

APORIA JOURNEY

The Rebellion of The Visual

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For my mom and dad.

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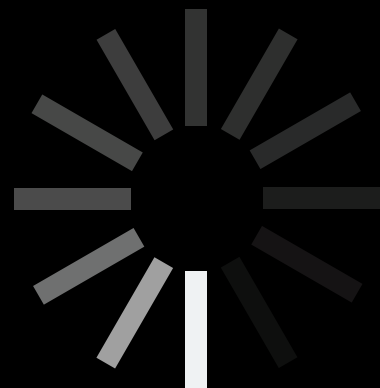
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CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	4
ABSTRACT	8
INTRODUCTION	13
Black Sun	14
The Disequilibrium of The Reality	18
Rebellious Spirit	22
THE APORIA MAGAZINE	28
Beyond The Real	56
Good Ugly Design	64
Socio-Political Communication Tools	68

CONCLUSION	80
Visualizing Rebellion	80
Further Research	84
APPENDICES	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY	98
LIST OF FIGURES	100



“In formal logic, a contradiction is the signal of a defeat; but in the evolution of real knowledge it marks the first step in progress towards a victory.”
(Whitehead, 1997)

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a creative work called “APORIA” which is a fictional magazine that engages the ideological complexities of the current visual age. As a graphic designer, in addition to understanding how to use visual language effectively to communicate, ability to question the interpretations and meanings established by symbols is especially critical in this age. I wanted to explore the role and potential of graphic design in relation to social and political issues, therefore I am using APORIA magazine as a means to explore the ways in which graphic design could interpret possible social and political issues.

In this practice-based exploration, I have investigated the ways and effects of rebellion from an interdisciplinary perspective and developed a rebellious visual communication strategy. APORIA magazine is a thought tool to break beyond the reality, a design strategy to break the rules of graphic design and conventional aesthetics, and a visual practice to trigger social and political dialogue. Through this work, I encourage designers to work with a “rebellious spirit” as a way to explore and create.

INTRODUCTION

As a graphic designer with an economic background, I have always been very interested in the relationship between visual communication and social and political issues, especially the relationship between visual communication and ideology. At the same time, as a Chinese who has lived and studied in Canada for eight years, the experience of cultural differences between China and the West also made me realized the importance of visual communication in the current era of globalization. Through the reflection and research on personal experience, cognitive psychology, and deconstructionism in relation to design, I have constructed the concept and research framework of the APORIA project and used it as a means to explore the potential of visual communication in relation to social and political issues.

BLACK SUN

Art class was one of my favorite classes in elementary school. I remember when I was in the fifth grade, there was an art class that asked everyone to draw a picture based on the theme of happy moments. When my classmates were painting mother’s smiling face, robot, or stuffed toy, I have drawn a big black circle. When the teacher came to me and asked me what it was, I told her that it was a warm sun. She smiled, and then she picked up an orange watercolor pen and drew a circle of the same size on my paper. She told me that the sun can be painted in orange or yellow, but not in black. Because there is no black sun.

This black sun appeared in my mind from time to time when I became to an adult. Looking back now, I understand why my art teacher would tell me “there is no black sun”. Chinese culture is relatively traditional and conservative. Compared with the *personal development* that Western education values, Chinese education places more emphasis on *collective development*. Therefore, my teacher as an educator who lived in this kind of educational system and cultural characteristics, naturally believed students should not draw a sun in the color of black.

I have always been a “problem child” since I was young. In elementary school, I never liked to obey the rules and didn’t like to accept preaching about obedience. I always like to challenge the authority of adults through the behavior of “breaking the rules”, and this has brought me a lot of trouble.



↑ Figure 1: chinese elementary school’s class room. When I was in primary school, students were required to put their hands behind their backs except when raising their hands and writing.

↑ Figure 2: Film Still from Malèna, 2000
This is the scene in the movie when Malena smokes and the men fight to light her cigarette. Chinese movies rarely show women smoking, so it is this scene that makes me interested in cultural differences.

It is the difference between the culture shown in the movie and my real life that had given me the opportunity to think in contradictions. Through the film, the difference created by the cross-cultural, cross-time, and cross-regional visual experience has become the trigger for me to think.

In the summer of 2013, I came to Canada with curiosity and longing for the western world. I started a completely different experience on the other side of the earth. From Beijing, the capital of China, to Ottawa, the capital of Canada, everything is so disruptive and different. With my inherent worldview and an open attitude, I immersed myself in a completely different culture and society.

