

IN BETWEEN

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Unit 3 Projection²

[How Language Describes a Sheet of Paper]

In everyday language, we usually describe a sheet of paper by its front and back. We say the front of a page, the back of a page—but never the side of a page. The side is assumed to be a dimension that doesn't exist, unless the number of sheets is enough to form a "body." Its presence is faint, like a ghost hidden in a linguistic blind spot, graphic design's version of You-Know-Who. A piece / a pile / a stack of paper gestures toward it. GSM (grams per square meter) circles around it.

A sheet of 80gsm A4 paper measures 0.10 mm thick at its side, but it is still described simply as "a sheet of A4," not as $297 \times 210 \times 0.10$ mm.

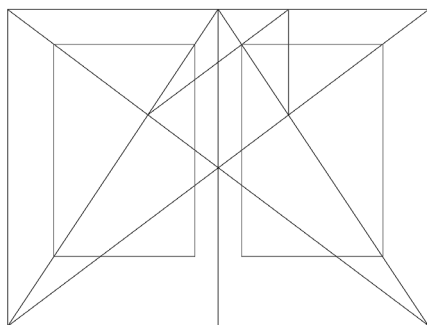
Front-back, that's how we describe a surface.

Front-back-side (–top), that's how we describe a 3D object.

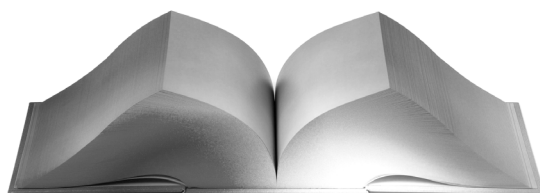
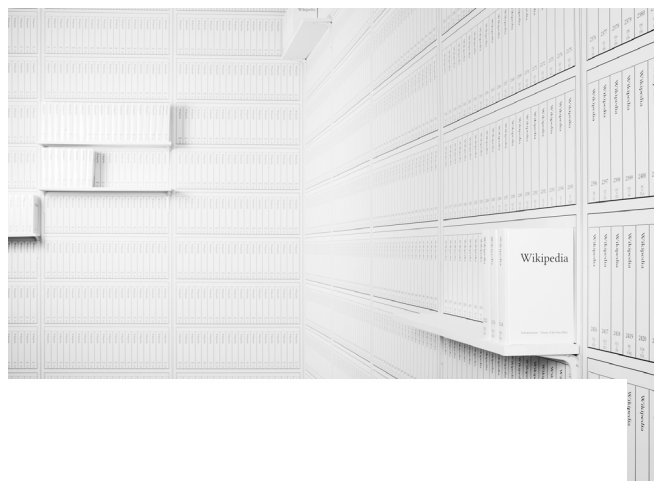
Unlike a book, a box, or a suitcase, a ream of paper on Amazon doesn't come with its volume marked. It says 500 sheets, not $297 \times 210 \times 500$ mm or 31.2 liters—as if the space occupied by paper were something too trivial to mention. The language we use to describe a sheet of paper reinforces the cognitive neglect of its side.

[From a Sheet of Paper to a Book]

Being ignored doesn't produce absence, it produces a different kind of presence. Johanna Drucker writes, "*Artists' books are almost always self-conscious about the structure and meaning of the book as a form.*" Similarly, a stack of paper is not merely a vessel for content, it constructs meaning through its form, structure, and material presence. The thickness of a stack alters perception: a single sheet is a poster, a thin stack is a magazine, a thick stack is a dictionary. Thinness feels fashionable, current, ephemeral; thickness feels solemn, archival, old. This echoes certain rules of typographic layout: a *Van de Graaf grid*—with a small type area, narrow gutter, and wide outer margins—tends to feel classical; a page with evenly proportioned margins on all four sides tends to feel modern. In design, we often place great emphasis on how the layout of a magazine differs from that of a dictionary, but rarely ask what happens when a magazine becomes as thick as a dictionary.



An example that emphasizes on 'dimension' is Michael Mandiberg's *Print Wikipedia*. Mandiberg transformed the entirety of the English-language Wikipedia into over 7,600 volumes of printed books. In this project, the volume of the set matters more than the information it carries, the interior of the books is almost never read in full, but its mass gives form to the overwhelming weight of knowledge. Another case is Tauba Auerbach's *RGB Colorspace Atlas*, a book that contains all possible permutations within the RGB color model, a three-dimensional version of Photoshop's color picker. Auerbach's book is not meant to be read page by page, but apprehended as a single, unified object. It should be looked at, rather than read. The image slips away from the page, gathering into a continuous form.



[Between a Poster and a Book]

I am concerned with a state that lies between paper and book. A single sheet of paper is an almost weightless, two-dimensional surface—a flat, instantaneous reading experience. A book, by contrast, is a volumetric structure composed of many such sheets, ordered and bound into a continuous, linear, and turnable space. A sheet becomes a book by being stacked; a book begins with a single sheet.

In graphic design, a single sheet is known as a poster; a stack of sheets becomes a book. A poster is a single, unbound sheet, almost dimensionless. A book is a bound stack of sheets with volume. What lies in between is:

- A. something thick, yet unbound;
- B. something thin, but carrying the attribute of thickness.

A. Poster as content + book as medium

Bibliography

The former corresponds to an inquiry into the relationship between content and its carrier: does content rely on its original medium? What happens if I preserve the content of the poster but shift it into the medium of the book? The result is this: a thick stack of paper is forced to share a single image. The poster image, originally occupying the front of a single sheet, now slips to the edge. Since each page measures only 0.184mm thick, what could once be carried by one poster must now be reconstructed by 1,631 sheets, collectively rebuilding the original A4 surface. Through the dismantling of its physical basis, the poster image no longer resides on the surface of the sheet, but becomes something that slides around the entire “body”, a ghost drifting along the structure’s edges. On the other hand, paper, originally a neutral carrier of content, is transformed by structure into an active participant in image-making. It shifts from being a transparent channel into becoming a formative force, an agent that defines the image itself. This reflects the proposition in media theory: The medium is not neutral. It shapes what it carries. As McLuhan said: “*We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.*”

B. Book as content + poster as medium

The latter addresses questions about systems of circulation: what happens if I fill a piece of paper with content belonging to a book? In this poster, the ISBN is retained as a marker of the book's identity. A numbering mechanism originally belonging to the publishing system is inserted into an object that is understood to be a poster. The ISBN allows something that is not a book to be recognized as one, this reveals how systems of circulation define media identity. In graphic design, a medium’s identity appears to be determined by content and form: a bound stack of printed pages, with a cover and page numbers, is considered a book. But within systems of circulation, it is the presence of an ISBN—the number—that authorizes an object as a book. As Foucault suggests, “truth” is not something that naturally reveals itself, but is constructed through systems of classification, discursive formations, and regimes of visibility. “What is a book” or “What is a poster” is not decided by the object itself—but by the institutional structures that name, organize, and render it visible.

I suppose what I’m exploring is a certain indeterminacy, something that lies between a poster and a book.

- 1 If a poster no longer resides on the surface of a single sheet, but drifts along the edges of a stack, is it still a poster? If a book loses its binding and chapters, exists by number alone, can it still be called a book?
- 2 Is the identity of a medium defined by its content, by its material structure, or by the system that classifies it?
- 3 How do we understand what a thing is? Is a poster with an ISBN still a poster, or is it a very thin book? If a publication requires no content, no pages, no words, but can exist through a number alone, how do we distinguish what is a book, and what is not?

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