

Equivalent

Progress of Practice on
Image Equivalence

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Creating Image

Joerg wrote in *Ornament Today*, "...from an epistemological point of view, the principal question is not what ornament is but how something becomes ornament." I believe the same phrasing can effectively describe what I aim to explore: I am not concerned with how images seem to be, but how they are interpreted as what they are meant to be.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

The most inspiring part of this book for me lies in its discussion of the relationship between things and concepts. A lot of times I feel that my work is related to cognitive science, about how we perceive things and images.

In the preface of *The Order of Things*, Foucault attempts to explore the relationship between things and concepts. At the beginning of the book, Foucault quotes Borges' example from *Certain Chinese Encyclopaedia*: "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies." This example, with its absurdity, emphasizes to me the possibility of making connections between things: if there are points A and B, how many ways are there to get from A to B? What is the difference between each path? What tools should be used to reach B? What tools can be used to reach it? Returning to the connection between cognitive science and my work: in cognitive science, the concept of "universal cognition" is important because this shared knowledge represents how most people will move from A to B. However, this does not mean that we can only go from A to B, and I believe this is what I want to focus on—exploring the less used, or unused, methods of connection and seeing what new connections they might bring.

White Makes a Book a Book

My work in the second unit began with a focus on the creation of images. I chose to start from the most fundamental aspect of "creation" to explore how images are

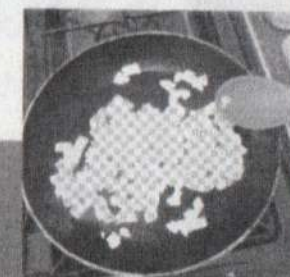
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WHITE MAKES A BOOK A BOOK

made. In digital workflows, most images are built upon a white canvas. Whether in Photoshop, InDesign, or even in After Effects and Premiere Pro for creating moving images, the starting point of any image is always a white layer. White naturally exists at the bottom of the image, much like a blank canvas in traditional painting, awaiting the artist's first stroke.

White, in this context, means something in the process of making an image that we follow by default, without ever thinking about why we do it—a kind of unwritten rule. Adobe's workflow has conditioned us to understand the white in images as "nothing," much like how we interpret the gray-and-white checkerboard in Adobe as transparent. But where exactly are these gray and white grids "transparent"? It is like the white, the default layer that quietly exists at the beginning of a file's creation. Because it is so taken for granted, so commonplace, it appears as if it is empty or devoid of anything.

The recipe said to "try the onions until it's transparent." Am I doing it right?



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But, is white really 'empty'? To borrow Heidegger's example from *Das Ding*: "The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The emptiness, the void, is what which enables the vessel to be a vessel... The vessel's thingness resides in its holding, in the drawing out of water, in the pouring and giving of drink." Similarly, the layout of a book exists because of white. I selected 100 photos from my album. By covering them with white, I made them appear as if they were the cover, flyleaf, first page, second page, third page... up to the one-hundredth page of the book. Without Adobe, I created this sequence in a more primal way. White is what makes the book a book. These whites are what distinguish the photos and the spreads, the album and the book.

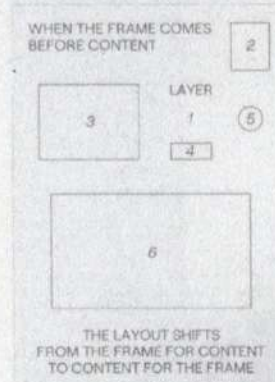
Magritte René, The Treachery of Images



Magritte's work inspired me to think about the relationship between visual experience and images (words are also a form of image). The image of a pipe is first drawn on the canvas, and then the inserted text denies the content of the image, creating a conflict between the image's content and the visual experience.

This work questions the conventions of language and visual representation, and I believe it connects to the "fundamental question" I want to explore in digital image creation: returning to a part of an image that we take for granted in our experience, such as the white layer at the bottom of a Photoshop file. I hope to find one or more visual methods, like this work, that clearly and accurately provoke a questioning of the essence of images.