For various reasons, even though I have shown more passion for music, art, and writing since I was young, I still chose economics for my undergraduate study. Growing up in a socialist country, but receiving an education in economics in a capitalist country was a very interesting yet contradicted experience. When I was studying in the early days, I began to believe that the market economy in capitalism is not only the freest economic mode but also a reason for the most active economic performance. However, with more learning and accumulation of knowledge, I have increasingly doubted and questioned the authenticity of economics. This is a suspicion of economic supremacy, a suspicion of the optimal economic system, a suspicion of progress and civilization.

Economics itself is a discipline about wealth and how wealth is distributed in the world. It is a structural study through analysis and theory. After studying economics, I felt more clearly that this was not my interest. Rather than “*what is this world like*” or “*why is this world like this*”, what I want to explore is “*how could this world be like?*” The exploration of the *could* is where my passion sits. This is an exploration of *possibility*, as the exploration of a world *beyond reality*. Therefore, design has become the direction for me to change my academic path and my way of knowing. Learning design with the academic knowledge and way of thinking cultivated in economics is a conflicting feeling of drifting between the sky and the ground.



↑ Figure 3: Tiananmen square in Beijing and Parliament Building in Ottawa

It is like I was trying to see the world beyond reality through a pair of realistic glasses. I learned to take off my glasses and also to deconstruct my glasses. From reality to explore beyond reality, from beyond reality to imagine a better reality.

It is my rebellious mind and the reflection of differences in my personal experience that determines the research focus and direction of this thesis. Meanwhile, the experience of differences in culture, cognition, and ideology plays a big role in my design practice as the creative material and exploratory inspiration.

I feel like I almost started this
APORIA magazine when I was five.

THE DISEQUILIBRIUM OF THE REALITY

There are two movies that have great influences on me during my teenage time, one is *The Truman Show*, the other is the *Fight Club*. Even though *The Truman Show* and *Fight Club* presented different stories, but both of these two films are using protagonist’s resistance to their reality as a means to trigger the audience’s imagination. For me as a teenager, these two movies opened a Pandora’s box for me. I began to pay attention to the rules and principles in the real world. At the same time, I was always questioning about the authenticity in the reality. Through a fictional world which different from the real world, the audience gets an opportunity to think and imagine beyond the real.

According to Darko Suvin who is the author of *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction*, he claimed that science fiction narratives are generated by a *novum*, a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and addressee’s norm of reality (1988). In dystopian films, this *novum* is usually a brutal form of socio-political domination that the protagonist attempts to escape or defeat. Therefore, the *novum* presents the future by estranging the reader from the present. This process of critical reflection is the cognitive estrangement achieved by science fiction (Suvin, 1988). If utopia promotes imagination through hope, then dystopia uses this *novum* to arouse the interest of audiences and readers and promote imagination, helping the audience to reflect on the real world.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/72KeAco6FH3xjMrRA>

↑ Figure 4: Film Still from The Truman Show, 1998
This is the scene in the movie when Truman decided to go out of his world after he knew his reality is not real.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/xt6z7xbdZvoPoXHV8>

↑ Figure 5: Film Still from Fight Club, 1998
Taylor in the movie is the personality imagined by Jack, it’s also a way for him to escape from the reality that disappoints him.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/LJwT5dwmFwHxapGL7>

However, the limitations of the film and the inherent characteristics of this media make the audience passively accept the concepts and information in the film narratives (Dunne & Raby, 2013). According to McLuhan's *cool and hot media theory* (1994), in hot media, there is no space for the audience to fill in, but in comparison, cool media requires the audience to fill in the gaps to form a fuller picture. Another perspective to understand the differences between cool and hot media is identifying their information resolutions (McLuhan, 1994). In hot media, the information resolution is high in return for low audience involvement; but in cool media, information resolution is low, providing a much higher audience involvement. Therefore, the film as a hot media according to McLuhan provides high resolution but low audience involvement.

From the concepts and methods elaborated in the book *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* by Dunne & Raby, I noticed some similarities to dystopia's

↑ Figure 6: Dunne & Raby, Needy Robot, 2007 from *Technological Dreams No. 1: Robots*, 2007. Robot 3: Sentinel. Photograph by Per Tingleff.

This project is mentioned in the chapter of unrealistic aesthetics in the book.

narrative technique *novum*. They all tried to use a kind of difference and abnormality from reality as a way to attract the attention from the audience, and then to triggering their imagination. However, the reason this method can effectively attract attention and provide space for active thinking is not only because of the design method but also because of the effect in cognitive psychology.

