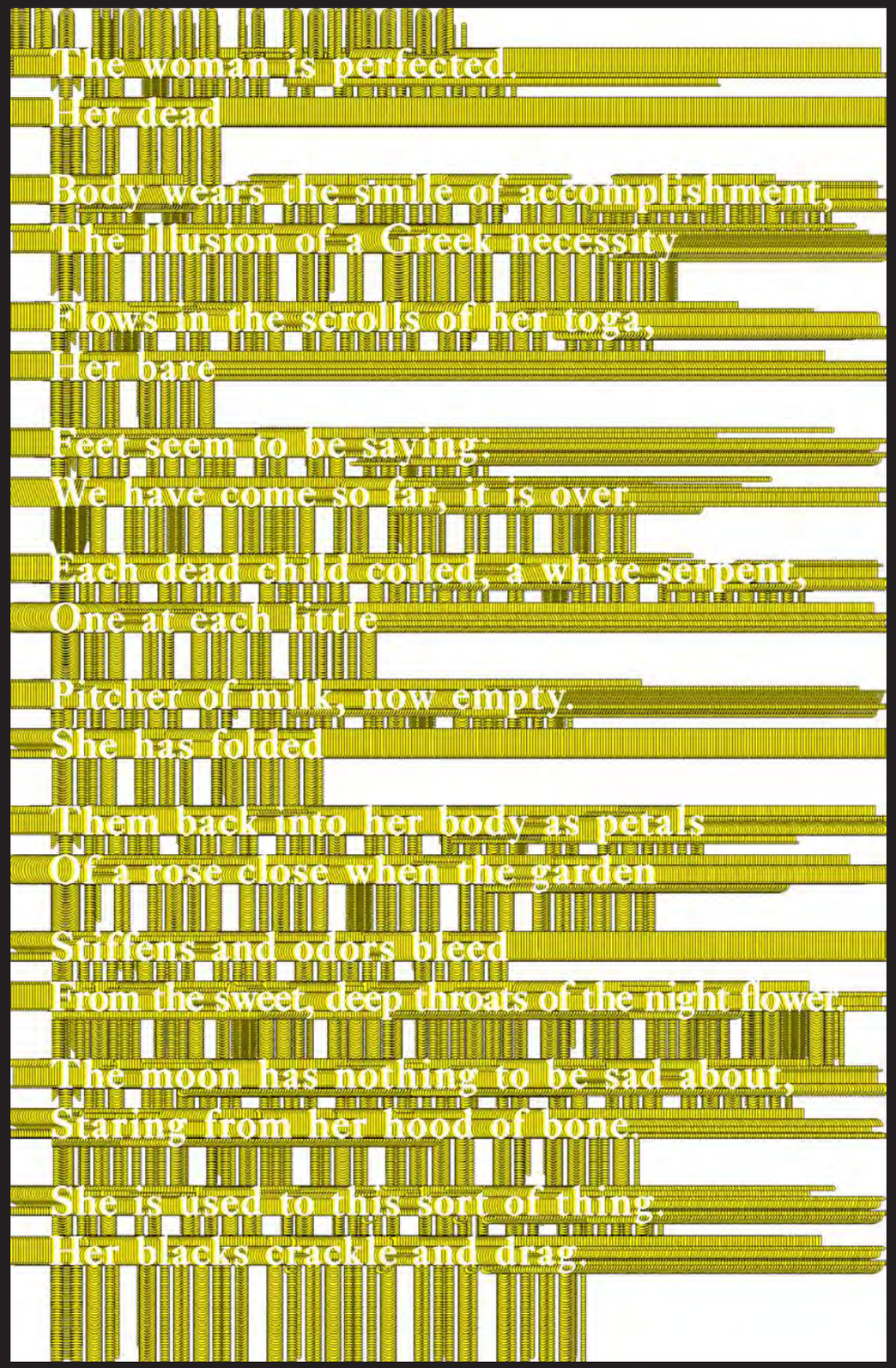
Text detail, lefthand column

Mania

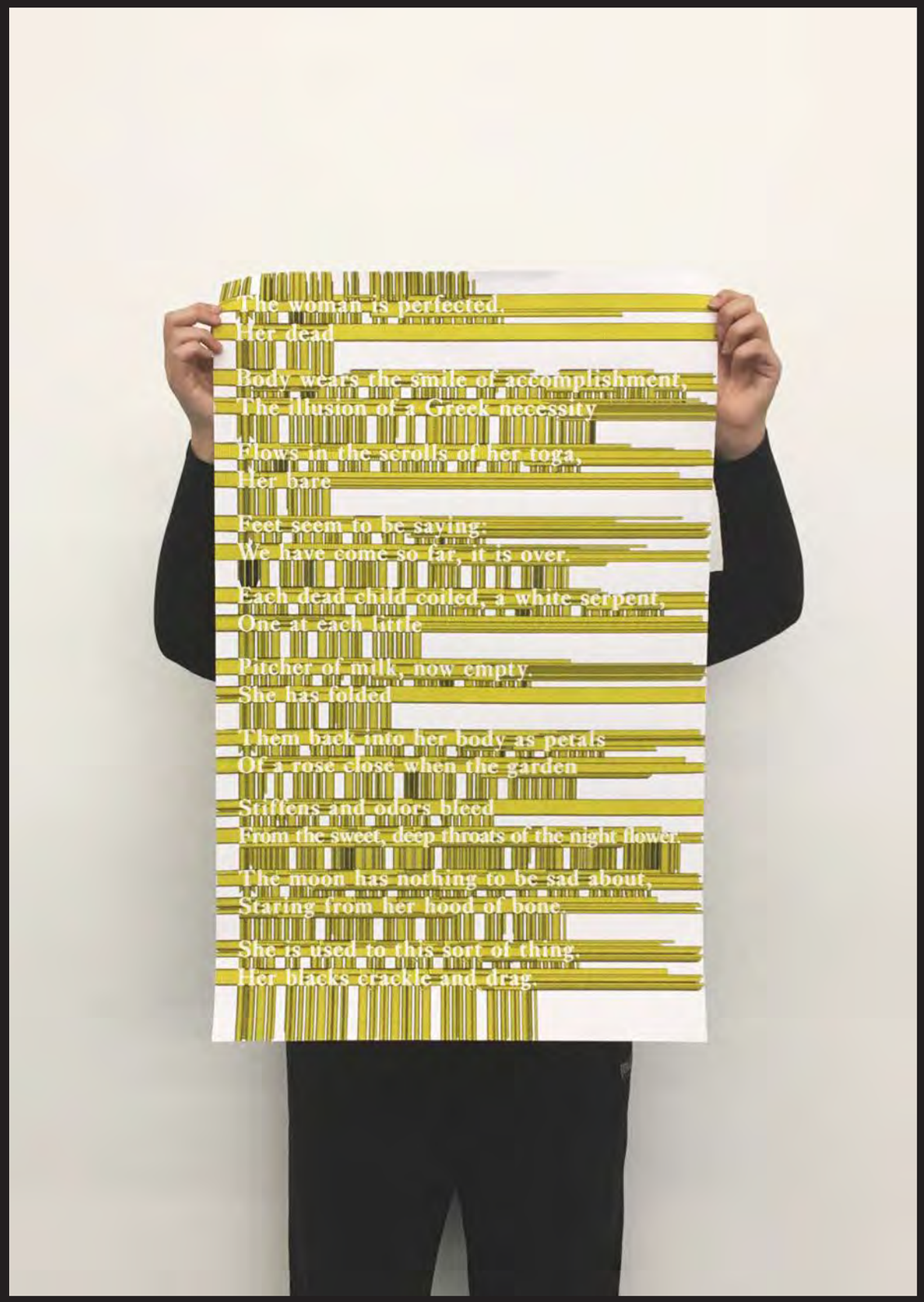
For the poster depicting mania, I wanted to depict a sense of frenetic motion. I did so by tightly layering the text on top of itself, each layer differing by small increments in placement. The layering itself was meant to give way to abstract form through rules that controlled where the layers were placed.

Mania is characterized by an abnormally elevated mood and hyper-activity. The goal here was to depict such feelings through motion, repetition, and bright color.

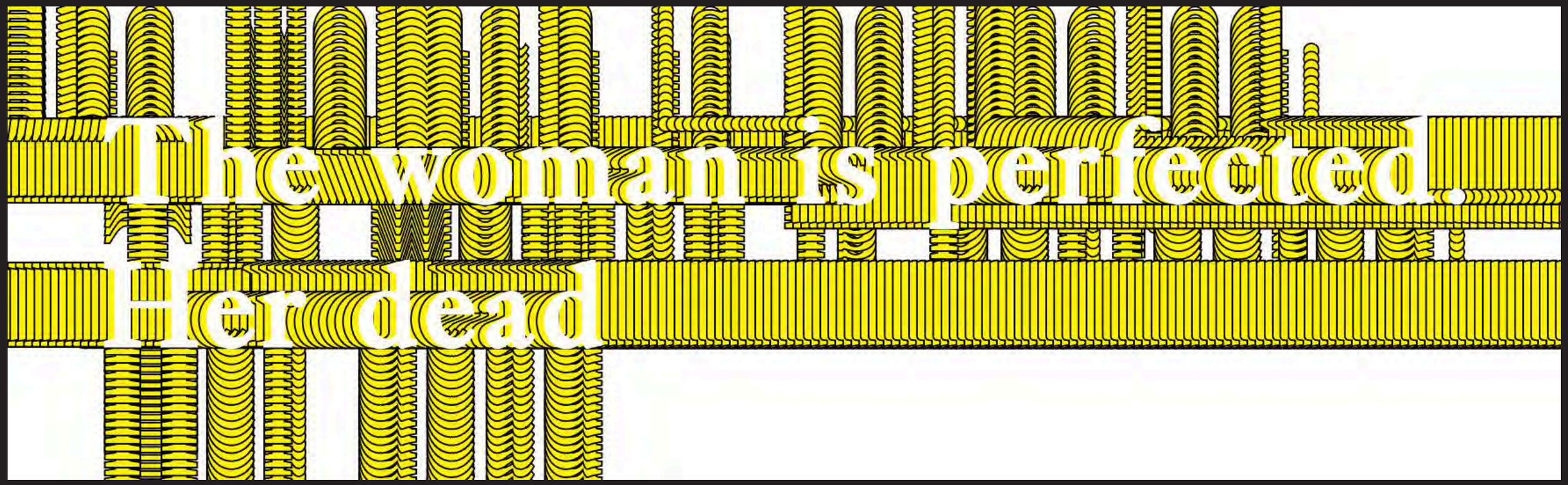
Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.

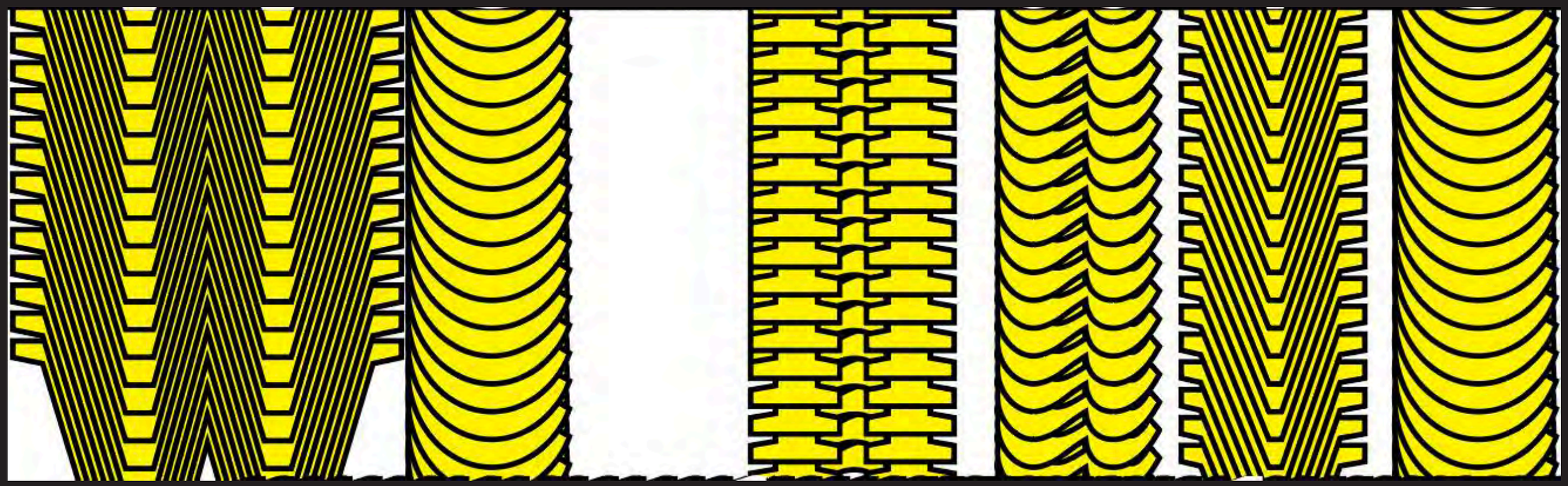


Poster visualizing mania



Documentation of size reference





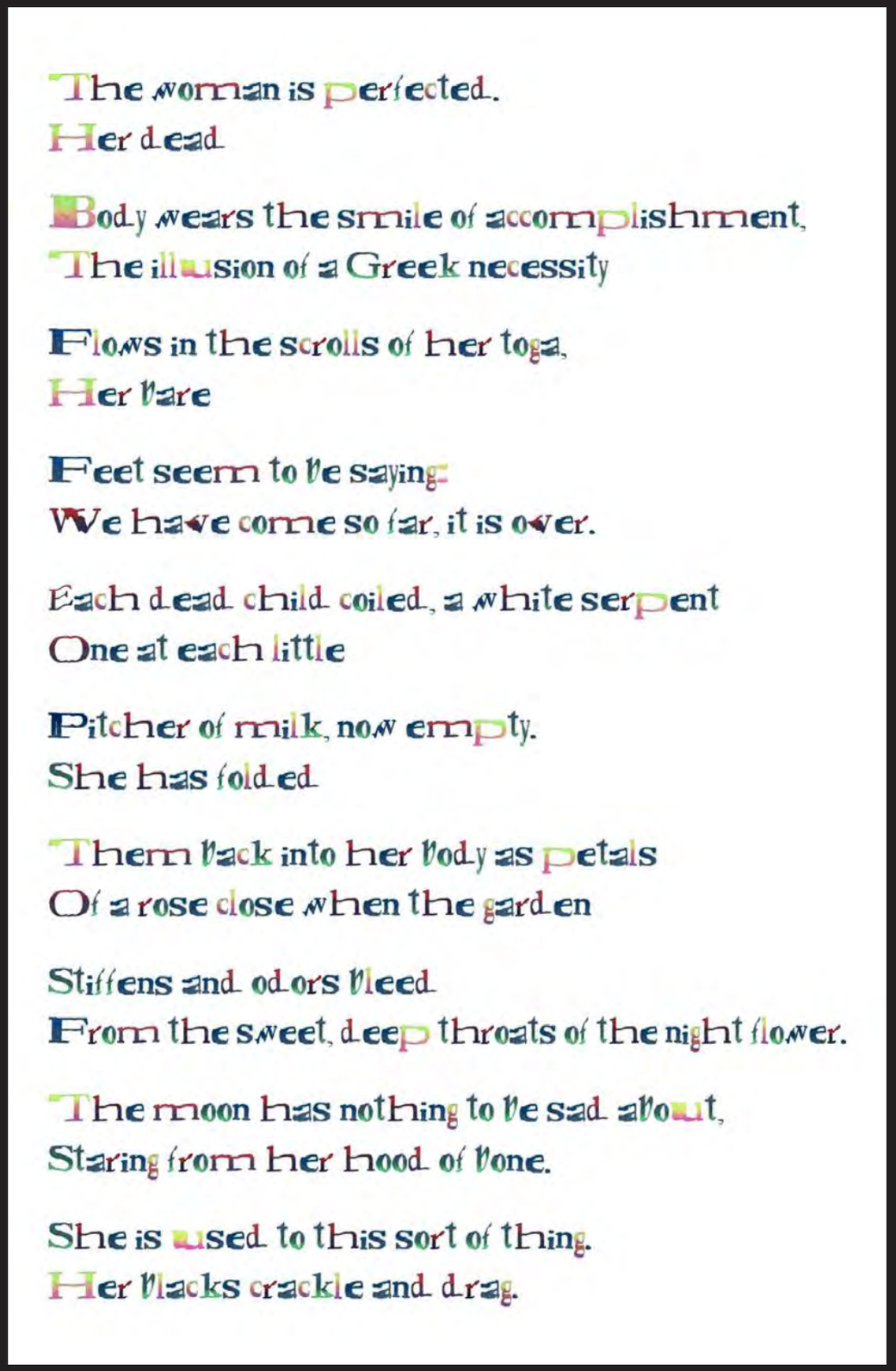
Text details

Hallucinations

I had the most difficult time conceptualizing what I would do for hallucinations, since it is more of an experience than a particular emotion. Hallucinations can be experienced as either good or bad, and are usually auditory in people with psychosis.

Thus, I decided to focus on hallucinations as a warping of reality by doctoring letters by hand and warping them through scanning, then editing their colors in Photoshop.

Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.