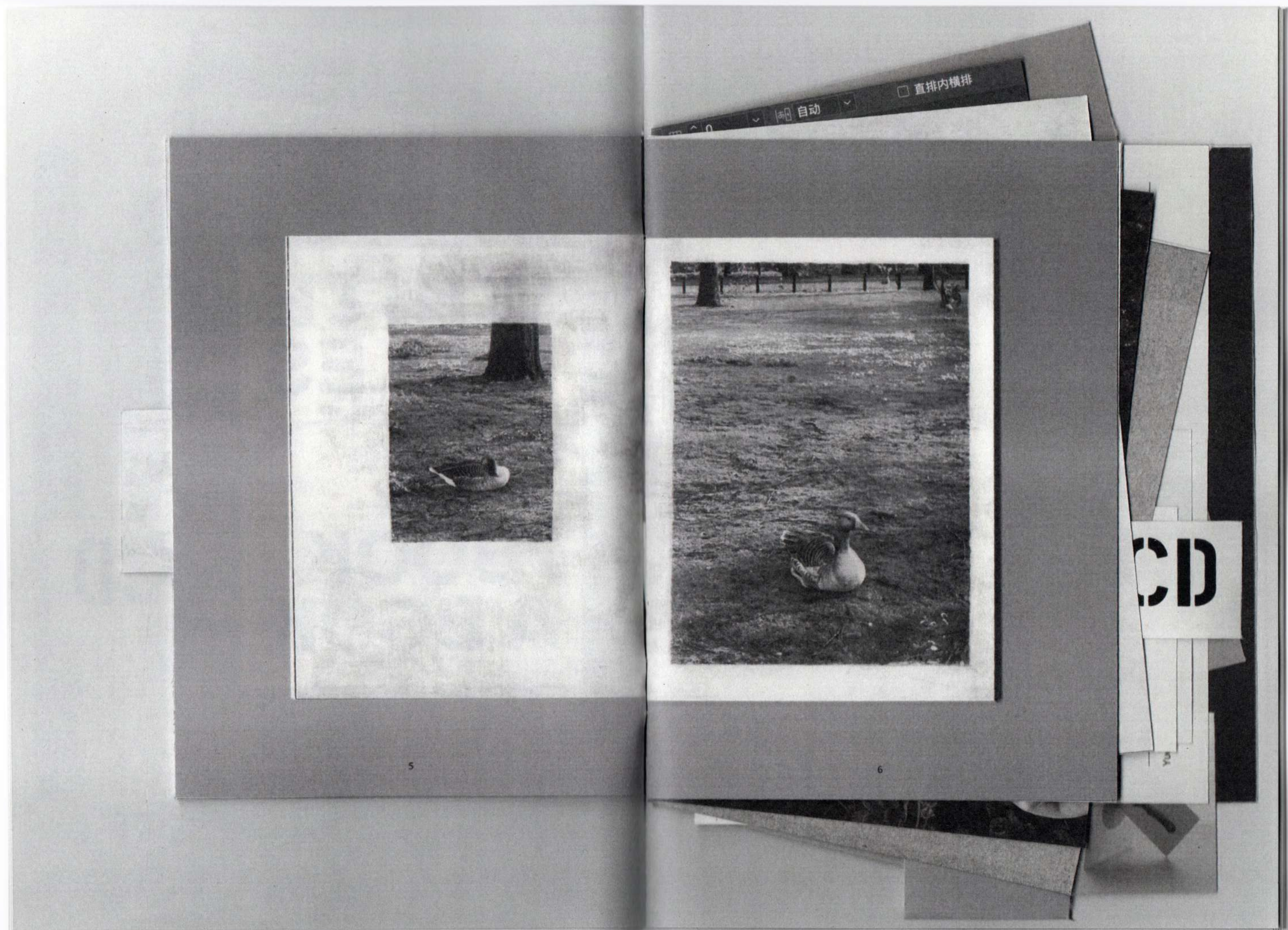
When the Frame Comes before Content

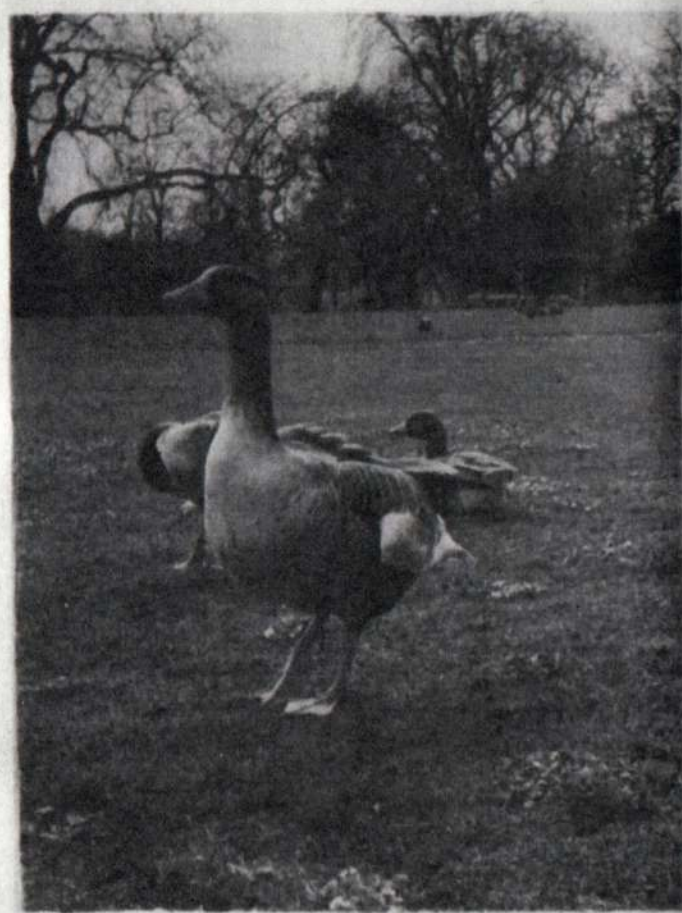


Reversing the order of layers in an image introduces a new production approach. In typography, white typically acts as the frame. However, when white is placed at the top layer, making the frame precede the content, the typographic approach shifts—from the frame serving the content to the content serving the frame. In a poster with a transparent white frame, the image is no longer composed by stacking it on a white canvas at the bottom; instead,

WHITE MAKES

A BOOK A BOOK





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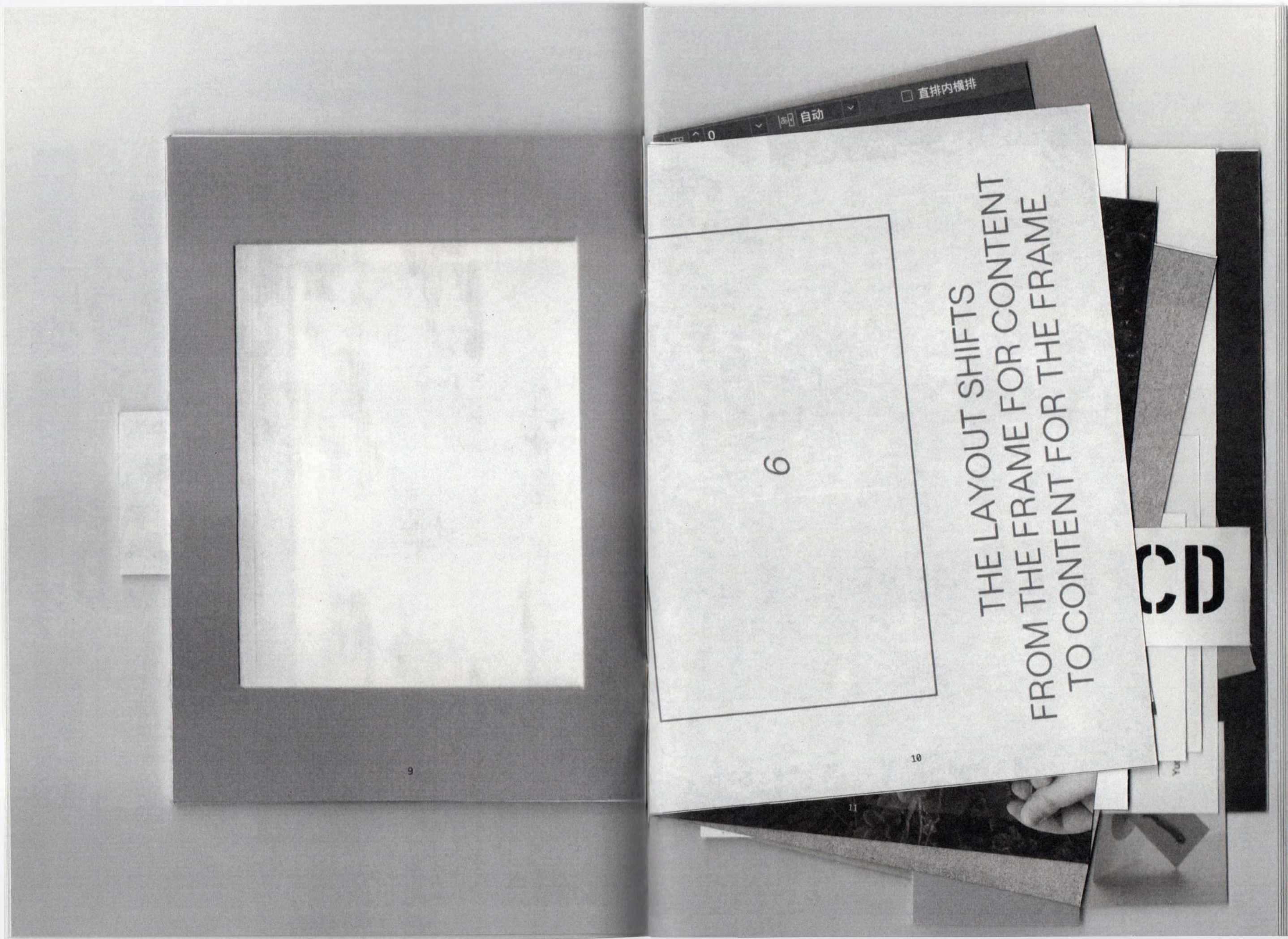