Piaget's theory (1976) of cognitive development indicated that when encountering information that requires new schema or to modify an existing schema, people will encounter a disequilibrium. This *disequilibrium* is an imbalance between what is understood and what is encountered. During this state of *cognitive imbalance*, people will try to reduce this imbalance by developing a new schema or adapting old ones until the balance is restored (Piaget, 1976). According to Piaget, learning depends on this process of being in a disequilibrium state and becoming balanced, from which people can have the opportunity to grow and develop.

What speculative design has encouraged is for designers to use design artifacts as a way to trigger imagination and provide an active thinking opportunity in relation to social dreaming (Dunne & Raby, 2013). These design artifacts use aesthetic differences as a means to break the cognitive balance for the audience and create a state of imbalance. It is in this unbalanced state which provides the audience an opportunity to break through the existing cognitive framework of themselves and to jump out of the constraints of reality.

APORIA magazine is using aesthetic differences as a means to presents cognitive imbalance, and to trigger imagination and reflection.

REBELLIOUS SPIRIT

Today we live in a visual age. From a pop idol’s hairstyle to a president’s hat, every visual artifact as a visual symbol is not only a communicative tool about meaning but also an event of culture and politics. Semiotics as the study of signs and symbols, it explores how humans use and interpret signs and symbols to communicate, learn, and develop knowledge (Chandler, 1994).

The founders of modern semiotics are Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, who respectively proposed their own semiotic basic systems in the early 20th century. Saussure indicated that sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified, where a signifier can be a word or symbol, a signified is an underlying meaning associated with the signifier. Therefore a sign is a thing that conveys meaning. Saussure saw the relation between signifier and signified as being essentially arbitrary, and motivated only by social convention. Pierce pays more attention to the interpretation of the meaning of symbols and the important role that readers play in the creativity of reading symbols.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/mwhWauCc1MKSGbtQ9>

↑ Figure 7: The hat which carries Trump’s campaign slogan “MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN”, has become a powerful symbol of political propaganda

Figure 8: Illustration from *Visible Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics in The Visual Arts* by David Crow in 2003.

↑ Figure 8: Illustration from *Visible Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics in The Visual Arts* by David Crow in 2003.

Peirce interprets symbol as a trinity of representamen (R), object (O) and interpretant (I).

Pierce believes that any symbol is composed of three items: a representamen, an object, and an interpretant (Chandler, 1994). Among them, the representamen is the carrier of the symbol, and the object is what the symbol represents. In this group of ternary relations, the interpretant is the decisive factor. The interpretant is the equivalent created by the symbol in the mind of the interpreter and can be understood in a broad sense as the meaning or thought produced by the symbol in the mind of the interpreter (Hall, 2012). Pierce emphasized that the core of the symbolic meaning is the interpreter’s own understanding and interpretation of the symbolic meaning. If Saussure’s dual semiotic theory is structuralist, then Pierce’s semiotics is post-structuralist.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/ncM3Bxo2SRr4xtzs5>

↑ Figure 9: Frank Owen Gehry, Disney Concert Hall, California, 2003

The architectural works of American Postmodernist and deconstructive Architects

With the advent of postmodernism in the 1960s, there has been more and more criticism of this dual relationship in Saussure's semiotic theory. Postmodernism originated from modernism but rebelled against modernism. It is a critique and deconstruction of essentialism, fundamentalism, and metaphysics of presence in traditional Western philosophy. Postmodernism believes that there are infinitely many interpretation possibilities for a given text, representation, and symbol (Butler, 2002). In this way, the literal meaning and traditional interpretation must give way to the author's intention and readers to reflect. At the end of the 19th century, Nietzsche declared that "God is dead" and demanded revaluation of all values. Since then, his rebellious ideas have had a profound impact on the West (Linker, 2002). As a trend of thought that questioned rationality and subverted tradition, Nietzsche's philosophy became one of the ideological sources of deconstructionism.

Deconstructionism is an extremely important school of postmodernism. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, as the leader of the deconstruction, was dissatisfied with the philosophical thoughts that have been running through the West for thousands of years. He challenged the traditional philosophical beliefs and criticized the Western metaphysical tradition since Plato. In order to oppose metaphysics, the logos center, and all closed and rigid systems, the deconstruction movement vigorously promotes the dissolution of the subject, the diffidence of meaning, and the freedom of signifier (Lupton, 1994).