The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

Them back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

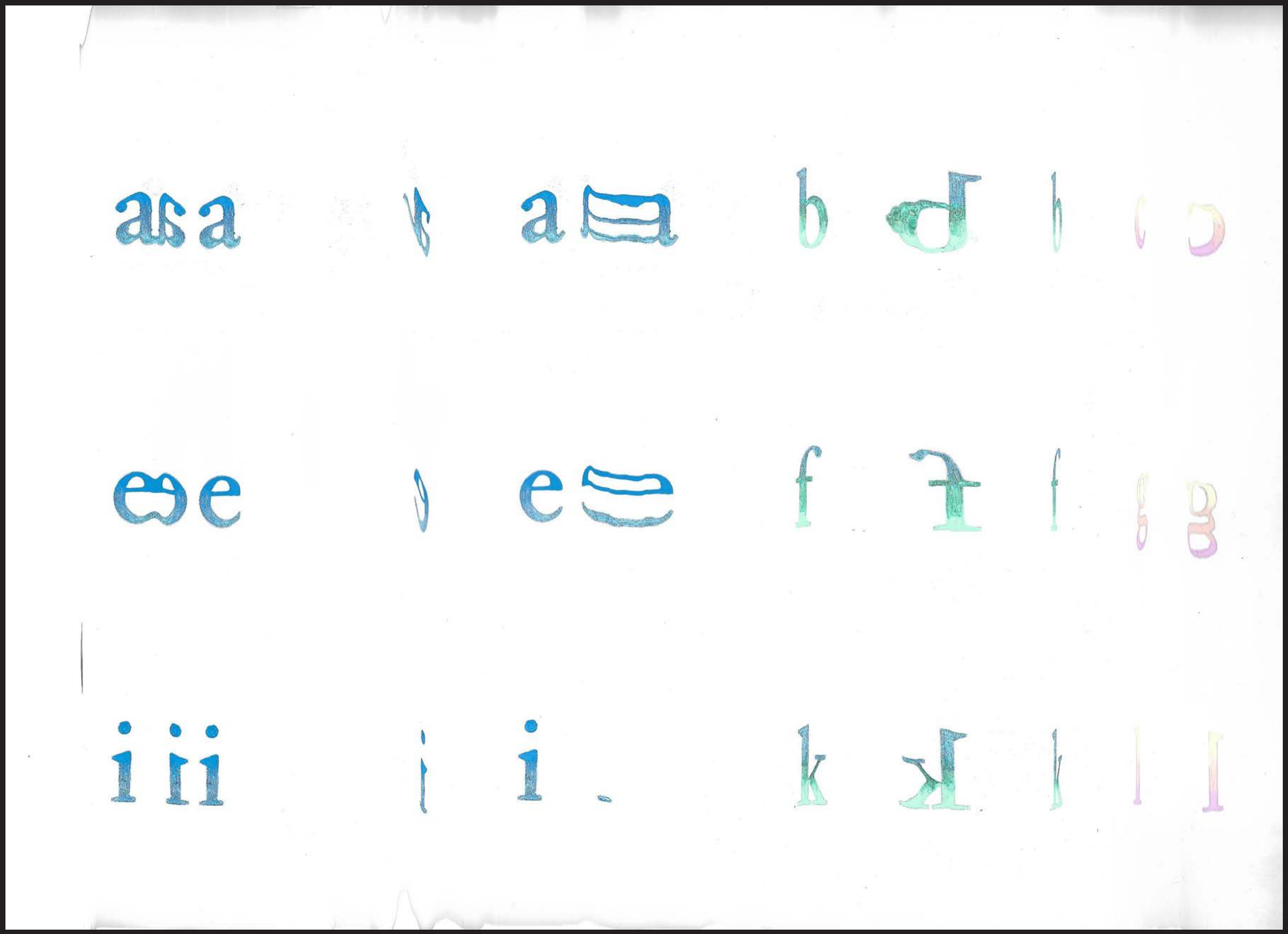
The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

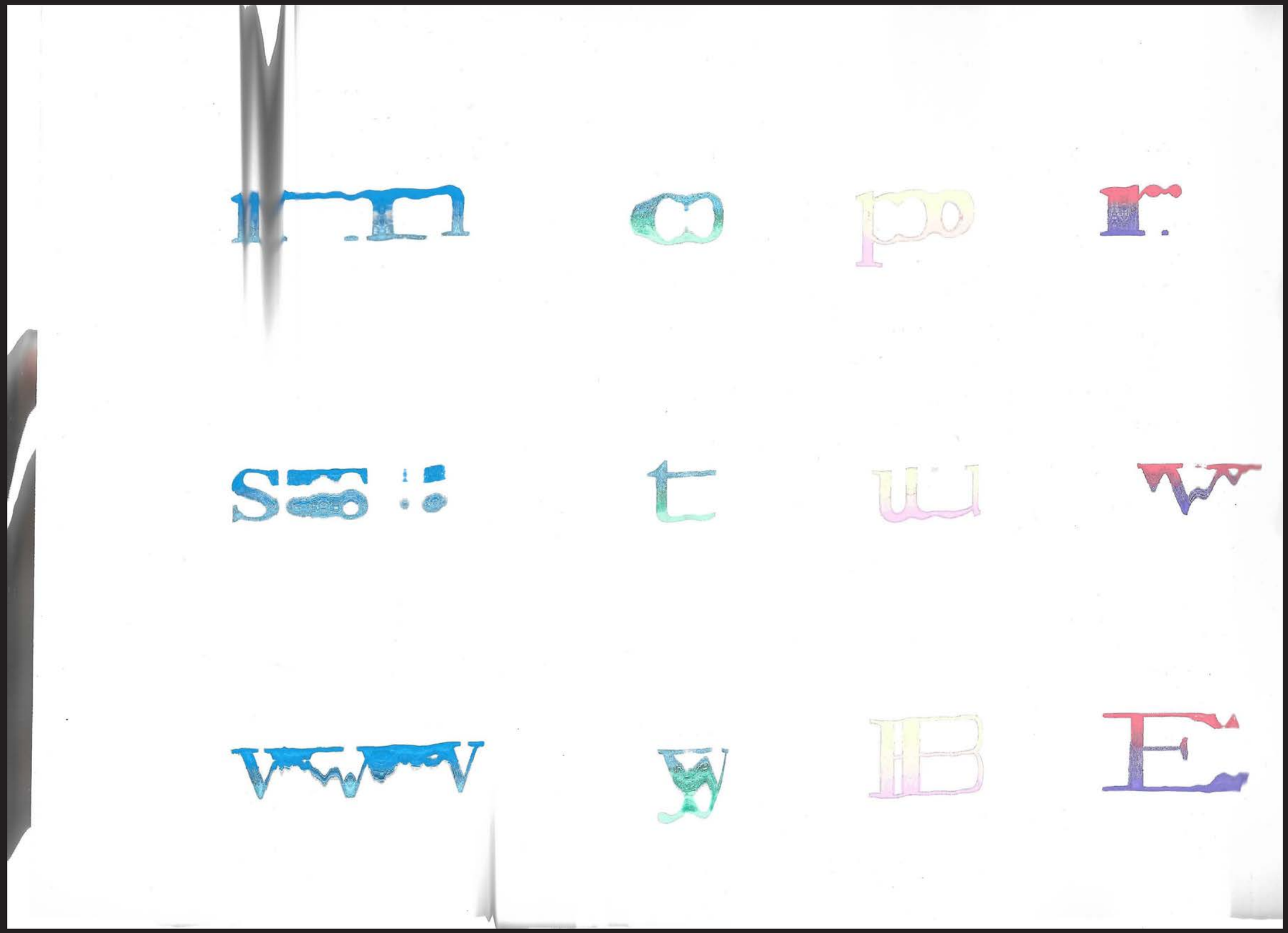
Poster visualizing hallucinations

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

Text detail



Raw letter scans



Raw letter scans

Experiment 2

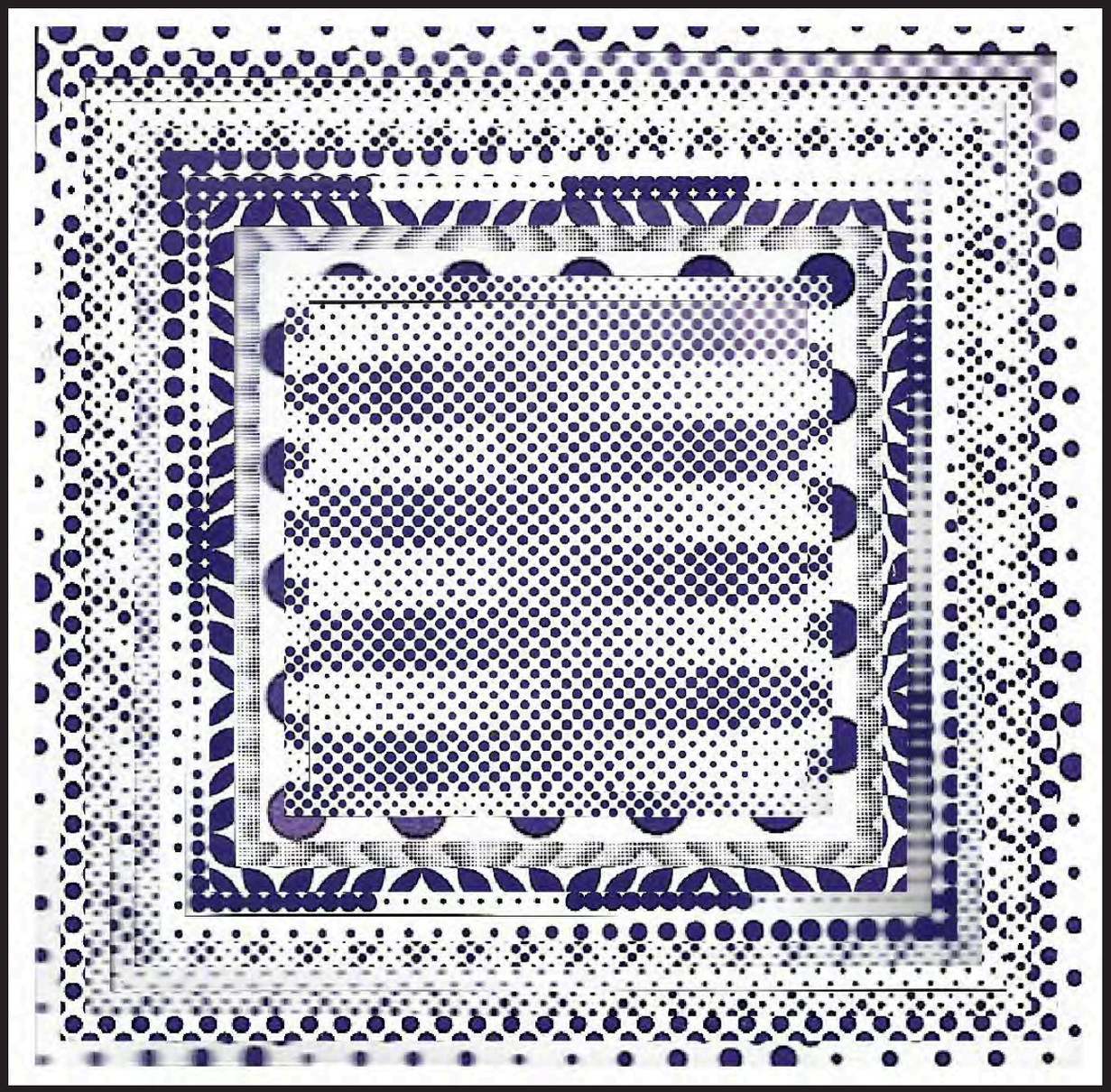
For Experiment 2, I began to think of the visual scenarios I had created in my posters as replicable symbols or markers. How could I condense these posters into purely visual media, without text, and still communicate the same meanings (i.e., that these were meant to represent certain symptoms of mental health)?

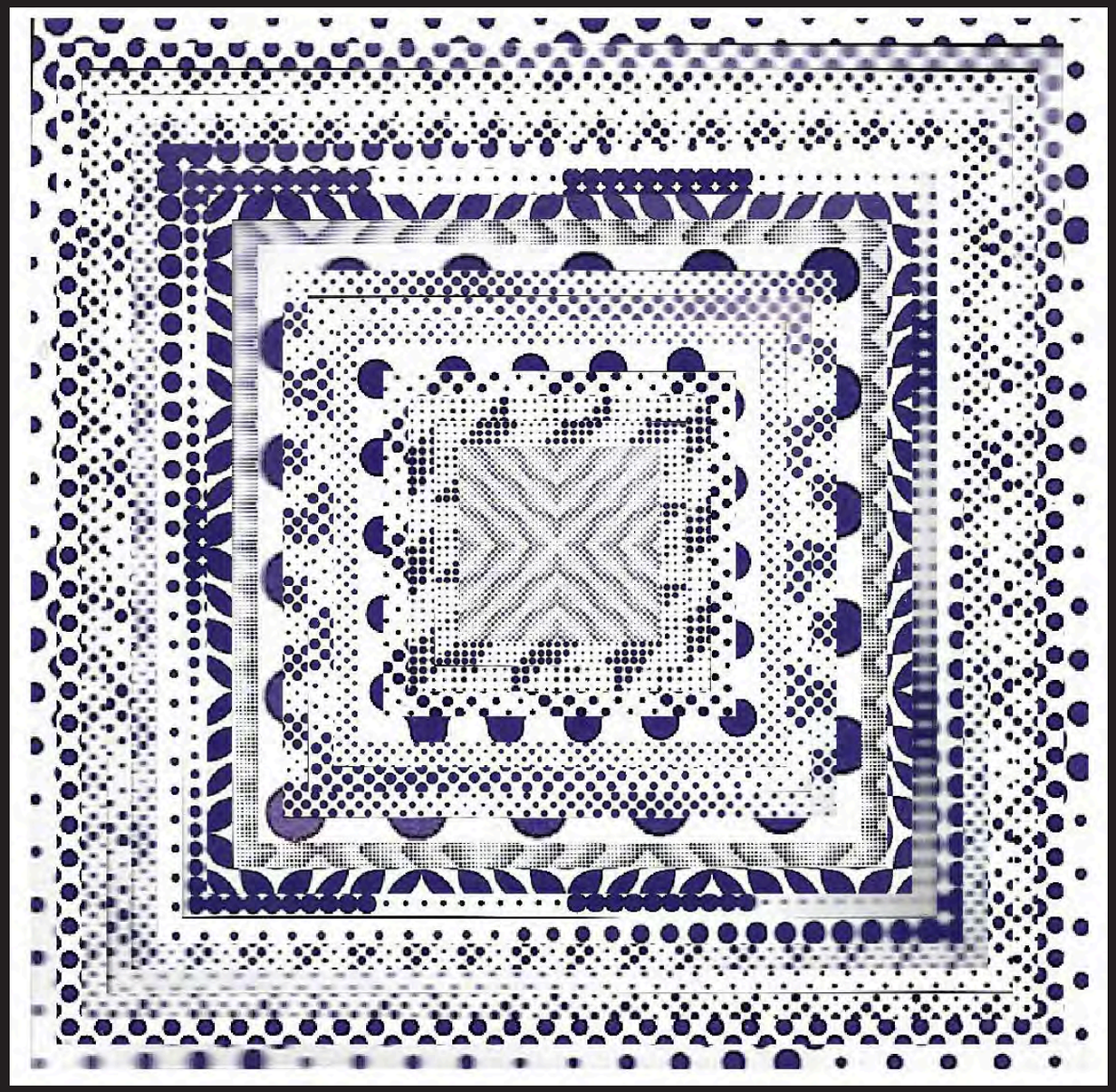
Focusing specifically on anxiety, I created a system of visuals and introduced them into various environments to see how they would interact with their surroundings.

Ultimately, I found that the message I was trying to communicate was not translating easily in this way. Therefore, I realized that any purely visual accompaniments to my posters (i.e., markers without textual signifiers) from Experiment 1 had to be more contextually and compositionally in sync with their predecessors, something I addressed later in my final project.