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WHEN THE FRAME COMES
BEFORE CONTENT

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LAYER

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THE LAYOUT SHIFTS
FROM THE FRAME FOR CONTENT
TO CONTENT FOR THE FRAME

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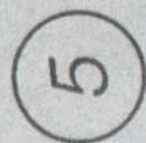
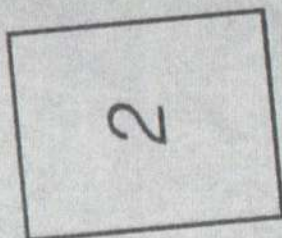
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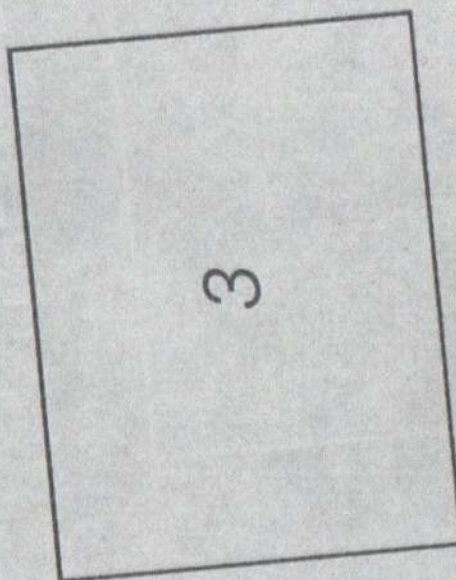
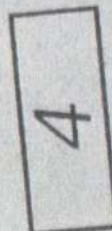
Laser Cutter

WHEN THE FRAME COMES BEFORE CONTENT



LAYER

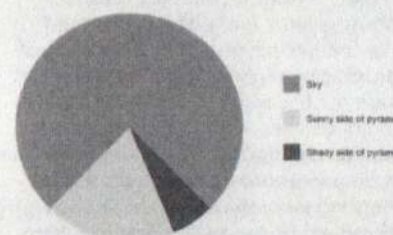
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we move the frames to find the most fitting composition within them. How we construct an image directly impacts our perception of it. By rethinking the hierarchical relationships within an image, I've sought to explore an alternative visual language—one that considers often-overlooked elements in graphic design, where the border (the white space) is no longer merely a passive, empty background but a vital component in shaping an image's meaning and perception.

Anonymous, Pie Chart Pyramid



The pie chart pyramid is a perfect example of content adapting to form. The anonymous creator of this work altered the colors and proportions of pie chart data, transforming the shapes within the chart into representations of the sky, buildings, and ground—turning a table into an image. In *White Makes a Book a Book*, my approach could be summarized as "creating a frame for the image." I then reversed this, exploring the "logic of the pie chart pyramid": creating an image for the frame. I made a poster consisting solely of a frame as a tool and then began working in the physical world (rather than in Photoshop) to make as much of the image as possible appear within this frame.

Talk to a Laser Cutter

My work on white inspired me to break away from the seemingly conventional workflows in graphic design, aiming to discover new processes and approaches for creating images. I have further experimented with the technical aspects, exploring the relationship between technology and the images it produces, and trying to connect the means, tools and ends involved in image creation.



As I was wandering around Moodle, this description of laser cutting intrigued me: colour is the language of the laser cutter (that quote looks like it came from some philosophy book). The phrase 'colour is the language of the laser cutter. This quote exemplifies the relationship between the technology (laser cutting), how the technology is used (what kind of files the laser cutter needs), and the images it produces (the finished cut files). Based on this quote, I created a font called 'Talk to a Laser Cutter'. It has two styles: cut and engraved, which corresponds to the principle of the laser cutter – the text typed in this font can be recognised and cut/engraved directly by the laser cutter, which is a language based on technology.

ABCD

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Helmut Smits, Pairs

He used double exposure to place one discarded shoe gently beside another. When I saw this image, I was struck by an overwhelming sense of awe—a feeling rooted in how the technical process of image-making could be used so movingly. Confronted with the vast theme of "Position," I felt lost, scrambling to find respectable justifications for the images I was creating, yet overlooking the simple joy and pure pleasure that image-making offers—a communication that can happen in an instant. Sometimes, we don't need to overthink; we can just let one shoe rest next to another in an image. It's a pure, gentle care that comes from the image itself. And what can images really give us, after all? They make us laugh, they make us cry, they make us softly say "Oh." Isn't that enough?



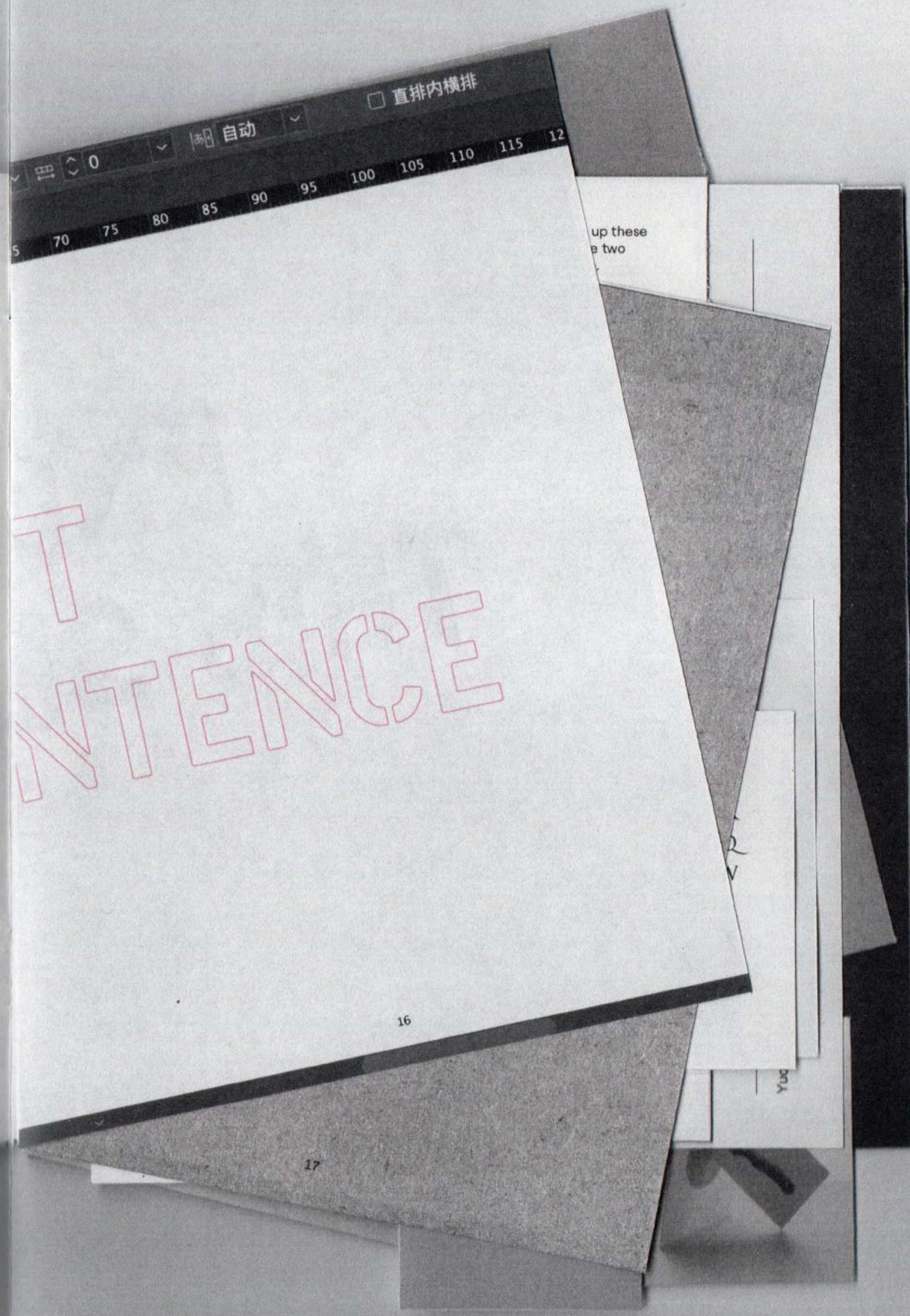
I believe that anyone who opens his website will be struck by the sheer volume of work on display—his projects shift gracefully and swiftly from one to the next, each created with lightness of thought and speed of execution. His medium is often photography, which, I believe, is where we differ. We may share a similar way of speaking, but the things we want to express are not the same. There is a resolute