Based on Derrida's deconstructionism, designers in the post-modern period began to use deconstruction as a means of style exploration and applied it to design, which emerged in the architectural design world in the late 1980s. Deconstruction logically denies the traditional basic design principles (aesthetics, mechanics, function), which creates new meanings (Lupton, 1994). The ultimate goal for the deconstruction is to provide people with a means of thought activities.

“As designers, maybe we are somewhere in between; we provide some visual clues but the viewer still has to imagine the world the designs belong to and its politics, social relations, and ideology.” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 75)

The Truman Show

Fight Club

Dystopia

Speculative Design

Cognitive Disequilibrium

Postmodernism

Deconstruction

When I put these words together, it should not be difficult to notice certain common areas between them. To some extent, they all have a destructive *rebellious spirit*. The interdisciplinary exploration and investigation of *rebellion* is the core and focus of my thesis. It was through the investigation of *rebellion* that the architectural structure of the APORIA magazine was born and constructed.

THE MAGAZINE

APORIA magazine is the rebellion of visual. The word *aporia* originally comes from Greek. In philosophy, it means a philosophical puzzle or a state in a puzzlement, as well as a rhetorically useful expression of doubt (Politis, 2006). I named this work APORIA, which implies my design practice intention: not to create clear or correct visual information, but to create dreamlike visual content as a means for visual exploration.

As an experimental and fictional visual magazine, APORIA is a graphic-based publication that contains no articles, and each issue revolves around some ideological themes. This magazine is *a performed piece* of visual communication in a surreal visual style. APORIA magazine is a pure *graphic performance* through the rebellious visual strategy by using semiotics and visual strategies.