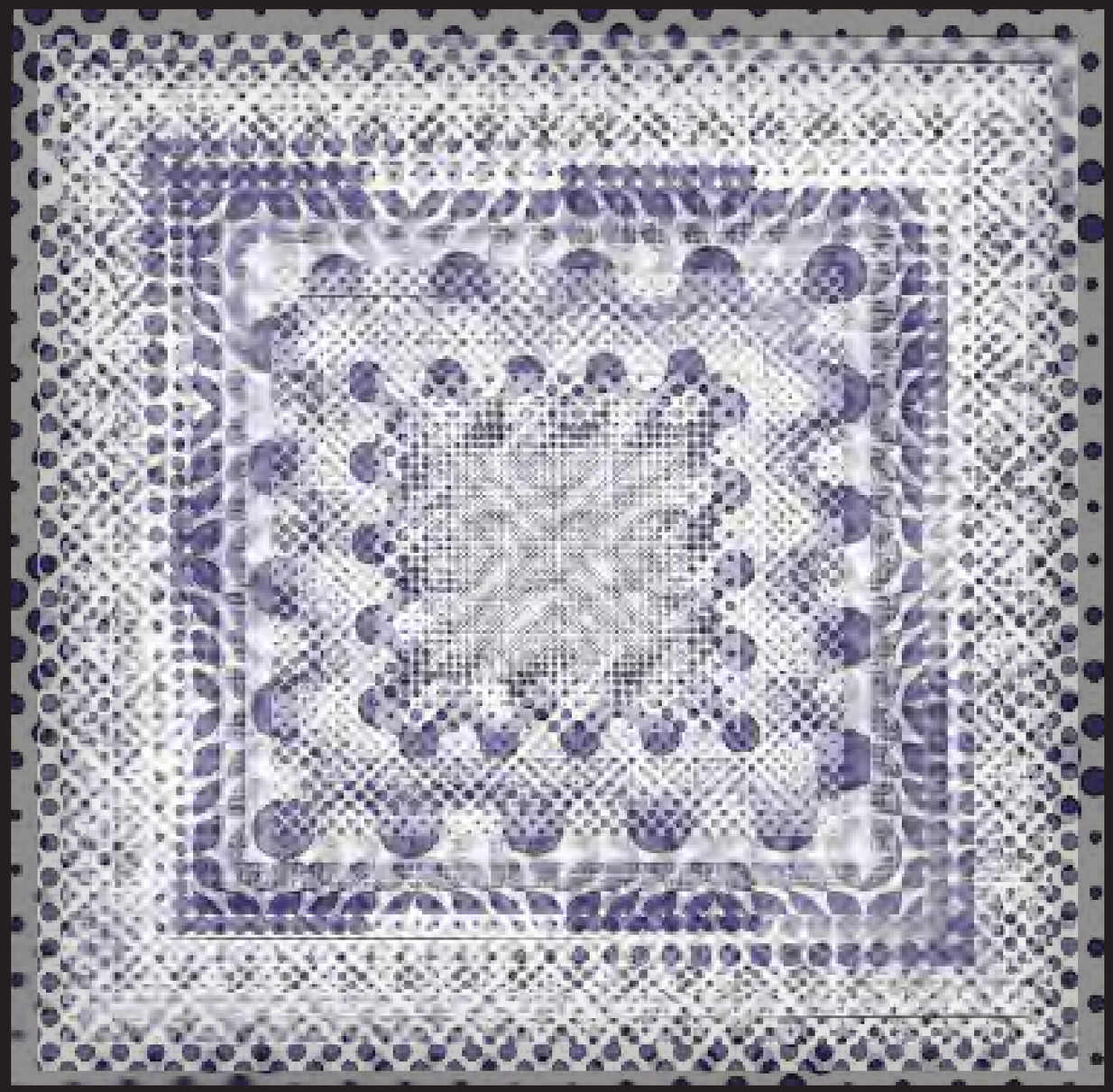
Symbols of Anxiety

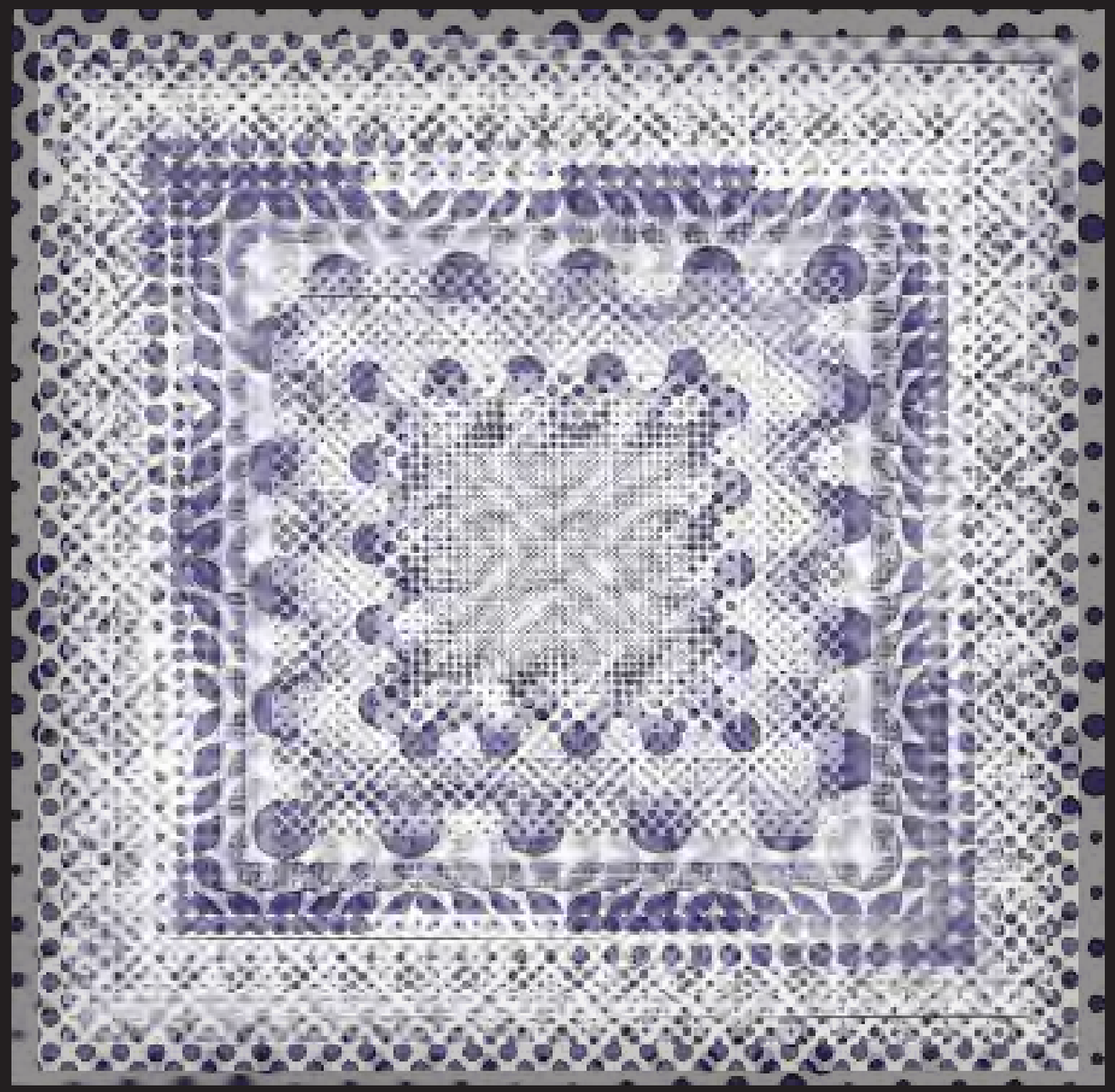
These are the compositions I made that are meant to depict anxiety. I chose densely patterned images and set them tightly together in a square format in order to depict the intensity and freneticism of a panic attack or intense bout of anxiety. The boxed structure of these images also mimic the ways in which I boxed in text in my poster for anxiety in Experiment 1.



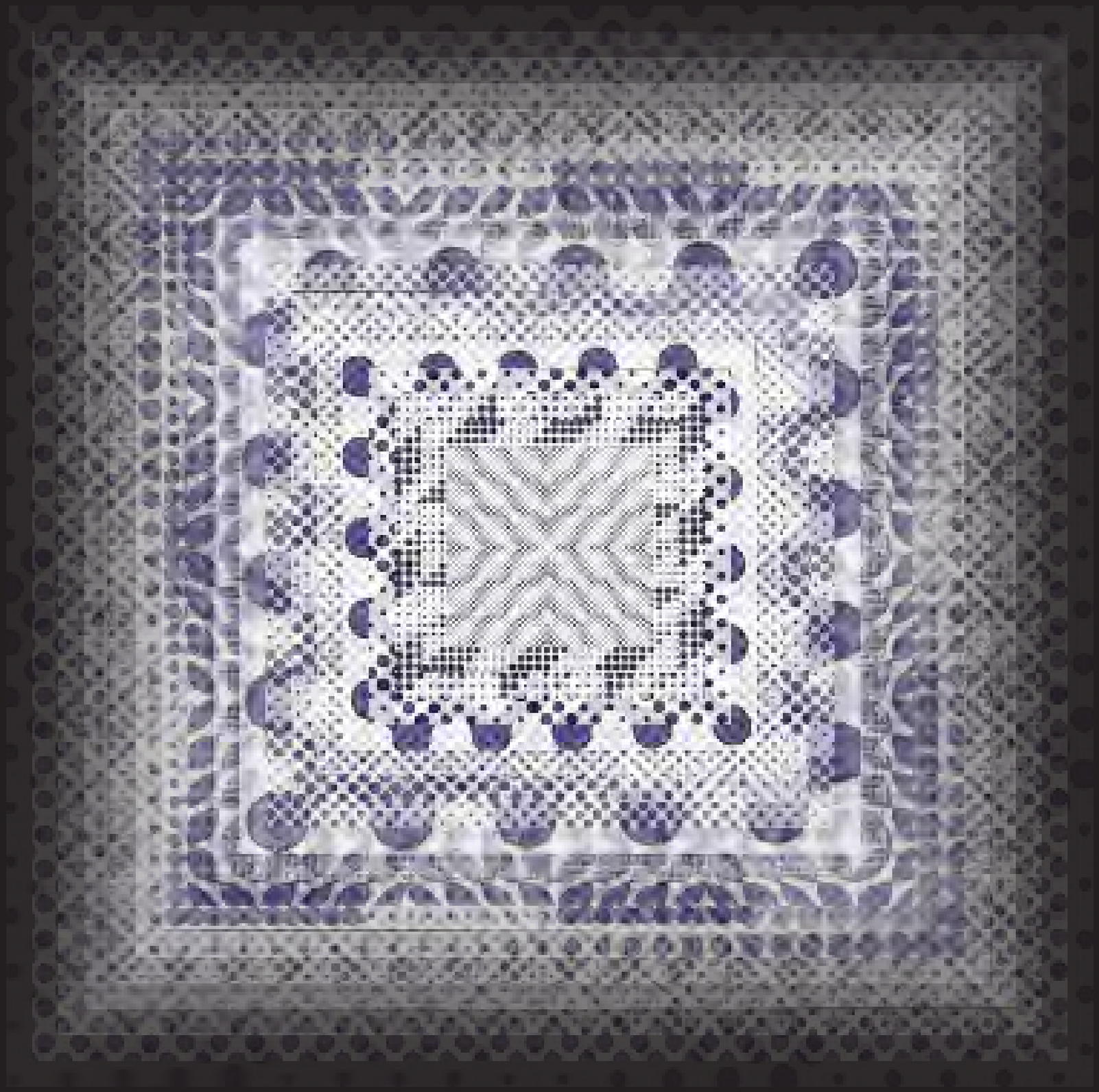


Anxiety symbols





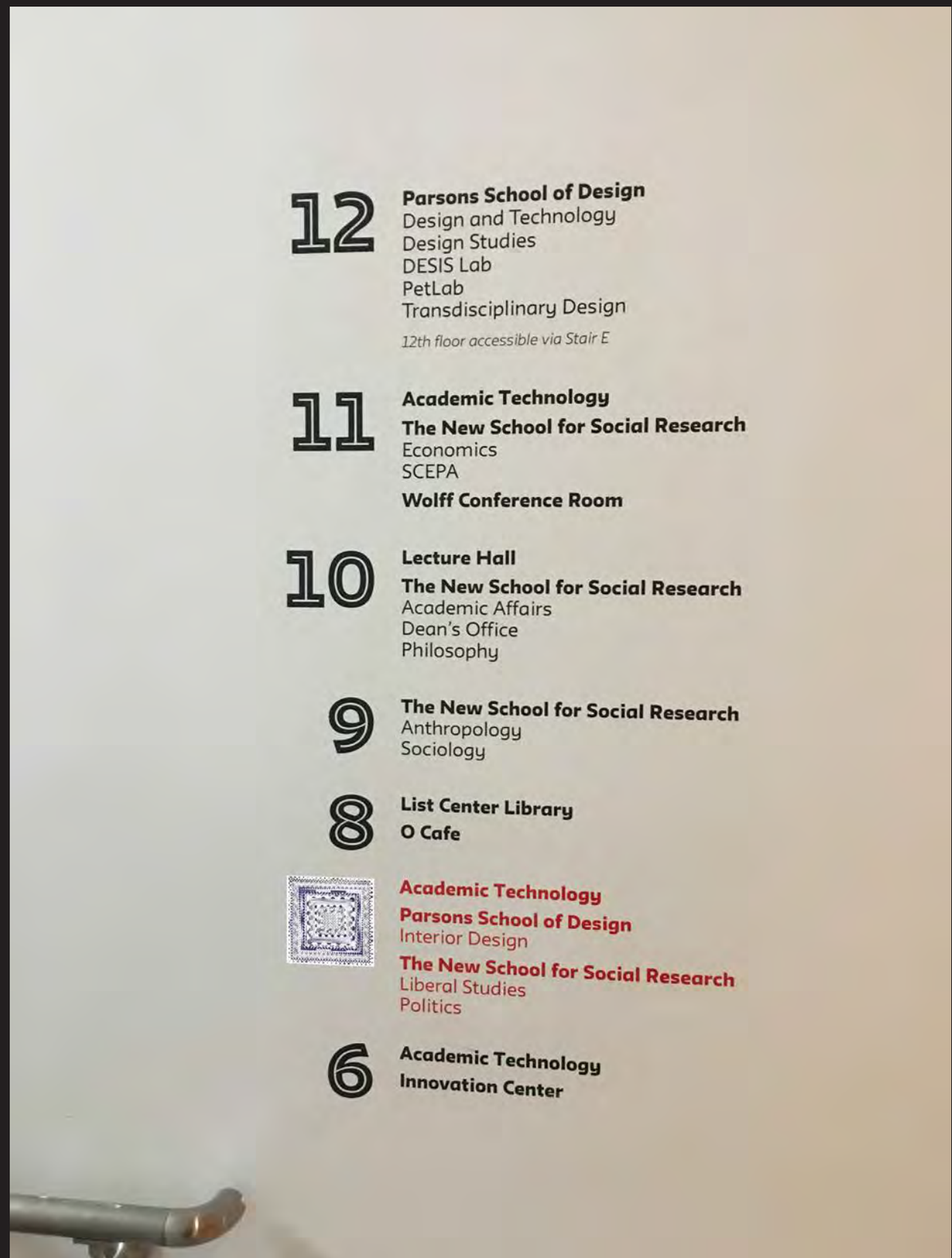
Anxiety symbols



Anxiety symbol

Environmental Placements

The next step of Experiment 2 was to place these symbols into every-day contexts, and explore how they could be possibly interpreted based on their surroundings as symbols, obstructions, or signs.



Symbol placements

Symbol placements

Symbol placements

Symbol placements

Environmental Placements—Textual Interventions

It seemed that the markers placed into these circumstances on their own did not have enough context to signify their meaning. The final part of Experiment 2 was to place text into these situations and to reassess the relevancy and significance of these markers in public space.

Symbol placements with text

Symbol placements with text

Symbol placements

Present

Experiment 3

For the final project this semester, I decided to combine aspects of my first and second experiments. The final deliverable for Experiment 3 was a series of five posters which appropriated the systems I had set up in Experiment 1. Instead of treating text, however, I decided to depict mental illness purely through imagery. I had begun exploring this in Experiment 2, but in Experiment 3 I would develop the concept to completion.

The symptoms I decided to use (one per poster) were the same as in Experiment 1: depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsion, mania, and hallucinations.

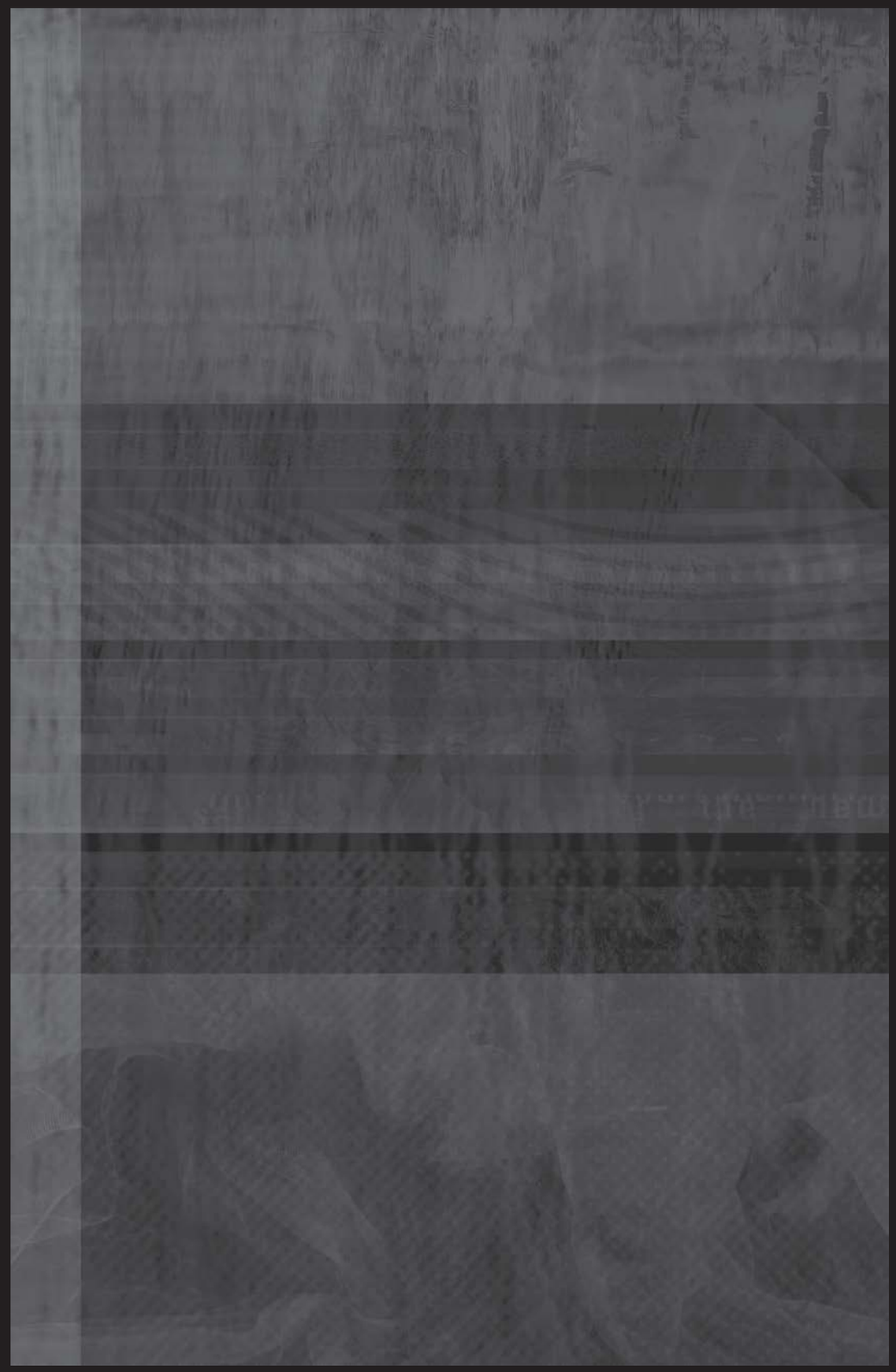
The adapted set of instructions for Experiment 3 can be found here.