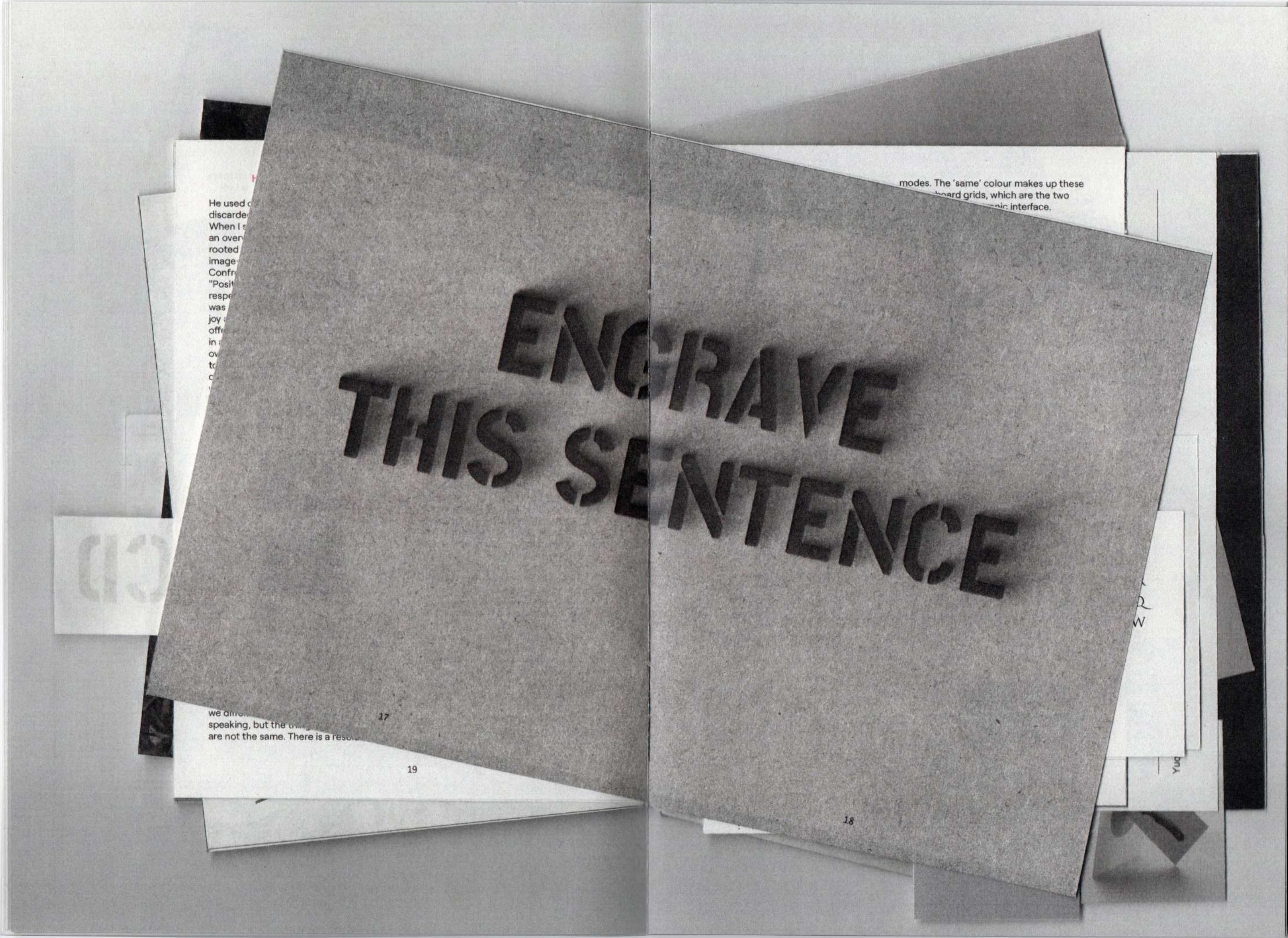
confidence that comes from action—from the verb itself. When lost, just create—my mind and hands will guide me to the answer. With an approach rooted in the visual, in the act of making, the verb, or "creation" itself, offers me direction. Swiftly creating, pausing briefly, occasionally reflecting on what has happened—it feels like a dance, and this is how I create.

Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Benjamin was adept at raising reflections on technology itself, or rather, using technology as a tool for reflection. For example, "Whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art?" The advent of photography technology brought about a crisis for the most commonly used technique in art at the time—painting. When human figures disappeared for the first time in photography, it showed us something new. We began to shoot empty landscapes, no longer limited to taking one photo at a time, but attempting to take many in succession. Thus, technology brought about expression, and the world began to unfold with the human eye (if the lens is seen as the photographer's point of view) as the starting point.

In fact, the emergence of new technologies always forces creators to think: If the existing content that this technology can produce could be replaced by another more convenient way, what else can this technology do? Or, in other words, new technologies always compel us to rethink the uniqueness and singularity of old technologies through updates and replacements, thereby changing the development purpose and direction of existing technologies, which is what I want to explore in practice: technology as revelation.