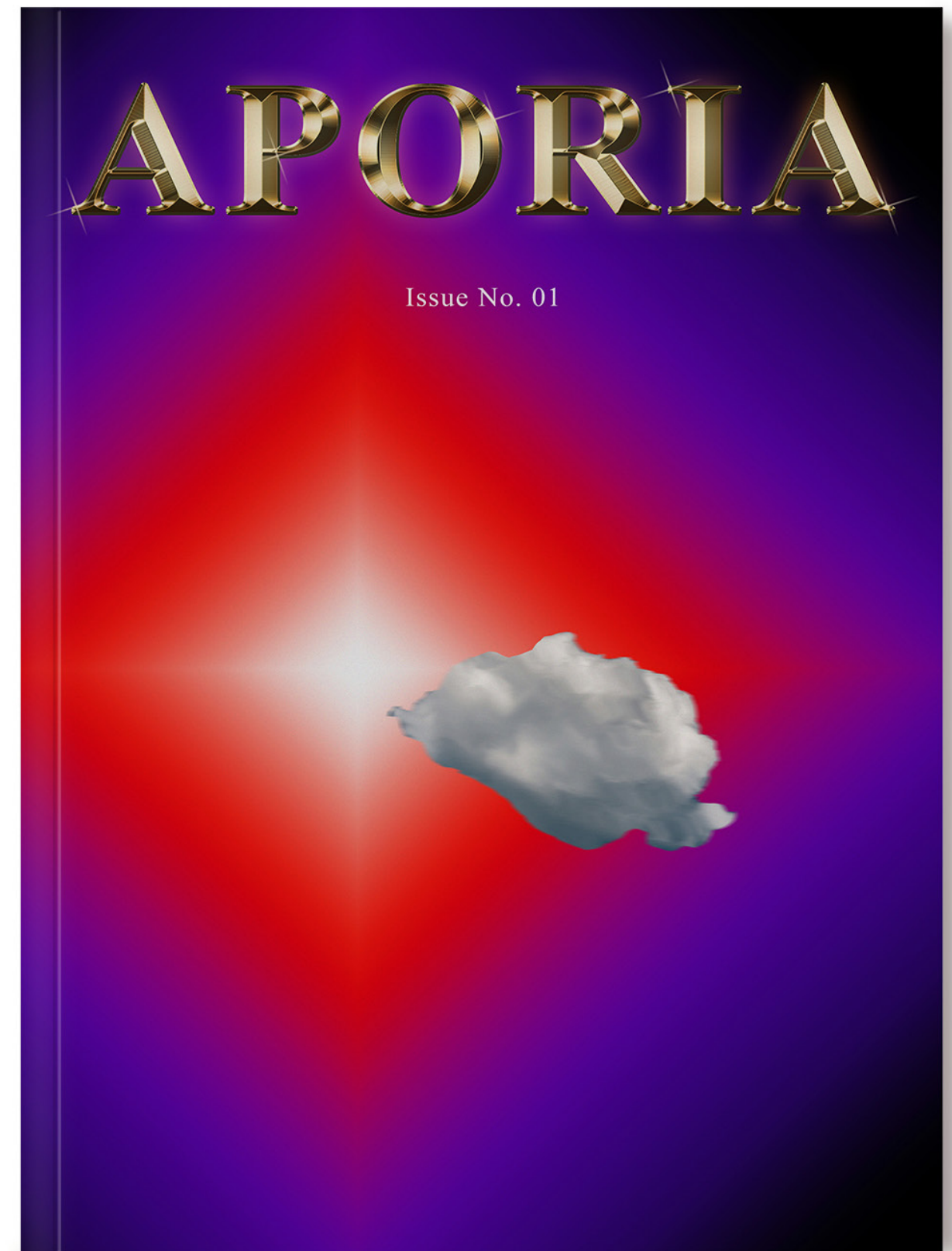
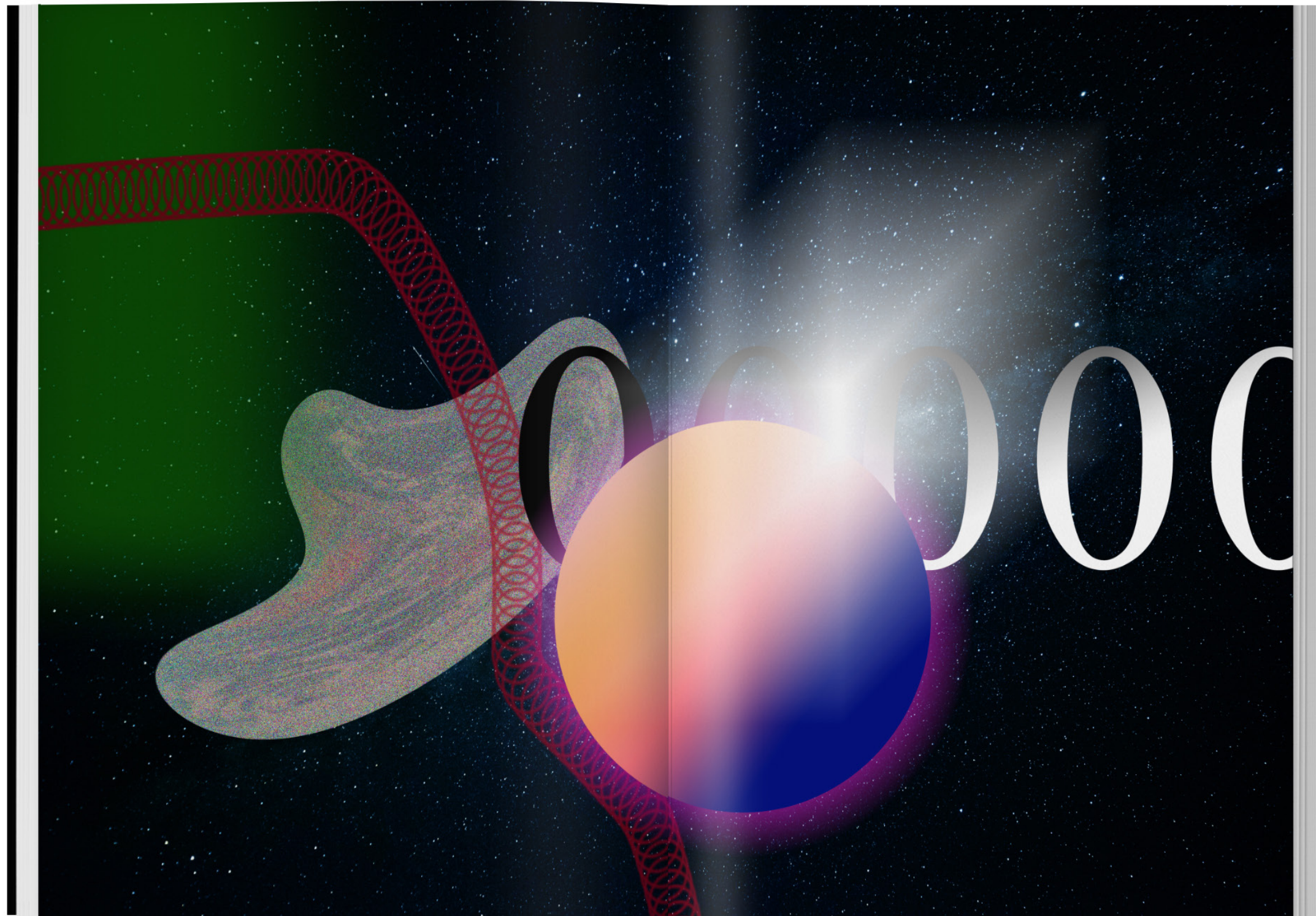