Depression

For the poster depicting depression, I removed the type and replaced the gradient boxes I had originally placed with images that I thought were representative of depression.

By playing with layering and opacity, there is potential to create many iterations of one composition, symbolizing the day-to-day experiences of depression as minutely different, but on the whole the same. No color was used here, in order to depict the monotonous experience of life many people with depression have described as their realities.

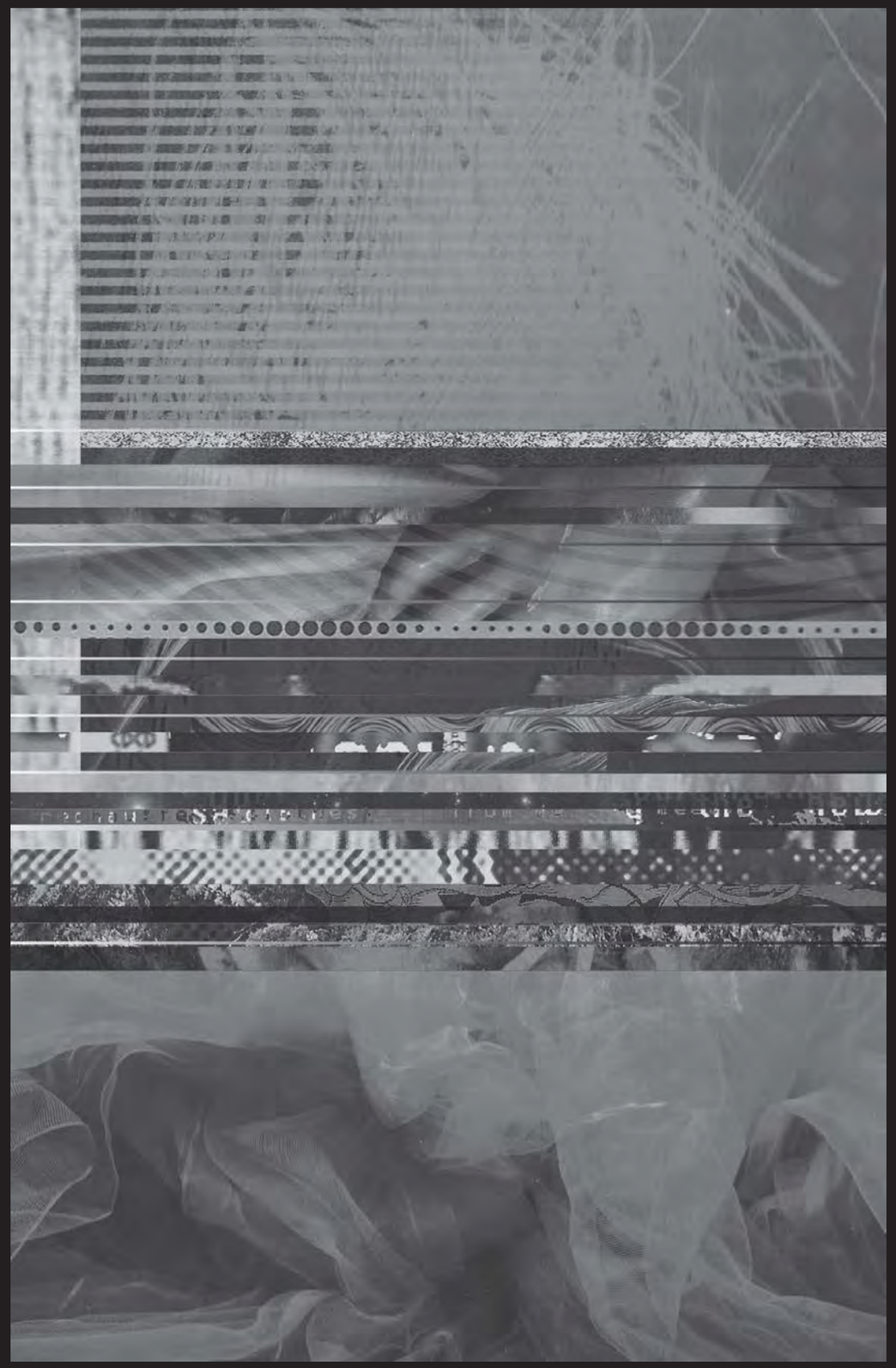
Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.