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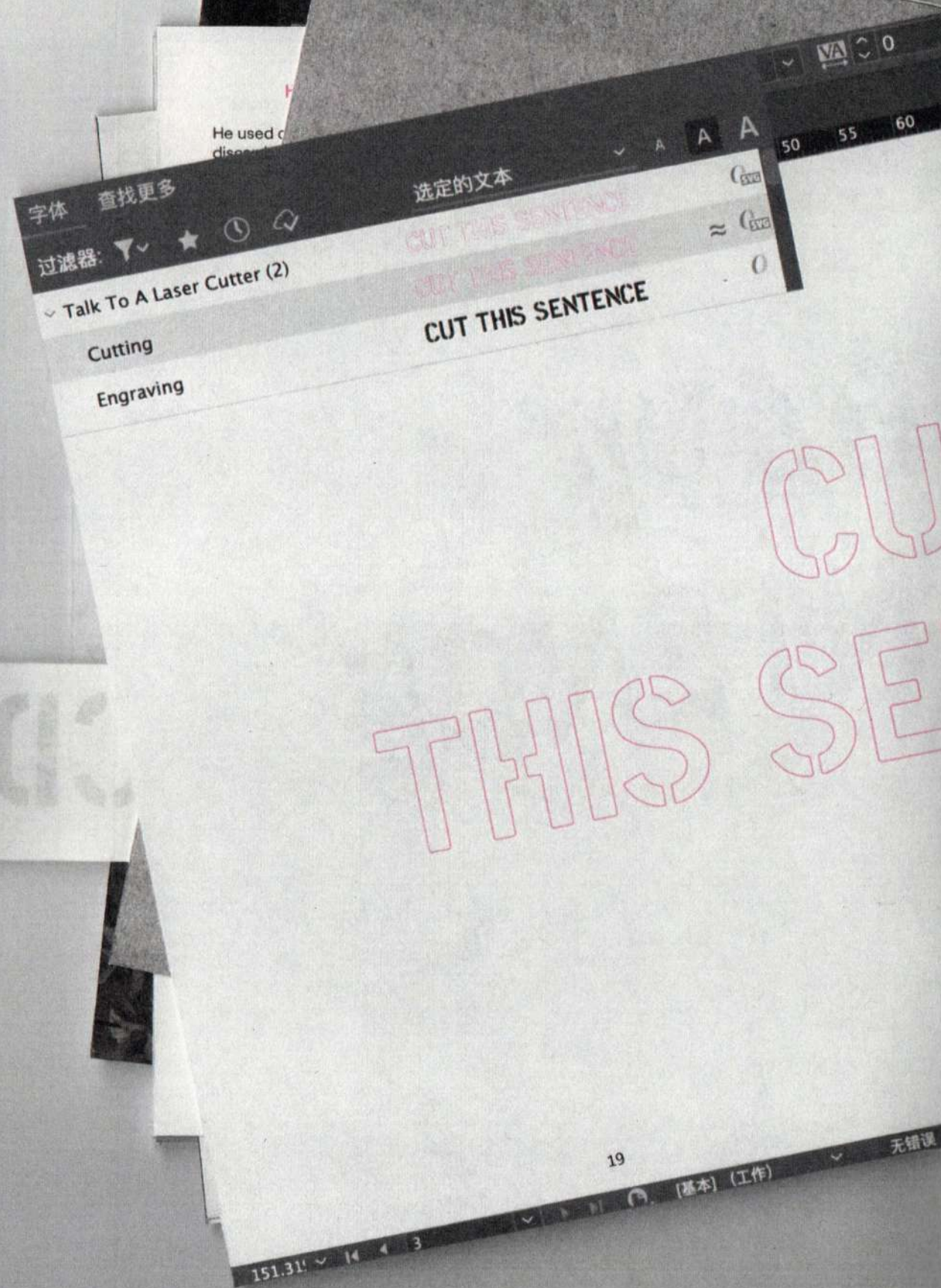
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modes. The 'same' colour makes up these
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Caesar Cipher

Another technical attempt at language is based on the font design software Glyphs. I tried to manipulate language through technology based on cryptography. Using Trijan as a master, I created a font called *Caesar Cipher*. This historically famous cipher is encrypted by offsetting each letter of the alphabet by a fixed number. Now, A is replaced with D, and B becomes E. So easily, technology has shifted the language.

modes. The 'same' colour makes up these checkerboard grids, which are the two colours of the electronic interface.



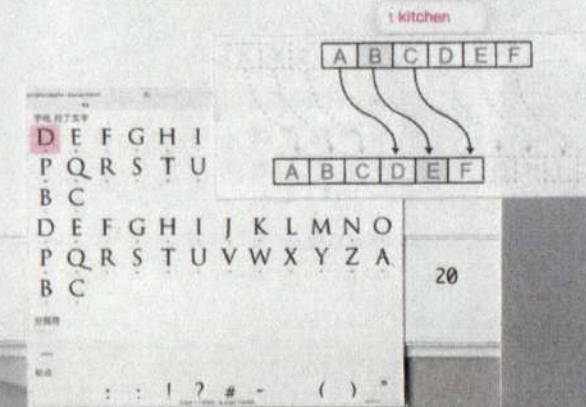
RGB TO CMYK

If the alphabet is pure text, then the palette is pure colour. Thanks to technology, colours in today's graphic design tend to run in both RGB and CMYK - technology divides the same colour into 'two'. The discussion of colour is divided into two parts: a discussion of RGB, and a discussion of CMYK. In the book *RGB TO CMYK*, the same colour is divided into two colour