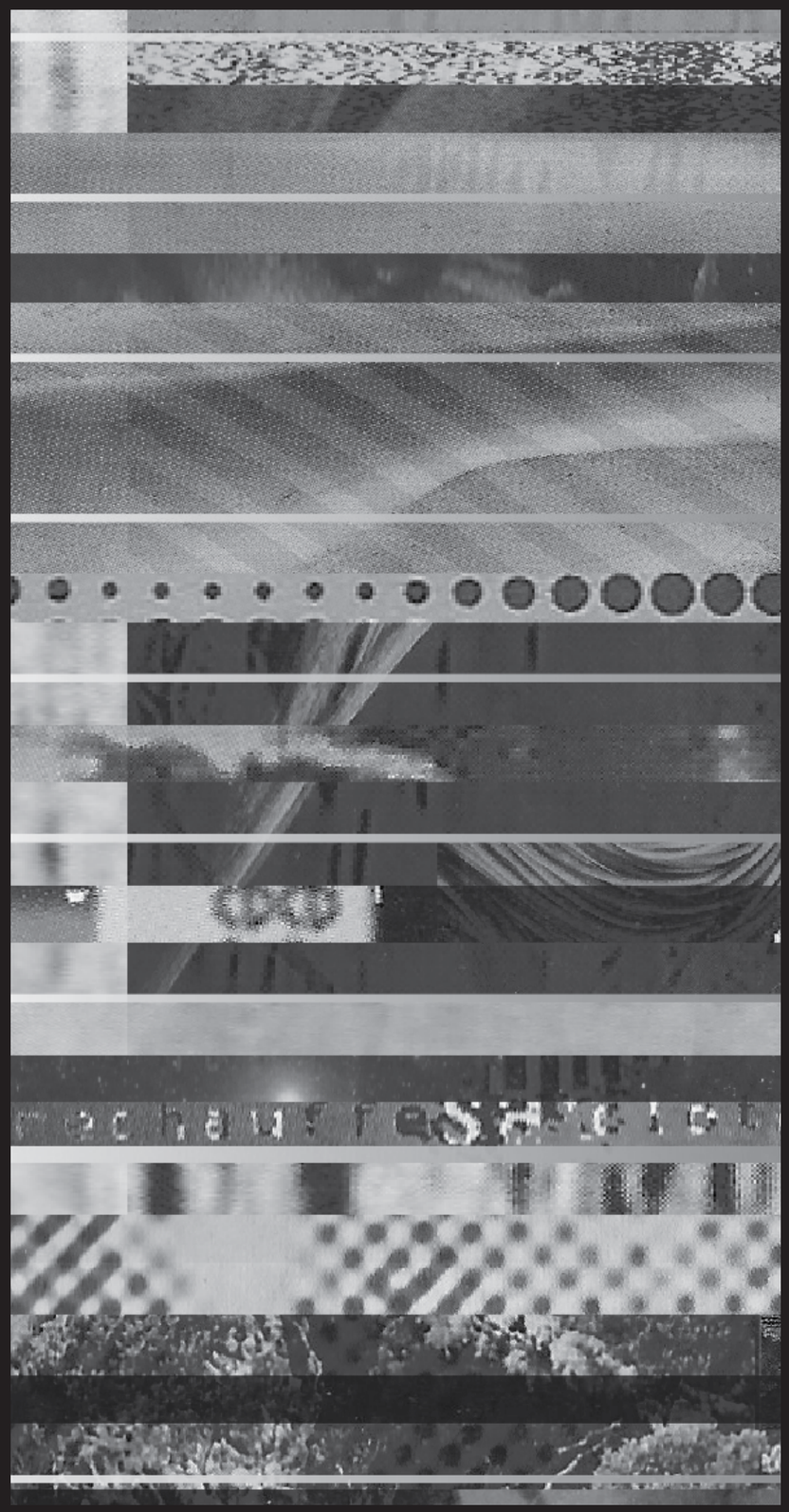
Poster visualizing depression

Detail

Detail

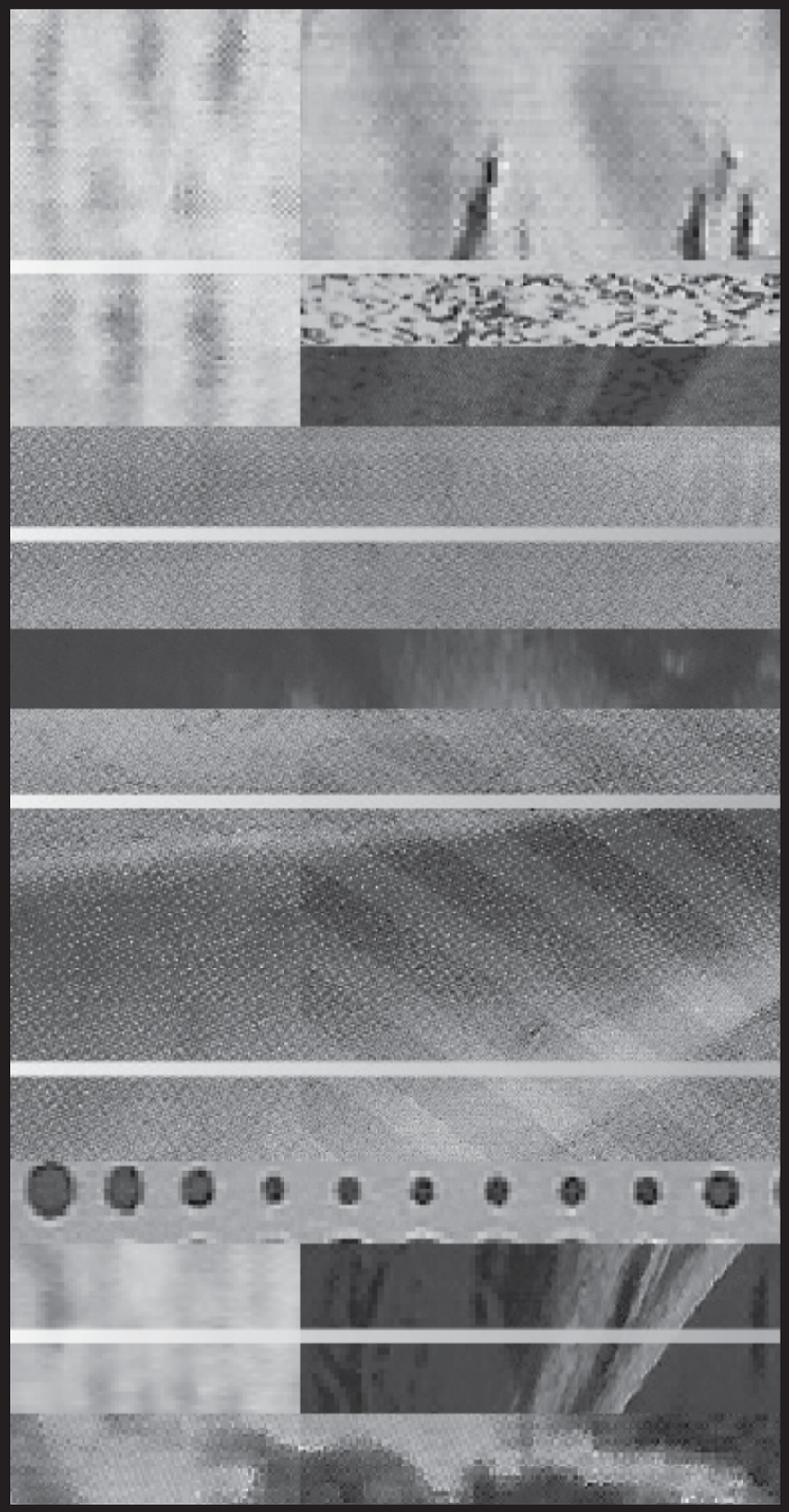


Poster variation



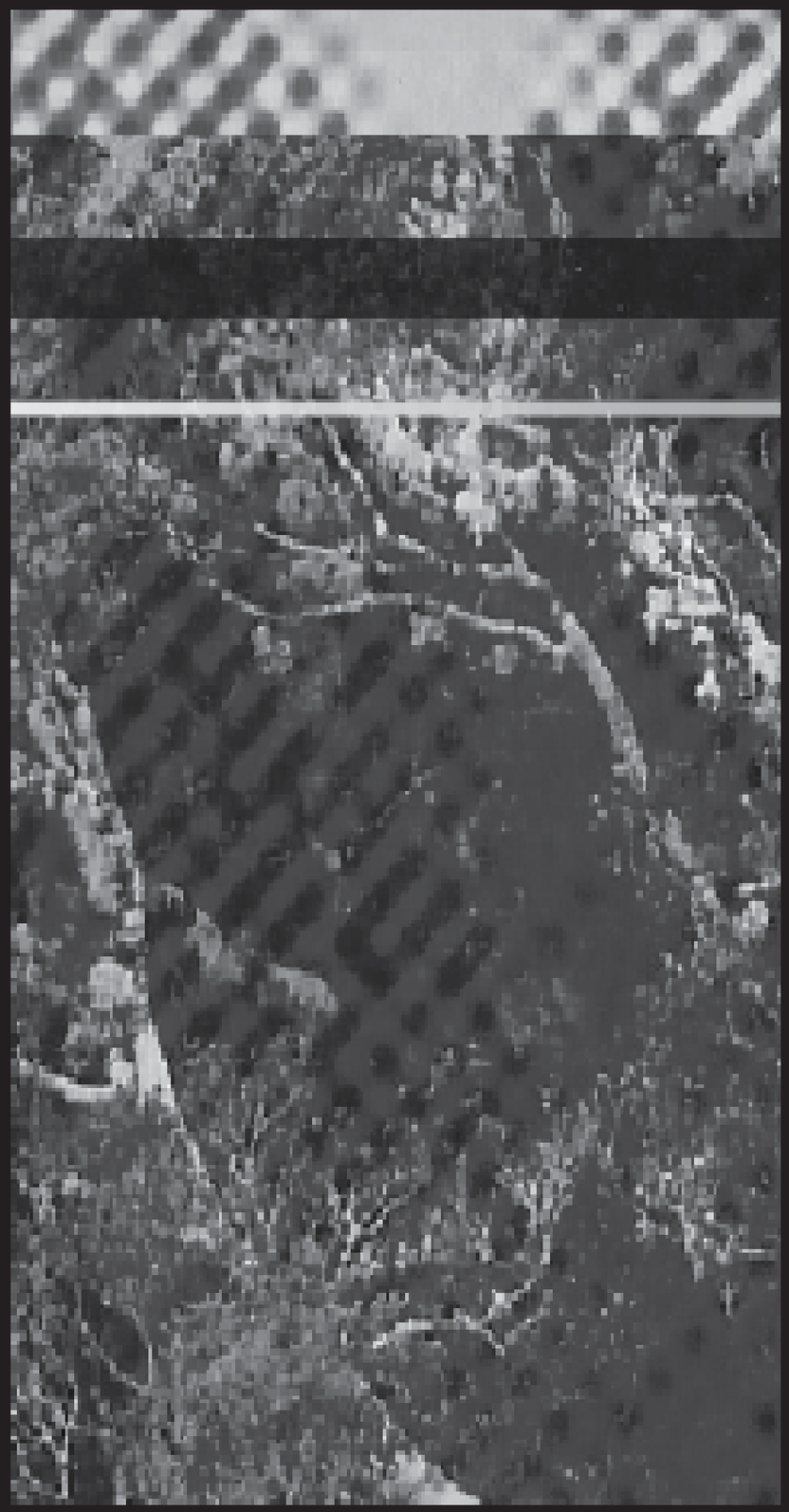
Detail

Poster variation



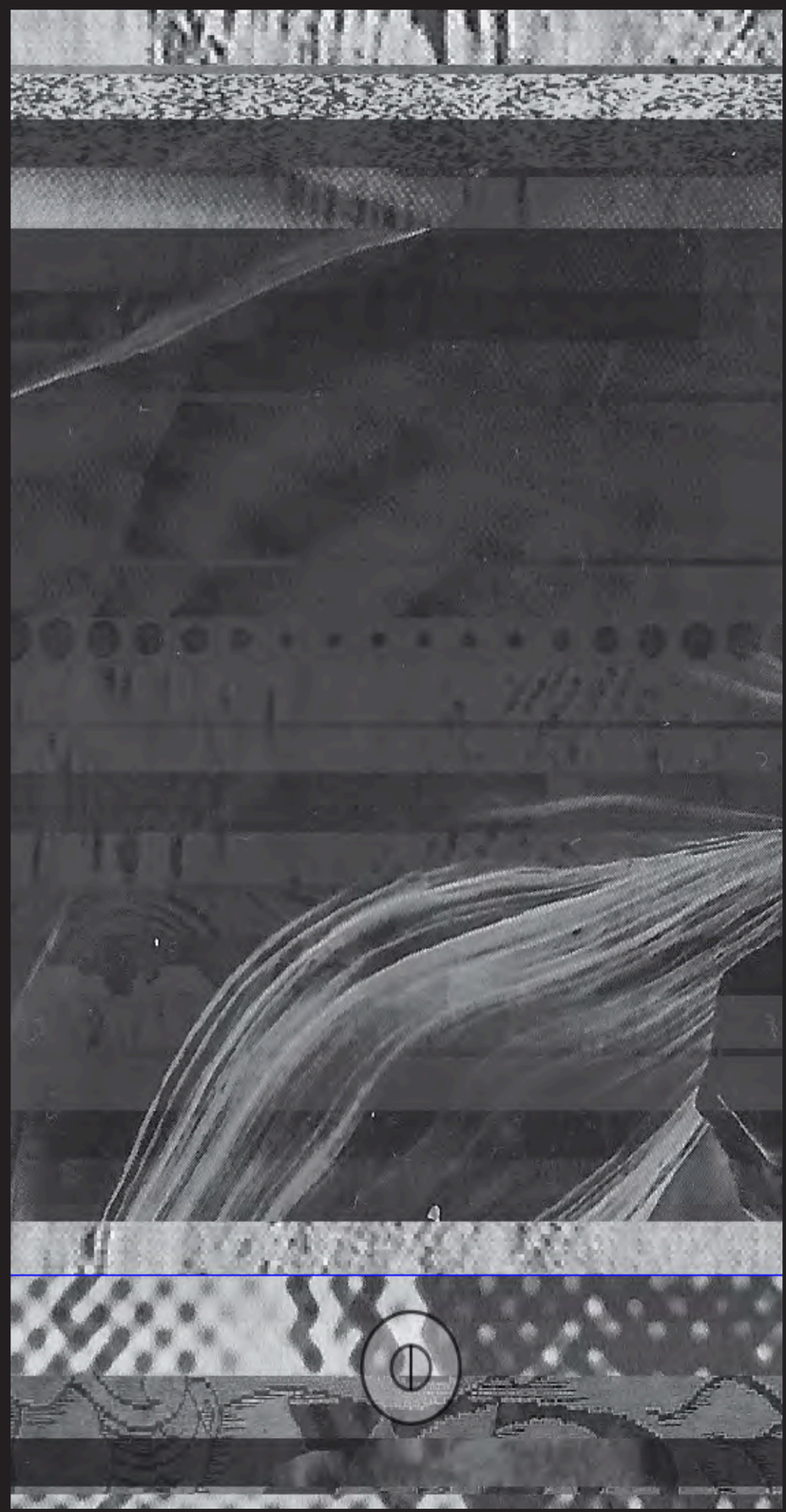
Detail

Poster variation



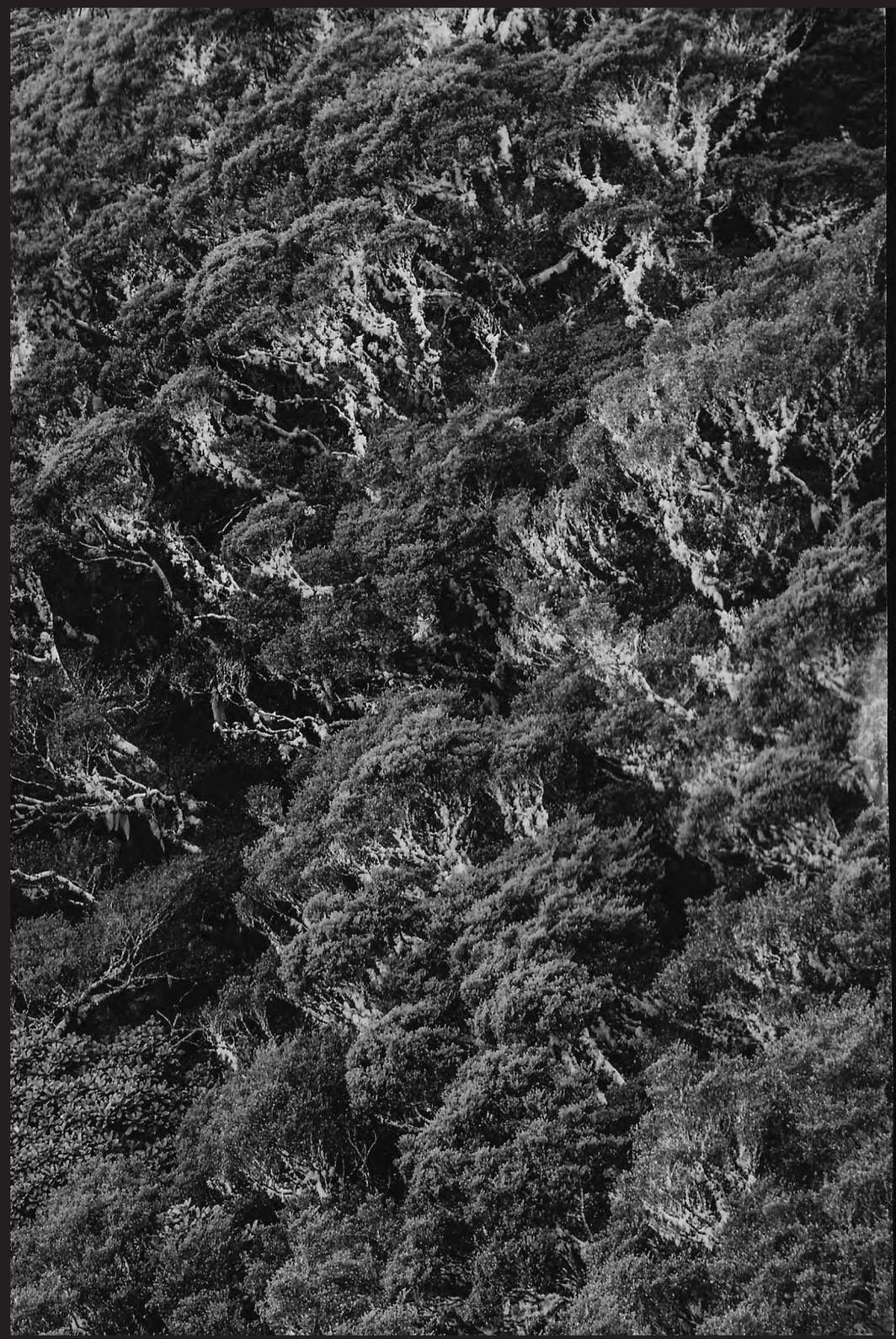
Detail

Poster variation



Detail

Images scan



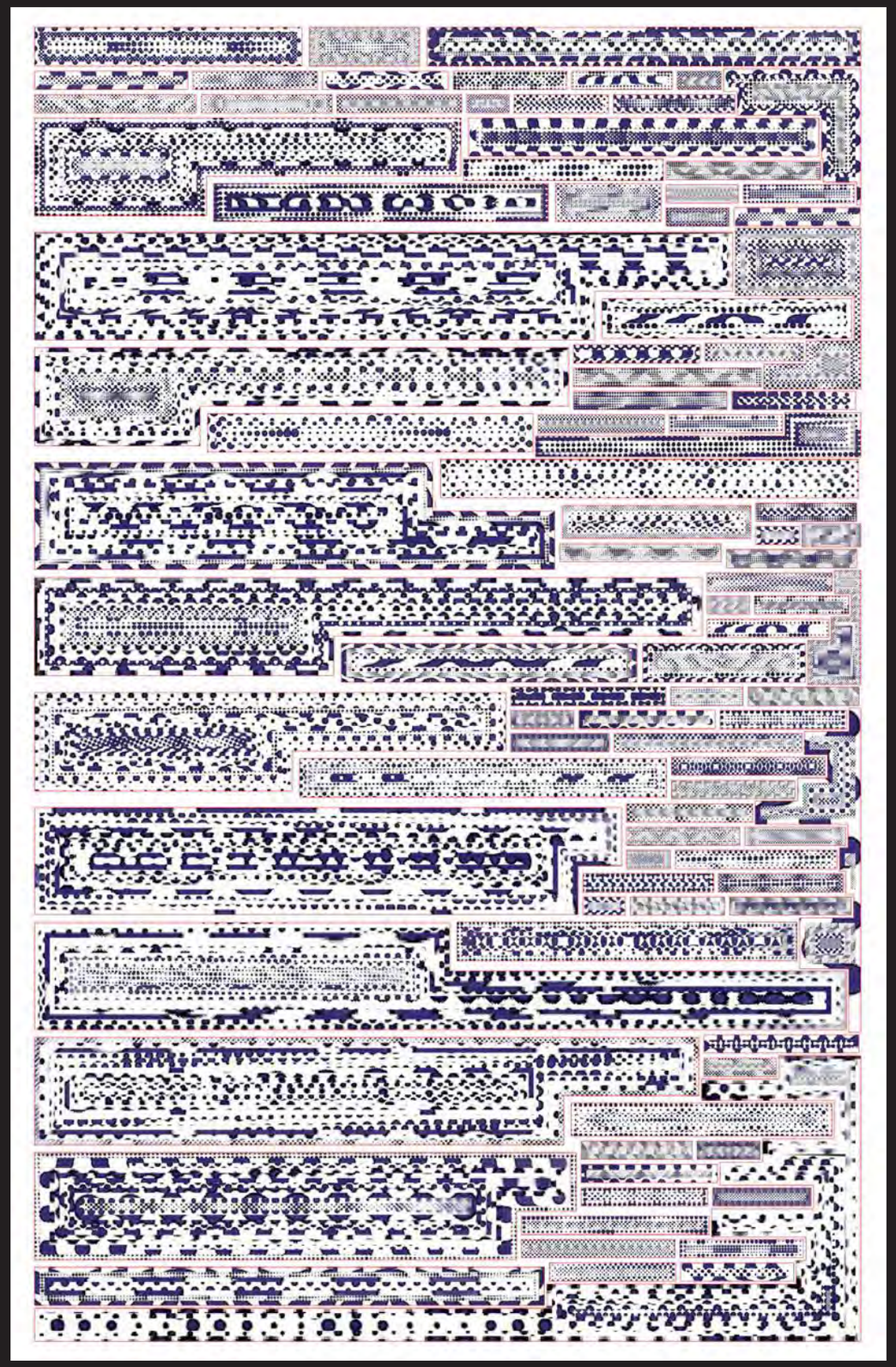
Images scan

Anxiety

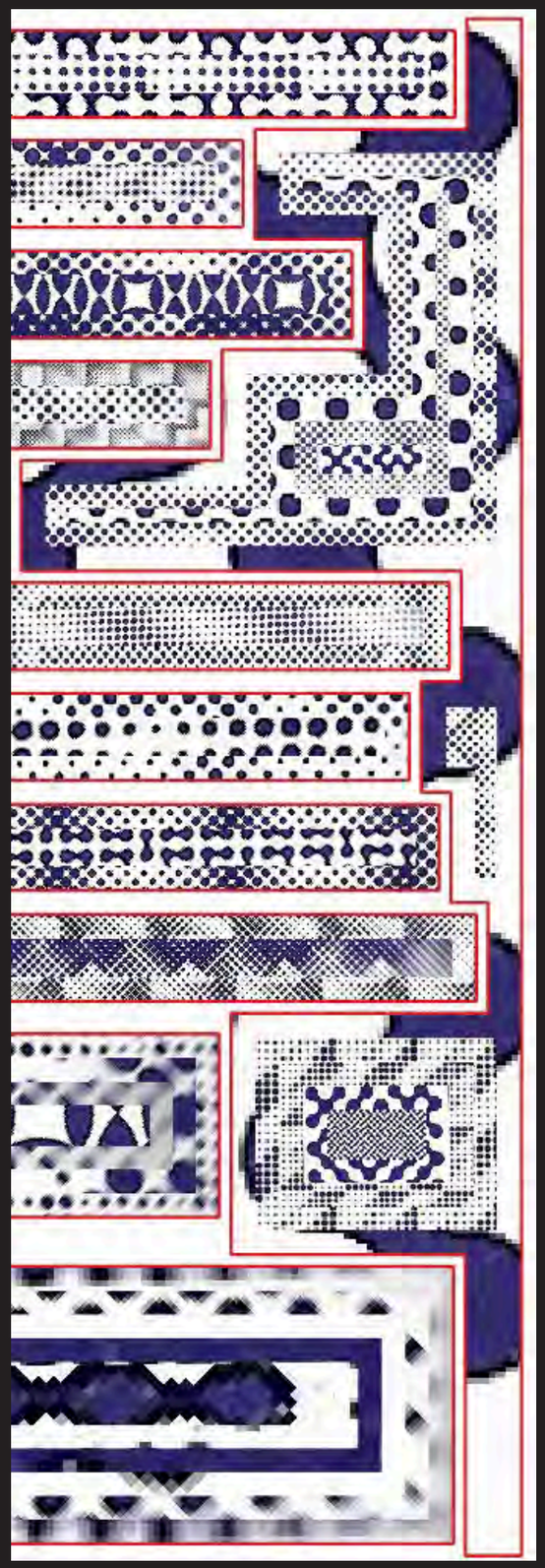
For the poster depicting anxiety, I removed the type, but kept the boxes which surrounded the poster's text and negative spaces. Within these spaces I laid densely layered patterns, similar to the anxiety patterns I had designed for Experiment 2.

I chose densely patterned images and set them tightly together in a closed space in order to depict the intensity and freneticism of a panic attack or intense bout of anxiety.

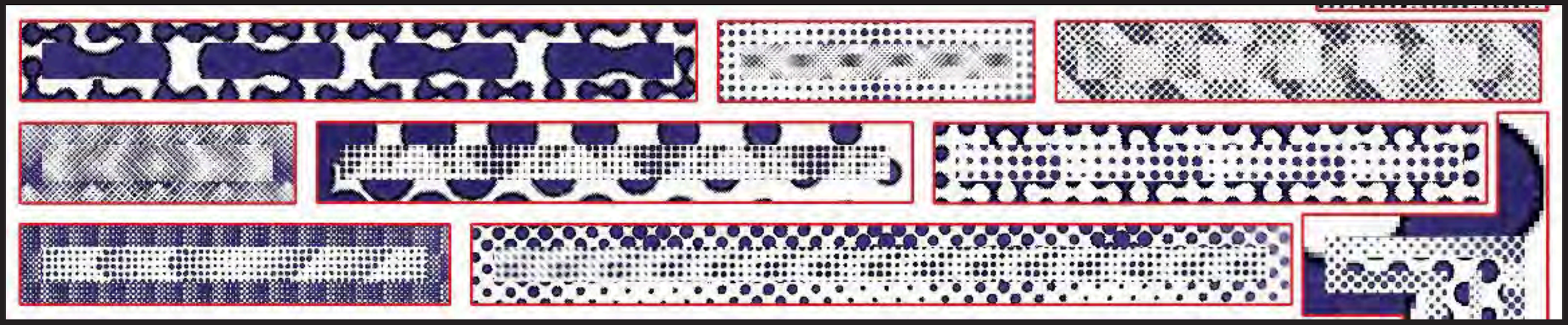
Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.

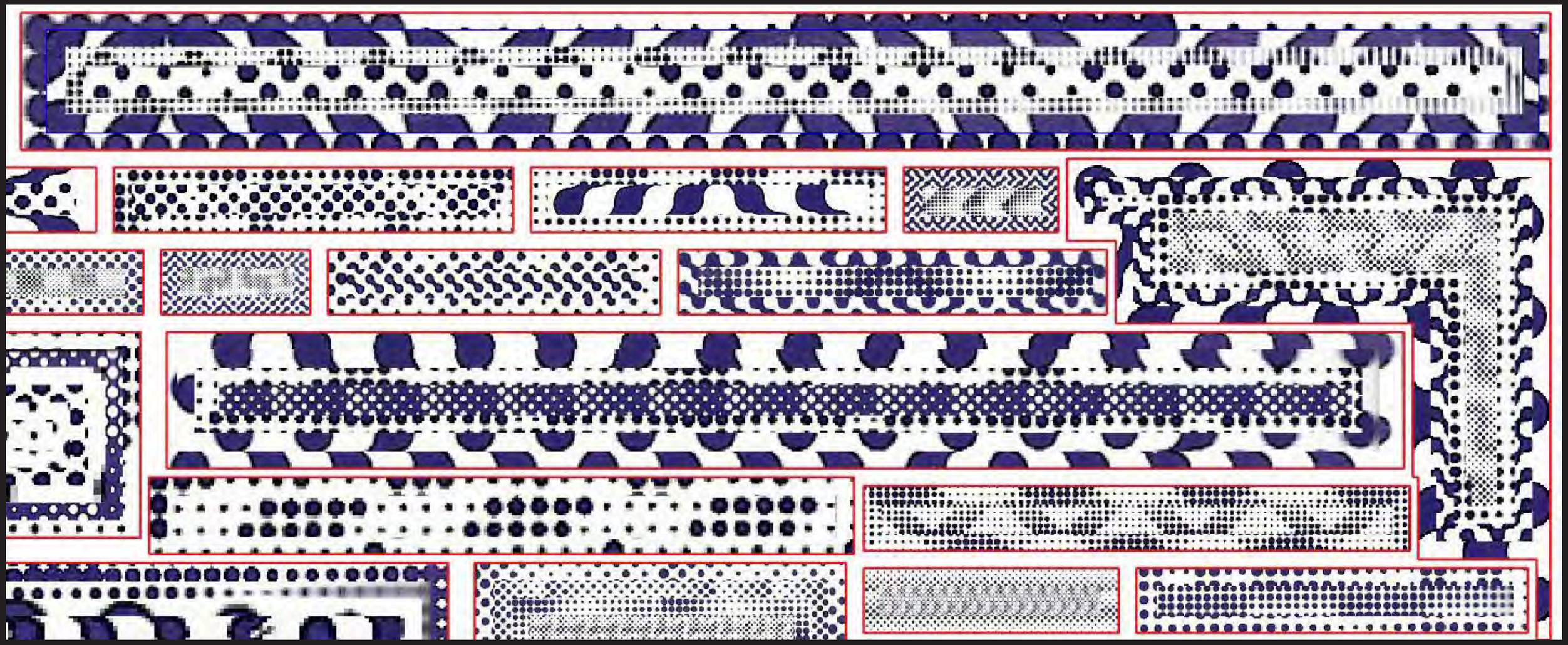


Poster visualizing anxiety



Detail





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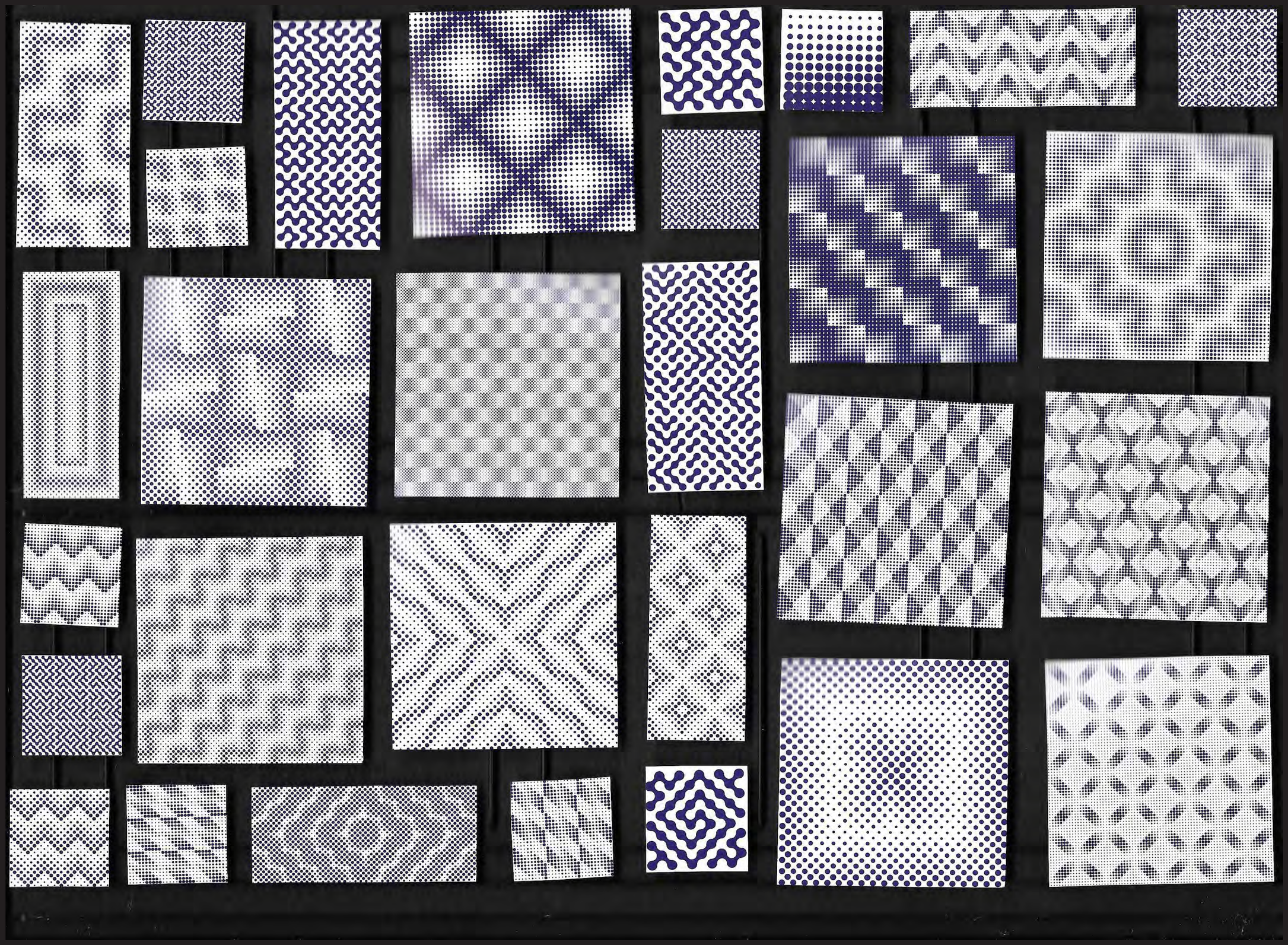


Images scan

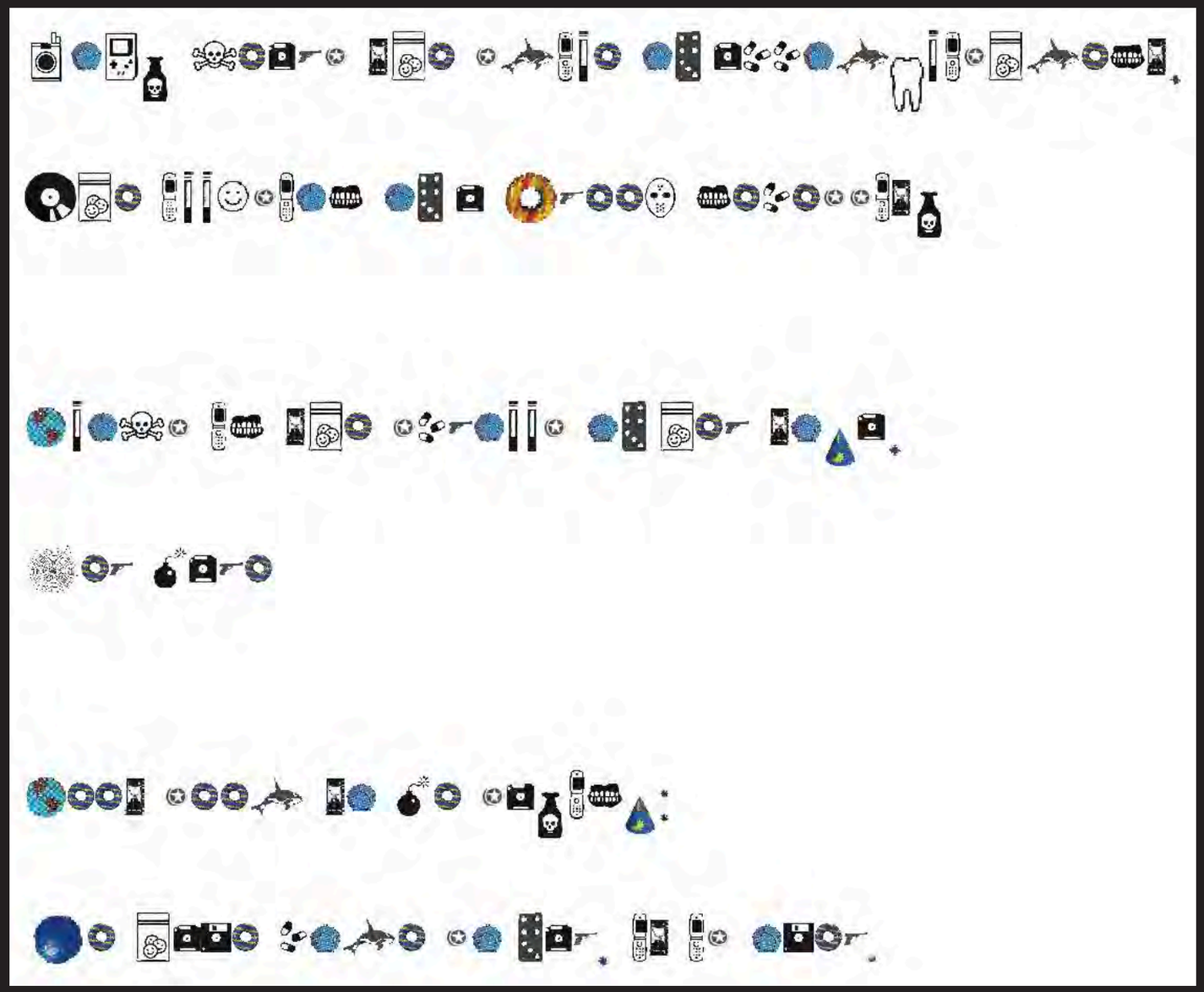
Obsessive Compulsion

For the poster depicting obsessive compulsion, I removed all the numerical markers I had devised in the first version of the poster. I then replaced all letters and symbols in the poem with icons, laying them out according to how many of each were in the selected text in the righthand column of the poster.

Assigning random icons to letters and symbols is meant to show the arbitrariness of the rituals that many people with obsessive compulsions feel compelled to perform.

Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.

Poster visualizing obsessive compulsion



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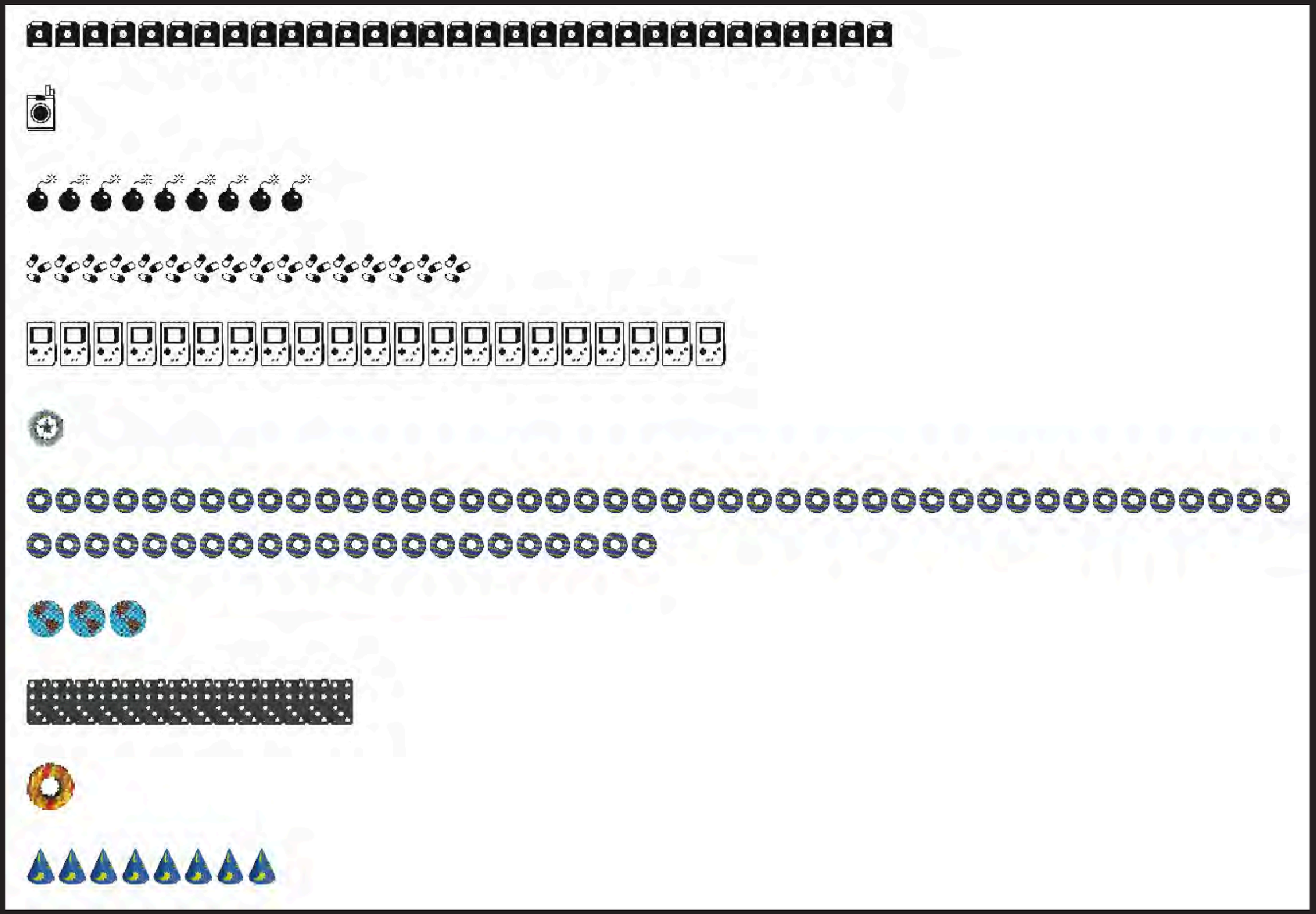


Detail

Images scan

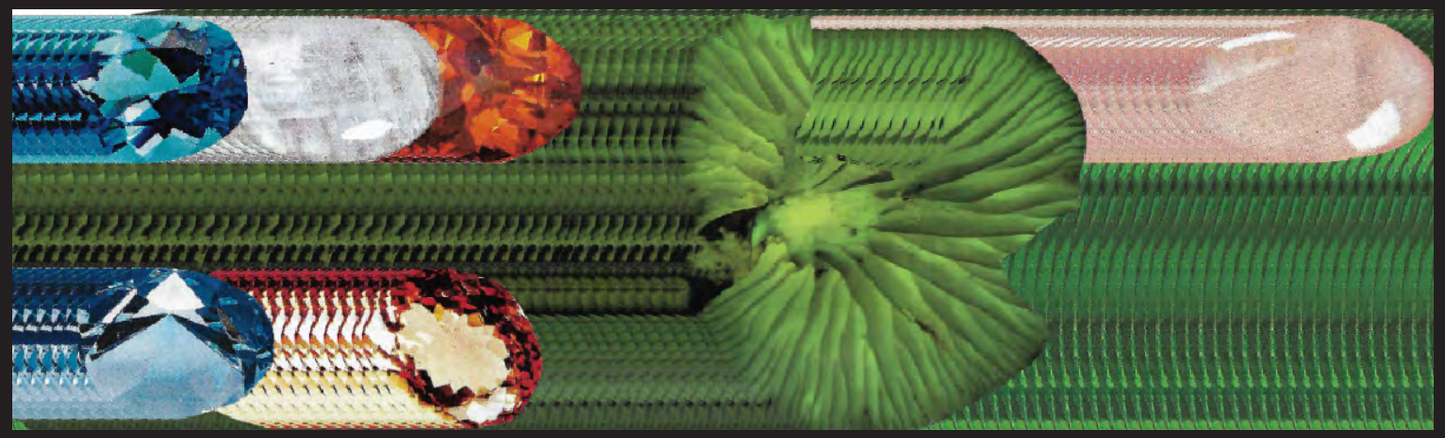
Mania

For the poster depicting mania, I replaced all text with images that had organic forms—forms which I thought could have a life of their own when repeated and layered over and over again in the same way I layered text in the mania poster for Experiment 1. All the images included in the Experiment 3 version of this poster were layered only from left to right, which allowed them to gain specific abstract forms.

Mania is characterized by an abnormally elevated mood and hyper-activity. The goal here was to depict such feelings through motion, repetition, and bright color.

Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.

Poster visualizing obsessive compulsion



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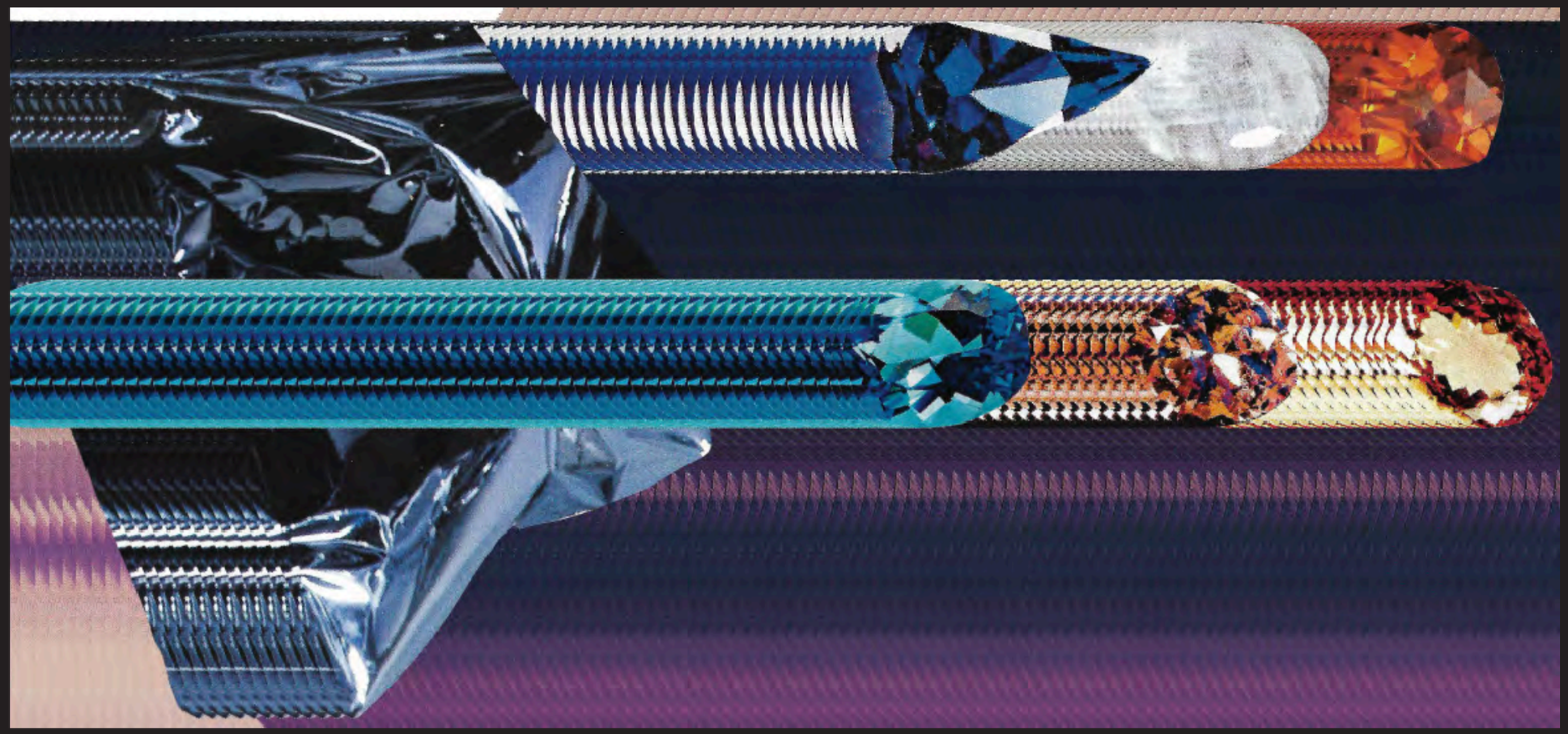
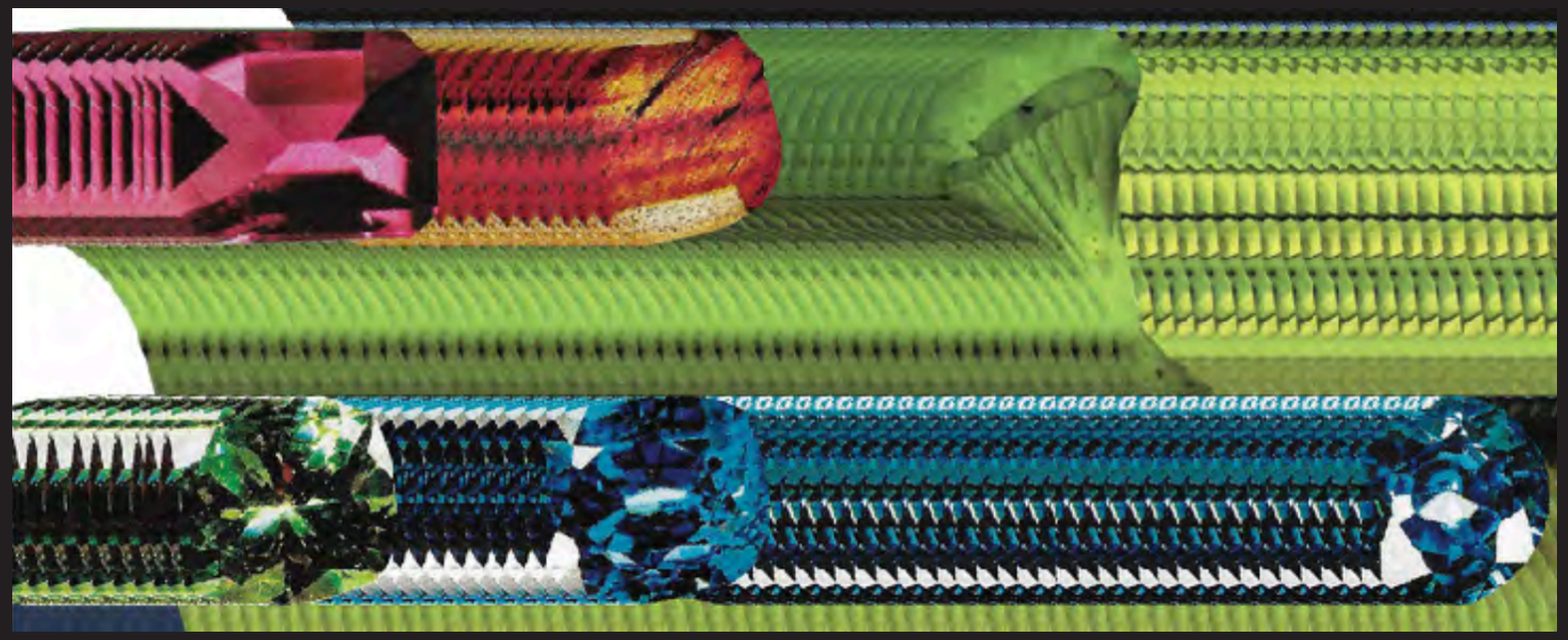