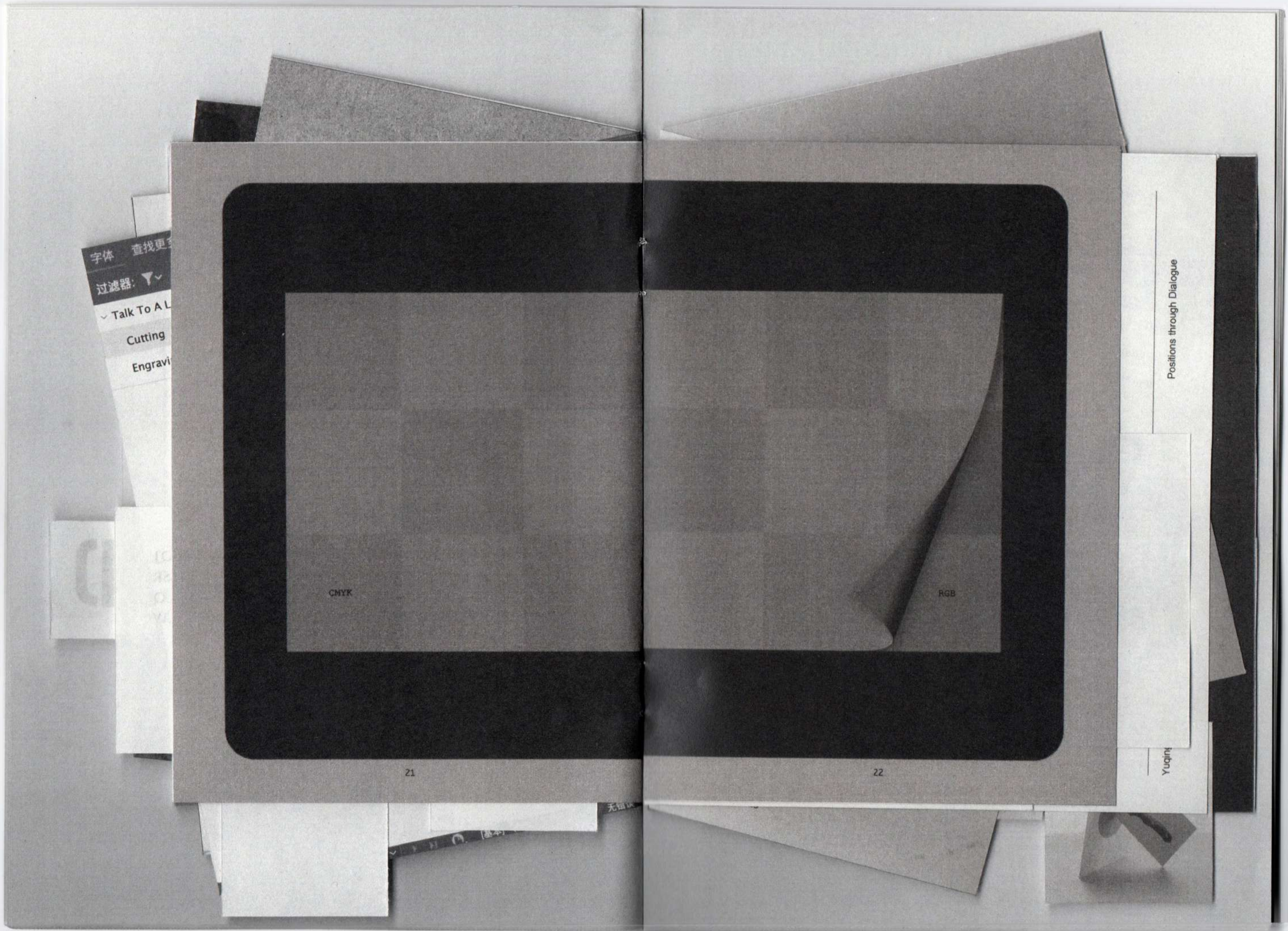
Sorry! You cannot reach RGB

The discussion of CMYK is simply reflected in this poster. The original version of this poster was produced as an RGB file (0, 0, 255), while its physical version is rendered in CMYK (93, 75, 0, 0) colours. This is because in printing, CMYK cannot reach RGB. RGB is converted to CMYK, which are the two colours used in printing.

LW ZDV ILYH R'FORFN RQ D ZLQWHU'V PRUQLQ
LQ VBLD. DORQVLGH WKH SODWIRUP DW DOHSSR
VWRRG WKH WUDLQJUDQGOB GHVLJQDWHG LQ
UDLOZDB JXLGHV DV WKH WDXUXV HASUHV. LW
FRQVLVWHG RI DNLWFKHQ



Positions through Dialogue



Explaining Image

Dialogue with José

A dialogue with José triggered my first shift in focus. He interpreted my previous work as a kind of explanation of the image and posed a valuable question: Do you want to explain the image or explain how to read the image? My answer was: both. Explaining the image and explaining how to read it need not be separate tasks; how we read an image determines what the image is. This shift led me to focus on content: What kind of image do I want to explain? How should I explain it?

Image Intersects Object

What interests me is the image, not the photograph. I want to clarify this from the beginning because it means that the medium I will be using is not limited to photography. While my current exploration might give the audience the impression that "wow, this guy's work is about real images," that's not the only focus. If an image is created to describe an object, then whether it's 2D or 3D, static or dynamic, Adobe or coding, it is all an object of my interest.

Images and photographs are entirely different objects when it comes to the relationship between image and object. In discussions of the image-object relationship, photographs often signify "something," "something like this," or "this particular thing." To borrow from Roland Barthes, when someone shows another person their photograph, they say, "Look, this is my brother; here I am as a child." This is the grammar of the photograph. A photograph separates the image of the object from the object itself, turning it into a representation of the object. The photographer uses the camera to cut out a fragment from the real world and place it there, allowing us to view an image of the sea without standing on the shore. "A photo of the sea" becomes "the sea," and "my photo" becomes "me."

For images, specific content usually means that the image is about one or more objects. I focused my further exploration on the relationship between object and image, posing additional questions: What is the relationship between object and image? What are the unique characteristics of

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photography

Sontag, S. (1977) *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Calle, S. (2011) *Blind*. France: Actes Sud.

What can images bring us?
What can interpreting them offer?

Yuqing Lei

Unit 2

Positions through Dialogue

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Dialogue with José García Oliva

Dialogue with José García Oliva

Interestingly, due to the subtlety of our dialogue content, our conversations are always accompanied by images—many analogies and sketches. To better convey this, I present the organized conversation with illustrations (most of the images come from the doodles Jose and I made during the dialogue).

I. Do you want to explain the image or explain how to read the image?
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Which type of subtitles do you prefer?



A.

A green cup, with a black bottle of water.



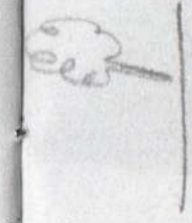
B.

In a day of loneliness, coffee is needed to keep up with all the problems of work and life.

Which one is a tree?



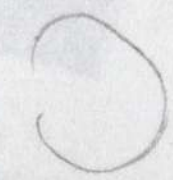
A.



C.

Tree

What is it to you?



A. Circle

B. Apple

II. What kind of image? Photo, or created graphic?
26

Which is more powerful for you?



A.



B.

III. What can images bring us? What can interpreting them offer?

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Calle, S. (2011) *Blind*. France: Actes Sud.

Product Packaging: Anththesis: Manual and Cover

What interests me is the image, not the photograph. I want to clarify this from the beginning because I mean the image, not the photograph. I want to clarify this from the beginning because I mean the image, not the photograph. I want to clarify this from the beginning because I mean the image, not the photograph.

Images and photographs are entirely different objects when they are used in product packaging. The image is a concept, a feeling, a state of mind. The photograph is a record of a moment in time, a specific object in a specific place.

The image, on the other hand, is more often used as an abstract concept, a feeling, a state of mind. It is a concept, a feeling, a state of mind. It is a concept, a feeling, a state of mind. It is a concept, a feeling, a state of mind.

Packaging for two knives I bought



Image orange
Image knife
Object orange
Object knife

an image? Based on these questions, I conducted a series of quick experiments where an orange and a knife alternated as image and object, interacting with each other. Through these interactions, I sought to reveal the image's characteristics by discussing the object-image relationship. When I put them together, I suddenly realized I wasn't concerned with the orange or the knife itself. What I'm pursuing in the knife is a state, a feeling—a quality inherent in the object as depicted by the image.

Orange and Knife Series 1&2

In the past few weeks, my work has focused on exploring object-image logics. I try to use images as a tool for explanation, conveying the essence of objects through indirect representation. The knife and the orange transition between object and image, interfering with and explaining each other.