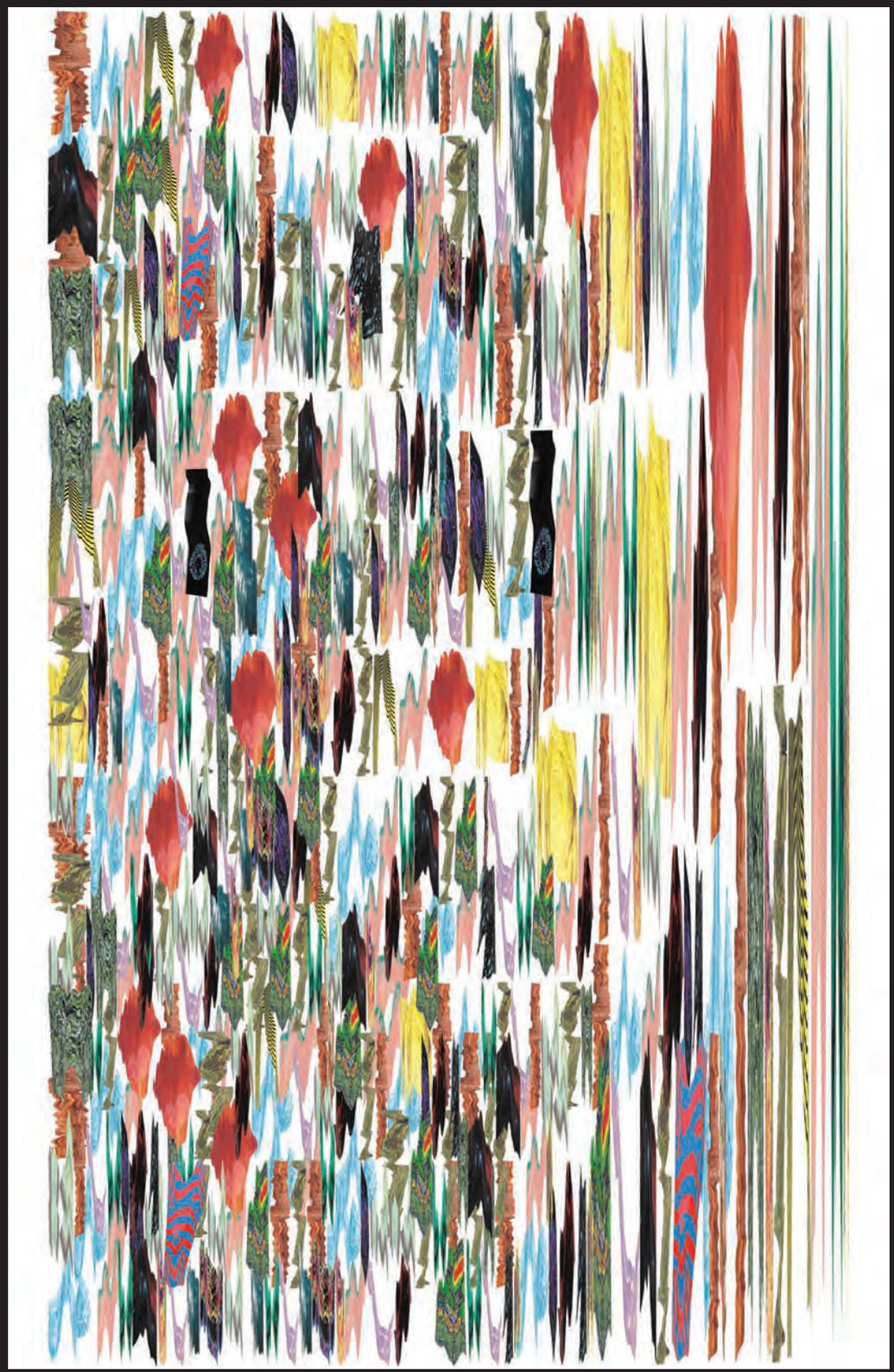
Details

Images scan

Hallucinations

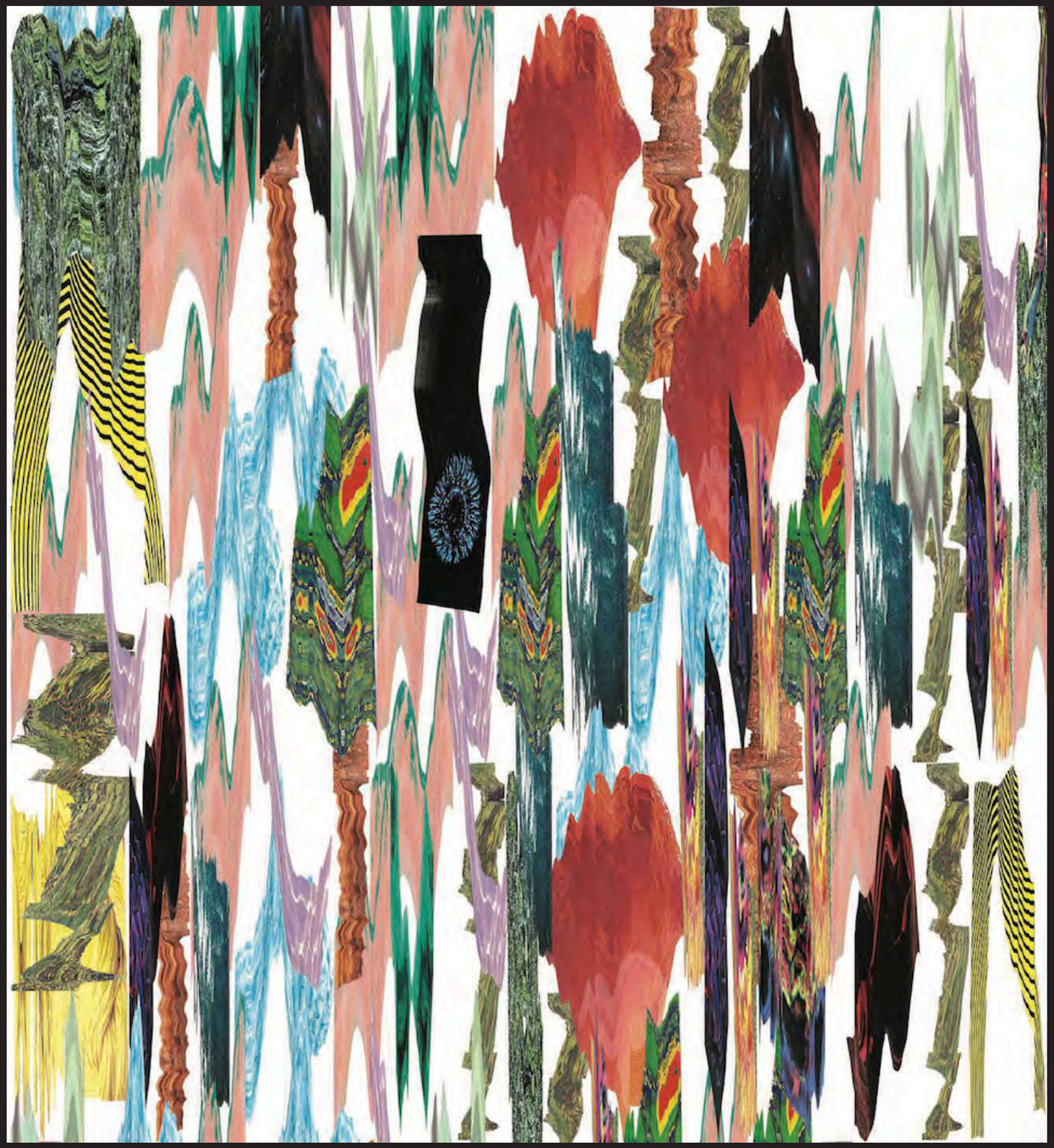
For the image-based poster depciting hallucinations, I decided to conceptually stay aligned to my first poster by focusing on warped images (which I had achieved through scanning). Each letter and symbol of the text was assigned a warped image. Images were stretched to cover all negative space in the composition.

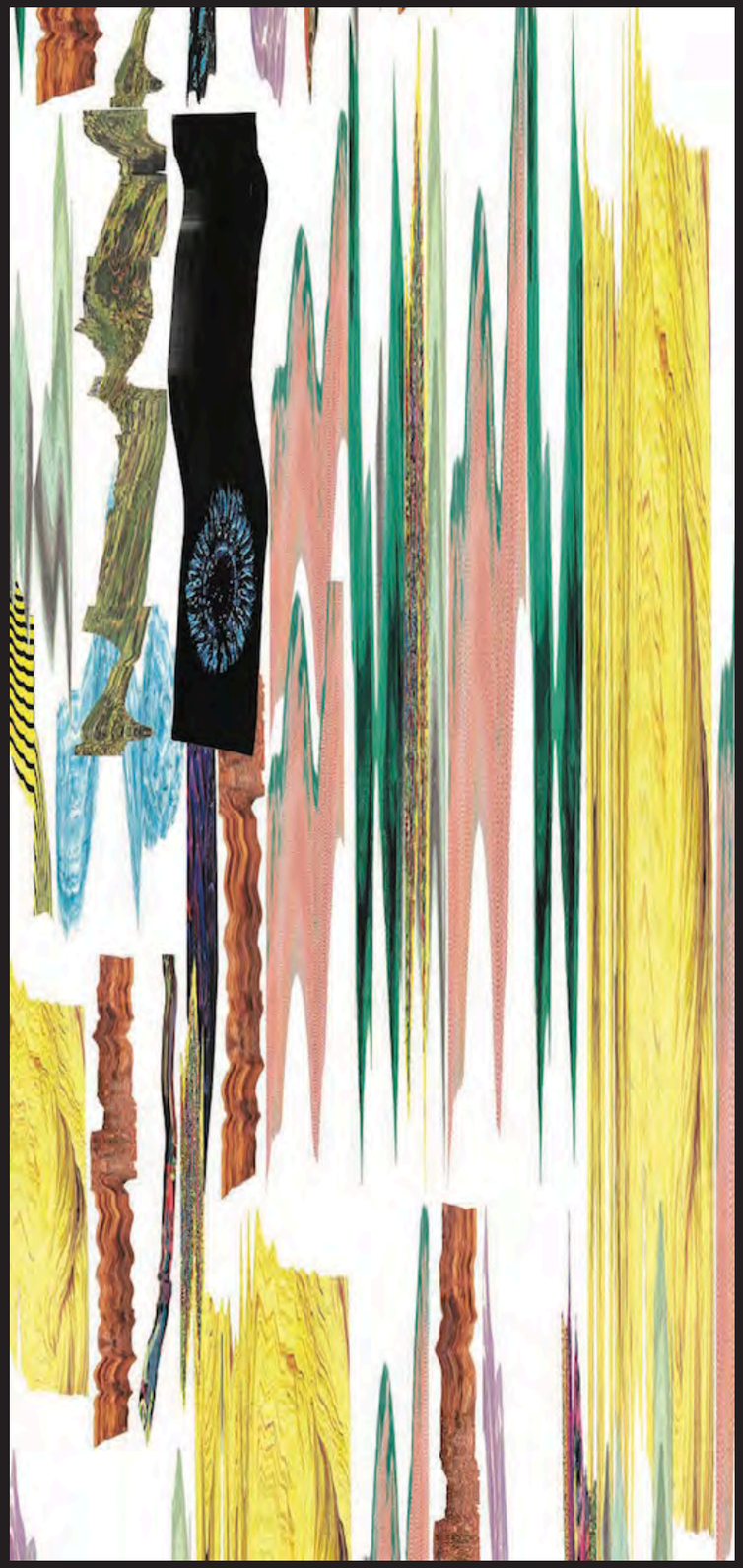
Refer to my set of instructions for greater detail.



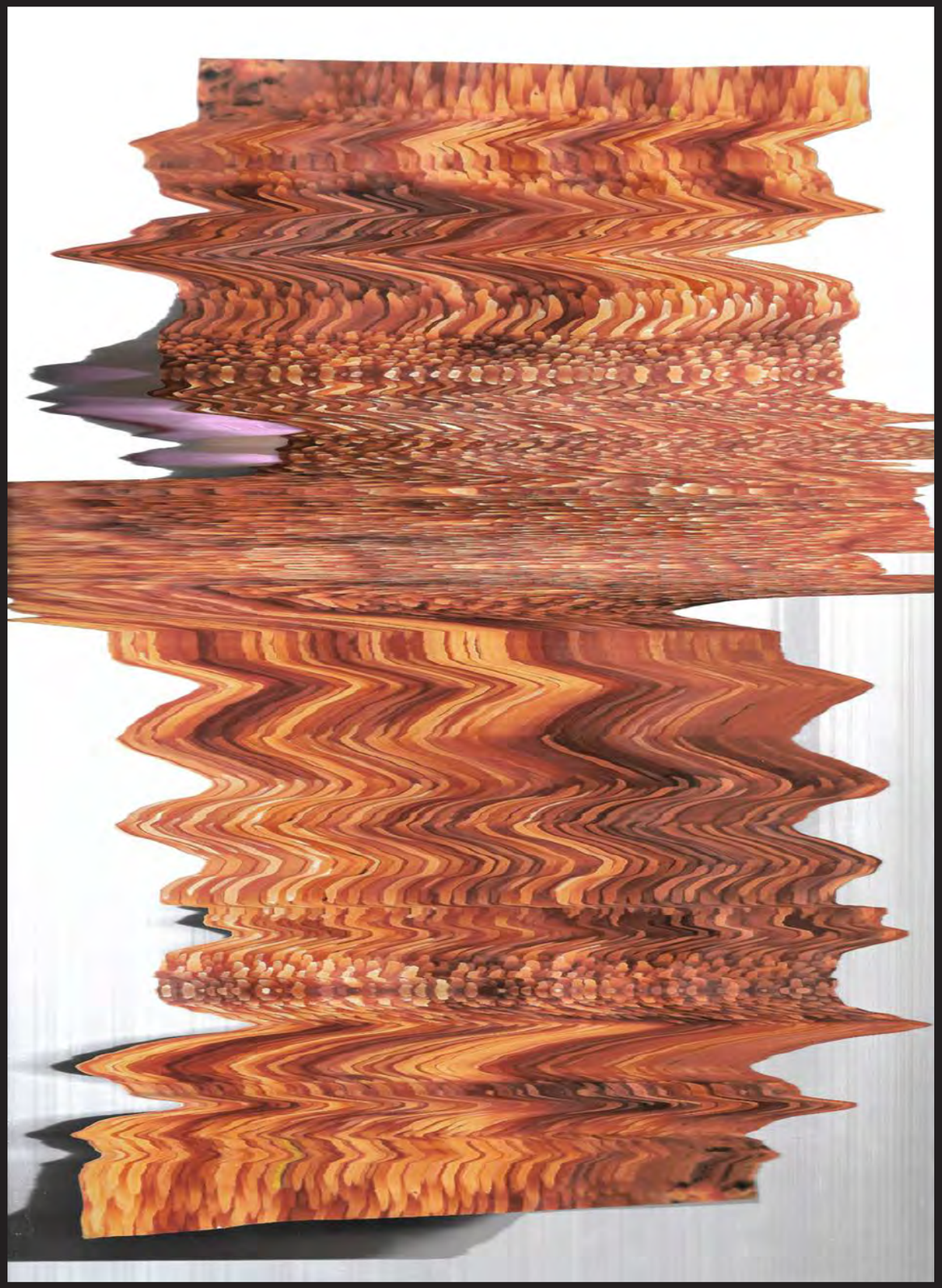
Poster visualizing hallucinations

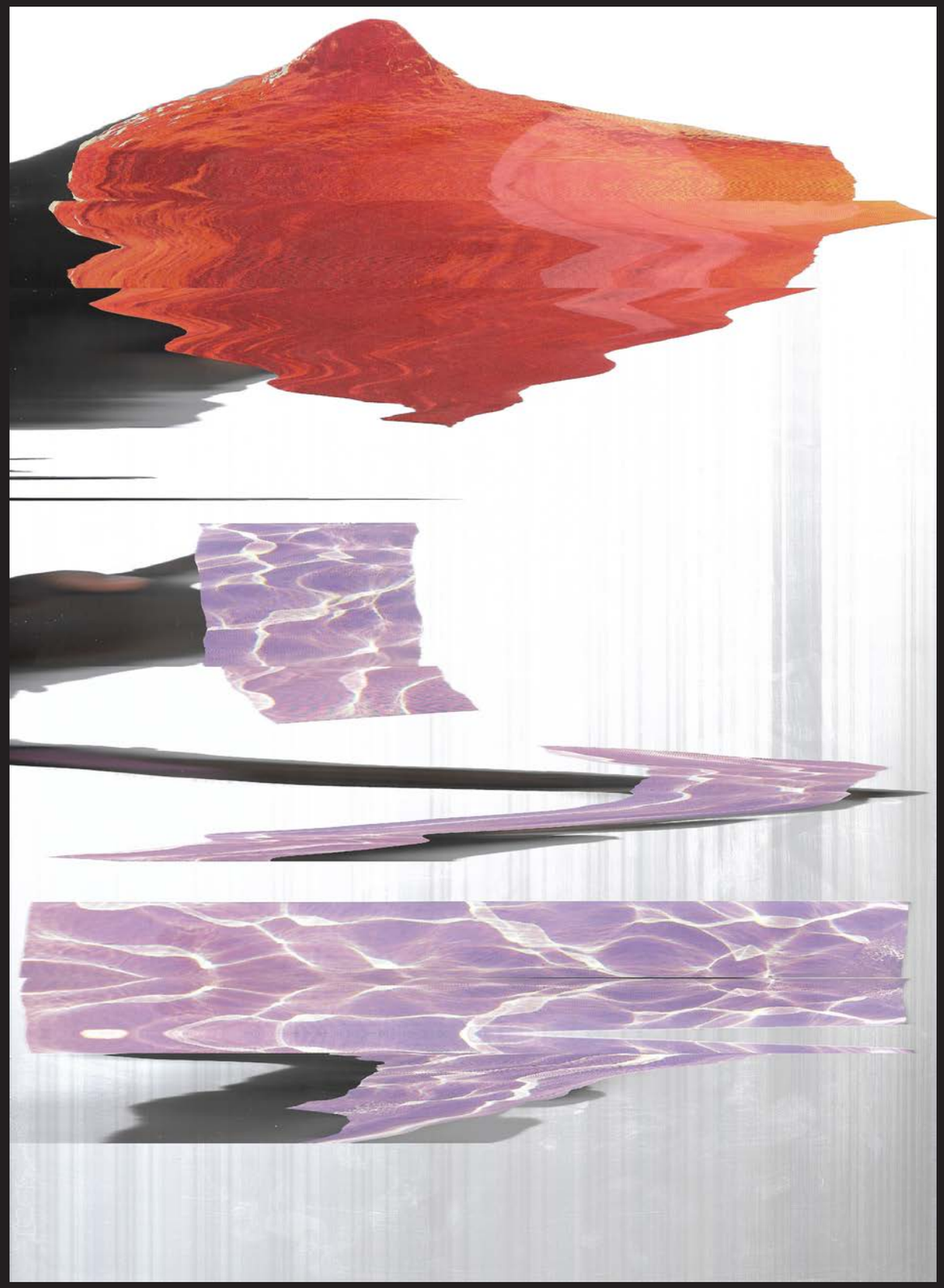
Documentation of size reference





Details





Images scans

Where would these posters exist?

In thinking about where in reality these posters would exist, I created the following list:

Depression

- Small, dark, secretive places
- Under my bed, back of the closet, inside closet door
- Small nooks and crannies of man-made structures

Anxiety

- Blown up to cover large areas—over doors, on floors

Obsessive Compulsion

- Clean, sparse, organized places—possibly just on a white wall?
- Medical laboratories, libraries

Mania

- Places that are visually noisy; crowded
- Clubs, raves, concert venues

Hallucinations

- On the periphery of an image
- Scaled very small, but noticeable in a space (i.e., brightly colored in a monochromatic image)

Future

Next Semester

As posters, I believe my work exists as a formally interesting series, but one without context. As such, I believe next semester the work I have done should be translated into a book.

Having a book as my final medium has several advantages, the most prominent being that it gives me space to detail my ideas and process. Furthermore, I would like to add more sections and create a more nuanced narrative from preliminary ideas to final output. This includes research, work by writers and artists whose work reflected their experiences with mental illness, and collected interviews from friends and family about how they 'visualize' mental health.

The next slides are images that are interesting and inspiring to me.

The dominant and repressive

breaking down.

Hyper-typography

the boundaries

between words, so

images dissol

and communication

the digital environment

graphic design is

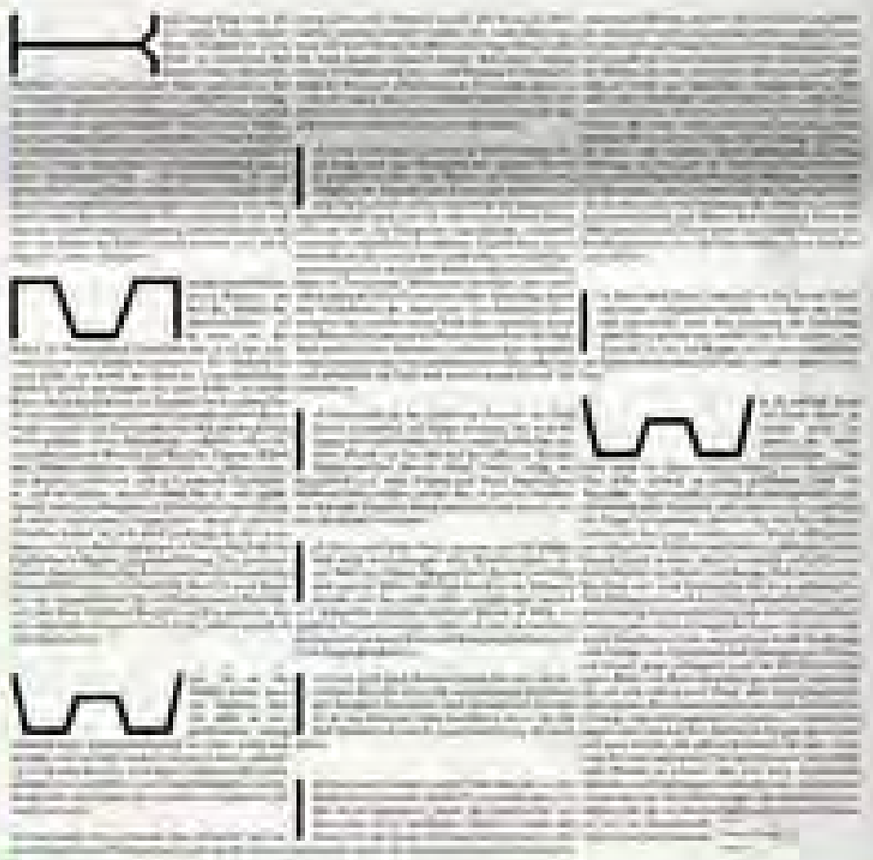
is idiosyncratic

as they are complex, a logical response

to our cultural context.

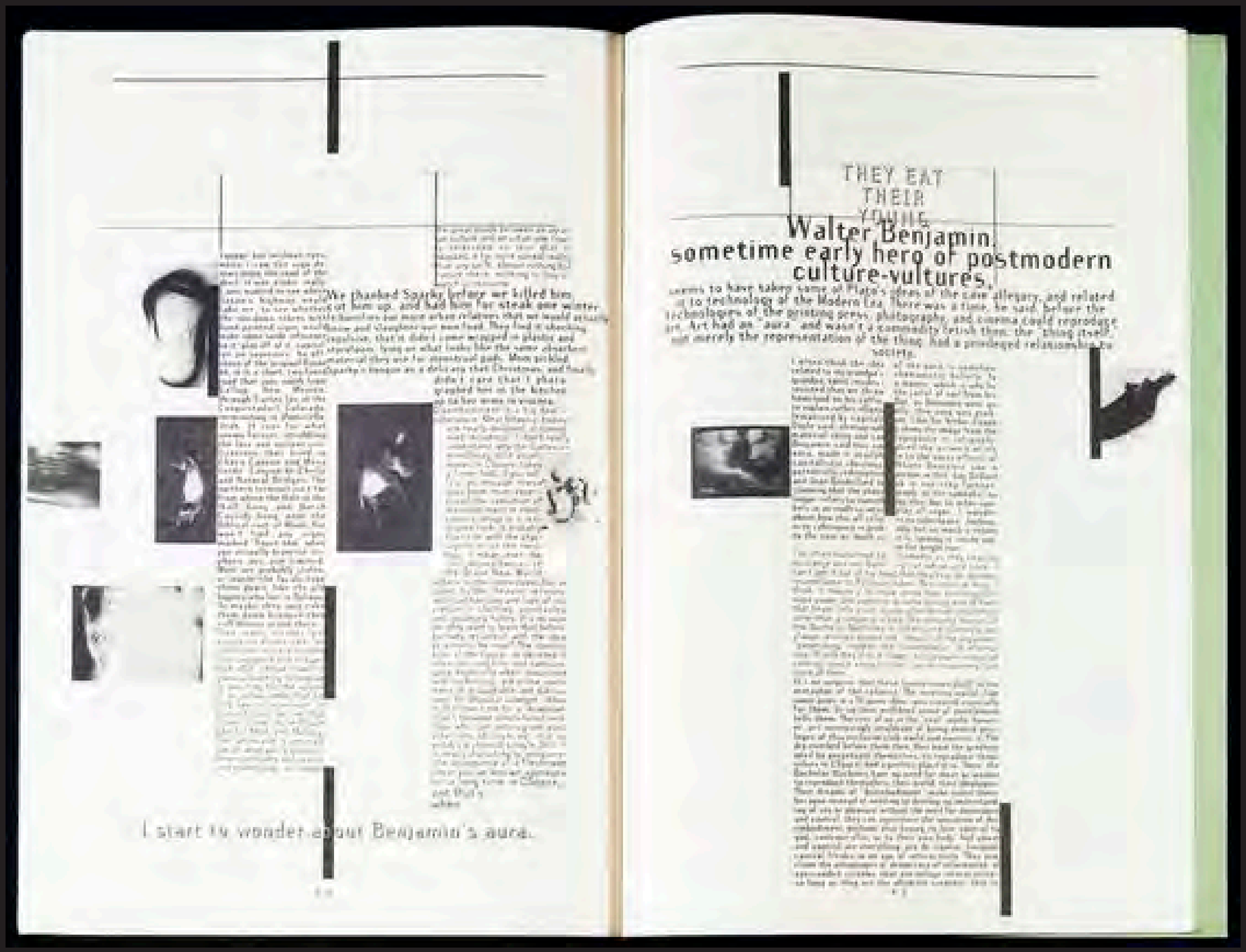
Party: the

afterglow

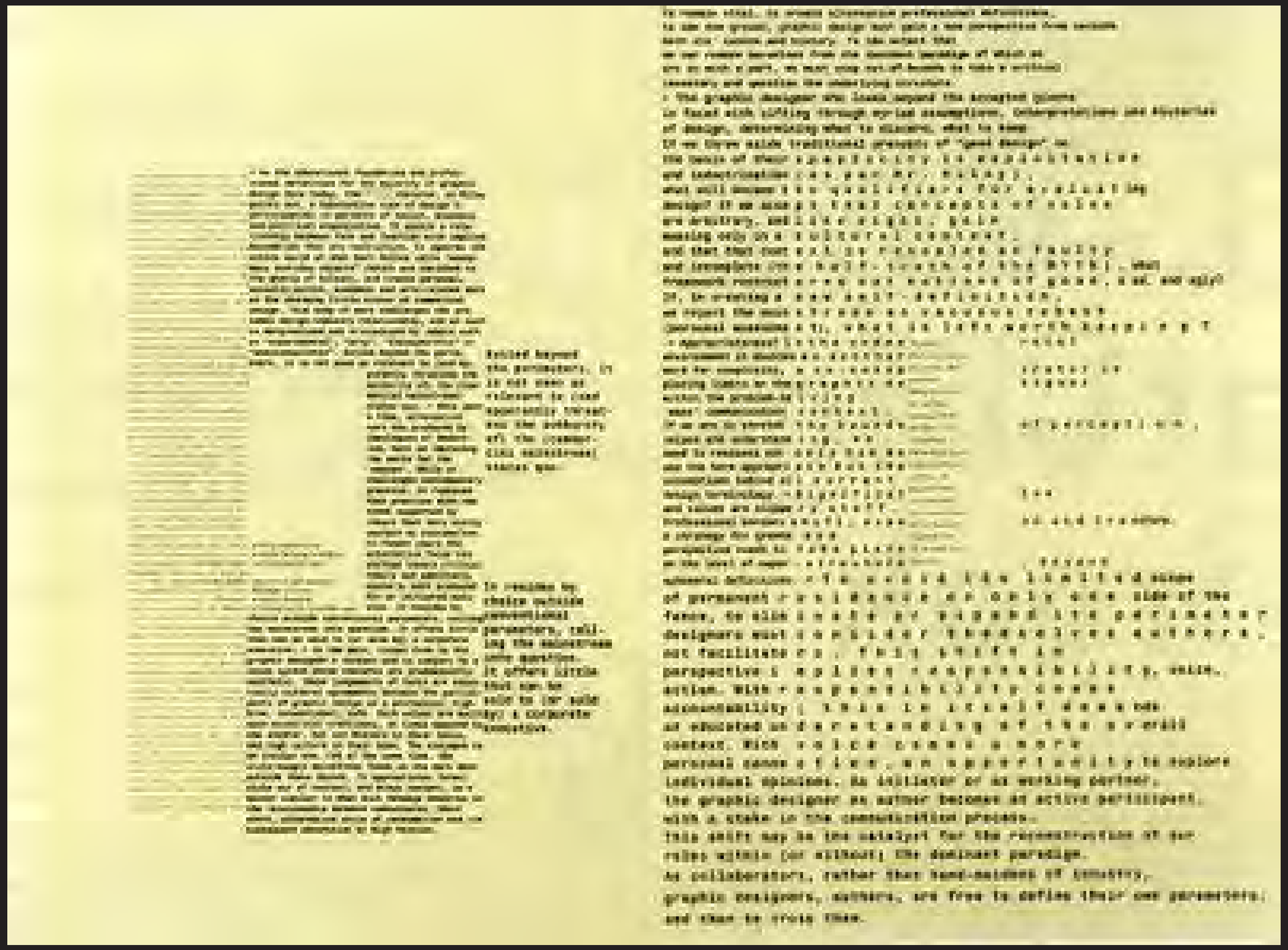


Portfolio:
Benjamin
Marra

The Book of Cave
Tooth



Emigre Magazine



Emigre Magazine

1 { }

The moon feeds the romantic, awakens the desire and becomes a memory. It captures the tragic-romantic-depressive mood. The people feel alienated from their surroundings. A feeling of being stuck and longing for something they have lost. The atmosphere of desolation and an unfulfilled desire is present.

This evening, the moon dreams with more laziness as well as beauty, on a multitude of cushions, and with an absent-minded, light hand, caresses the curve of her breast. On the satiny backs of slippery clouds, dying, she devotes herself to a lost lover's lament, strolls her second-sight across visions of white which blossom up into the azure night. When sometimes on this globe, in her idle sorrow, she lets fall a secret tear, a pious poet –an enemy of sleep– catches in the hollow of his hands, this pale tear, in images made as iridescent as an opal's fragment, and far from the eyes of the sun, hides it in his heart.

2 { }

Gleam of the night

3 { }

That long anticipated stretch of days, lingering days, free of responsibility and ripe with possibility. It's a time to hunt for insects, master bandstands, and practicing swimming strokes.

Light breaks where no sun shines. Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart. Push in their tides. And, broken ghosts with glow-worms in their heads. The things of light. File through the flesh where no flesh decks the bones. A candle in the thighs. Warms youth and seed and burns the seeds of age. Where no seed stirs, the fruit of man unwrinkles in the stars. Bright as a fig. Where no wax is, the candle shows its hairs. Dawn breaks behind the eyes. From poles of skull and toe the windy blood slides like a sea. Nor fenced, nor staked, the gushers of the sky. Spout to the rod, divining in a smile the oil of tears.

4 { }

In the night you can disappear. The gap of time between one day and the next day, until the first glimpse of morning light fills the gap again.

I am building absence out of this room's air, I'm reading suppositions into summer's script snarled on a varnished floor. It looks like a man. That knot's his hand waving good-bye, that stippled stripe of grain's the stacked-up vertebrae of his turned back. Small birds are cluttering the trees with blackened ornaments , and noises I can't hear. Chirring there, chittering. The window's closed.

Caitlin Berner