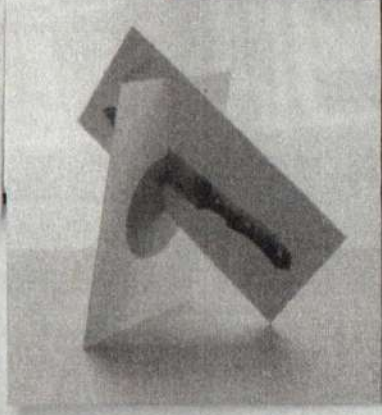
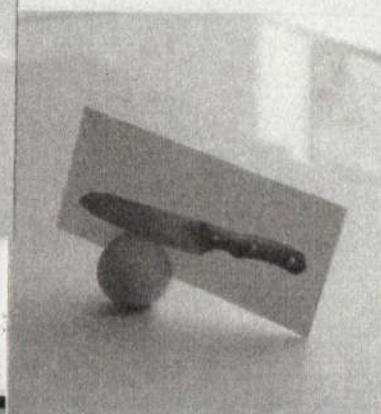
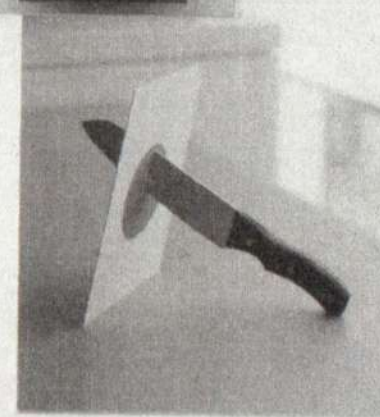
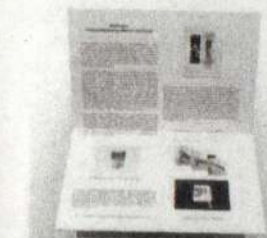
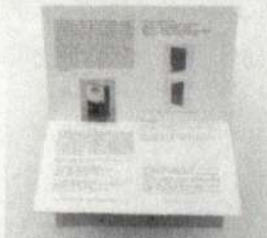
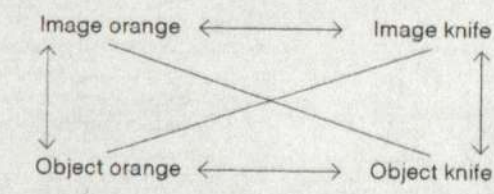


Image Explains Object

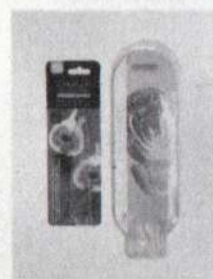
Philippe Starck, Juicy Salif



The image, on the other hand, is more often used as an explanation of the object. Packaging, posters, adverts—images quietly placed next to things, both present at the same time. For example, *Juicy Salif*, the juicer resembling an alien; when people first see it, they are often puzzled about what it is. However, Philippe Starck placed an image of a lemon on the packaging.

When people feel unfamiliar with the product, they look at its box, see the familiar image of a lemon, and immediately realize that it is a lemon squeezer.

Packaging for Two Knives



Similarly, a knife is understood as a knife not because it's a long, sharp piece of stainless steel, but because it can cut apples, spread butter, or scratch fingers. Apples, butter, and drops of blood on fingers reveal its identity as a knife.

I recently bought two knives—one with an image of a halved purple cabbage on the packaging, the other with a halved fig. The image of the knife itself does not appear in these visuals; instead, the knife exists as a real object—a physical knife placed over the image of the sliced produce. In this combination, the image functions as something akin to a manual for the knife.

The above examples correspond to three logics for using images to explain objects:

1. **The Logic of Product Packaging**

E.g.: An image of a lemon explains the object:

Lemon + glass bottle = lemonade

Lemon + spray bottle = lemon perfume

Lemon + knife = fruit knife

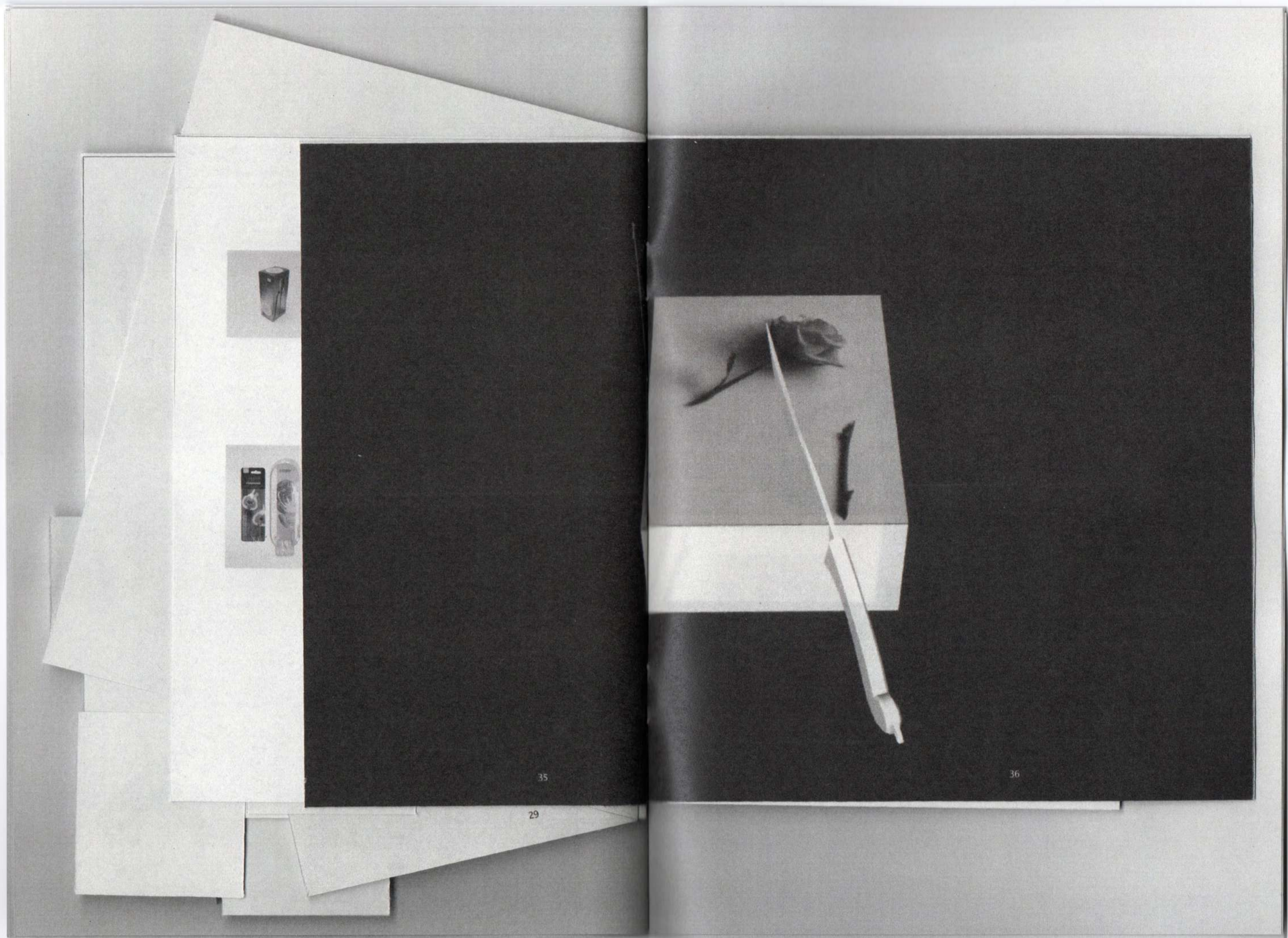
2. **The Logic of Product Manuals**

E.g.: Images related to a knife explain the knife itself:

Sliced fruit + a knife = cutting

Bloodstains on a chest + knife = stabbing

A rope cut in half + knife = slicing



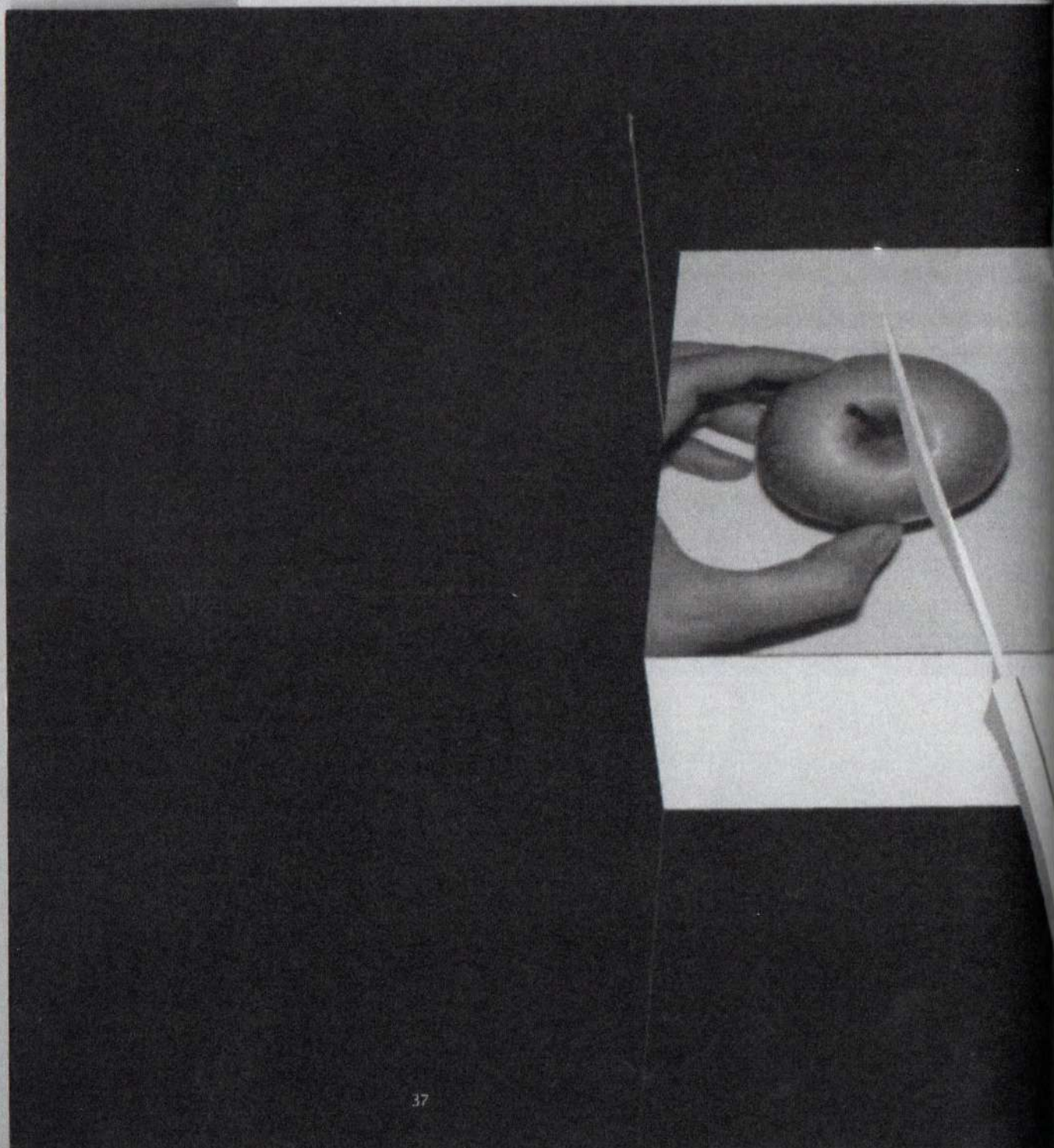


Image Equals Object

Claire Fontaine, *Equivalent*

Claire Fontaine's work made me realize another relationship between image and object: the image can explain the object in a less faithful way, even distorting its meaning. In her series *Equivalent*, she covers each brick with the cover of Gallimard's Folio series of essays, which is the cheapest and most popular format for French essays. By redefining and deconstructing the traditional functions of objects, she prompts the audience to think about the objects themselves and the socio-cultural contexts they represent. A book is deconstructed into two parts: the cover and the bricks. However, even when all the content is solidified into a single brick, the image on the cover—this thin layer of paper that exists only on the surface—is still sufficient to explain that this is a book. The book's cover is draped over the brick, so the book becomes a brick, a brick becomes the book, erasing the difference between them. The distinction between books and between books and bricks becomes equivalent.



In the structure of this work, the cover is more regarded as the packaging of the book. The cover of a book serves a functional role similar to that of product packaging—it explains the content of the book to the reader. Therefore, this work can also be understood as the author using packaging that does not correspond to the content to hold incorrect contents. As a result, due to the intersection (where the packaging fits the dimensions of the product), two puzzle pieces that are shaped to fit but have incorrect patterns can still fit together. The packaging continues to effectively explain the contents inside, albeit in a distorted manner. This erroneous explanation brings about subtle and interesting visual effects.

Equivalent

Claire Fontaine's work *Equivalent* led me to wonder: can an image be equivalent to an object? A picture of a sliced red cabbage can serve as an explanation for a knife, but can a stack of knife-related images approach the very concept of a "knife" itself?

I experimented with increasing the number of images, using various knife-related images to depict every aspect of a knife, aiming for these images to represent the knife itself. The knife doesn't appear in the book, but these images still embody it—a knife without a knife.

Image Equals ?

The structure of "Image = Object" intrigues me, as the notion of equivalence holds potential for new interpretations. Here are two possibilities centered around this concept:

In the structure "Image = Object," does this equivalence need to reflect the object's true nature? For example, in Claire Fontaine's *Equivalent*, the book cover imagery distorts the actual content, which is a brick. Here, equivalence is expressed through the alignment of cover and brick in size, presenting a "non-equivalence within equivalence"—the visual intrigue of this piece.

René Magritte, The Treachery of Images

Similarly, in Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*, where "This is not a pipe" separates the image from its verbal identification, text is not equivalent to images. Text introduces a layer of contradiction, questioning the relationship between object, image, and meaning.

Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs

Should text be introduced to form a new structure of Object—Image—Text? Text could unlock new interpretive possibilities, like in *One and Three Chairs* by Joseph Kosuth, where the image equals text equals object, each informing and redefining the other.

To my passions, idealism, and sharp edges in the past year. These corners are embraced by the book's frame, just as GCD shields my sharp edges.

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