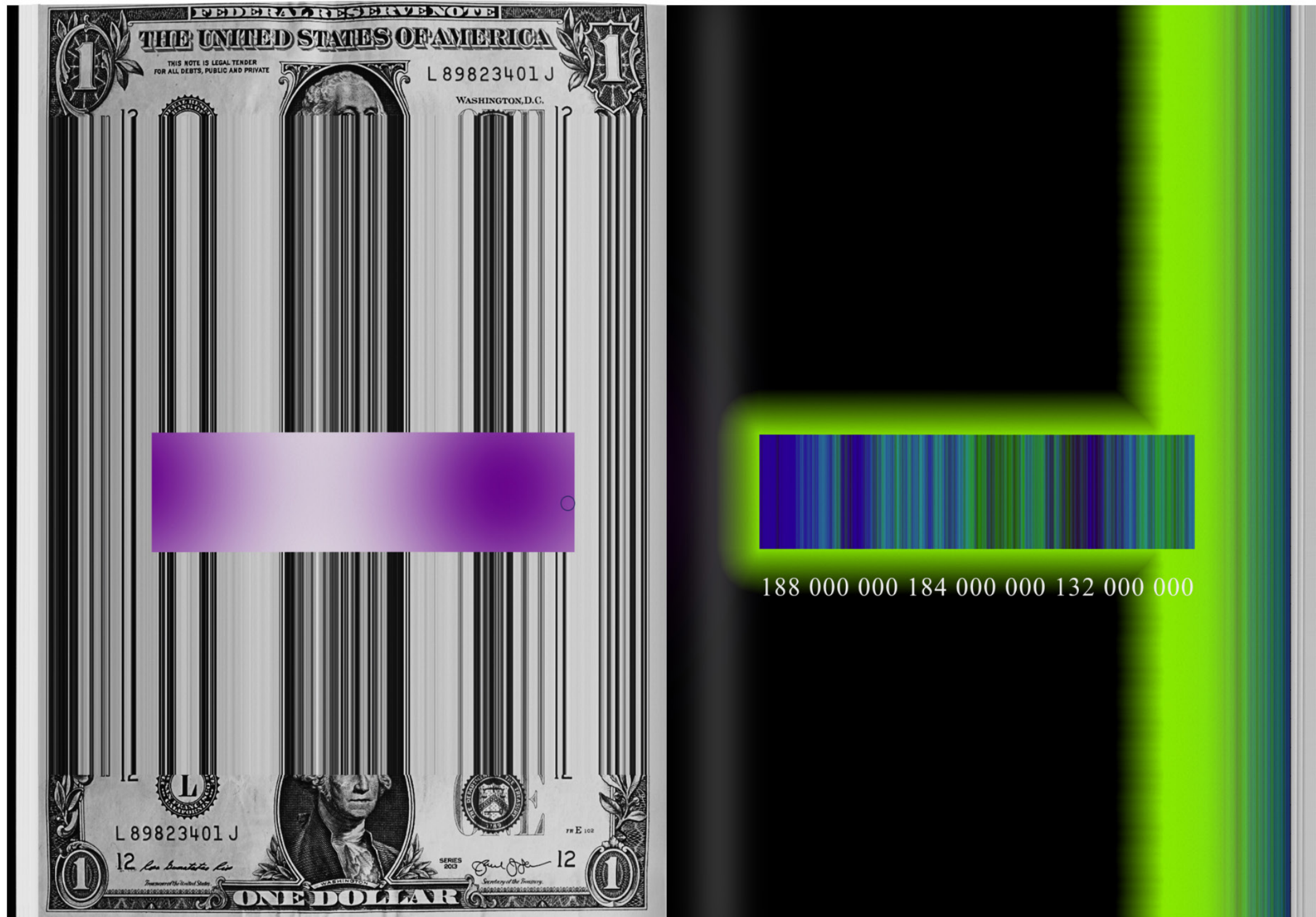


Figure 10: APORIA magazine

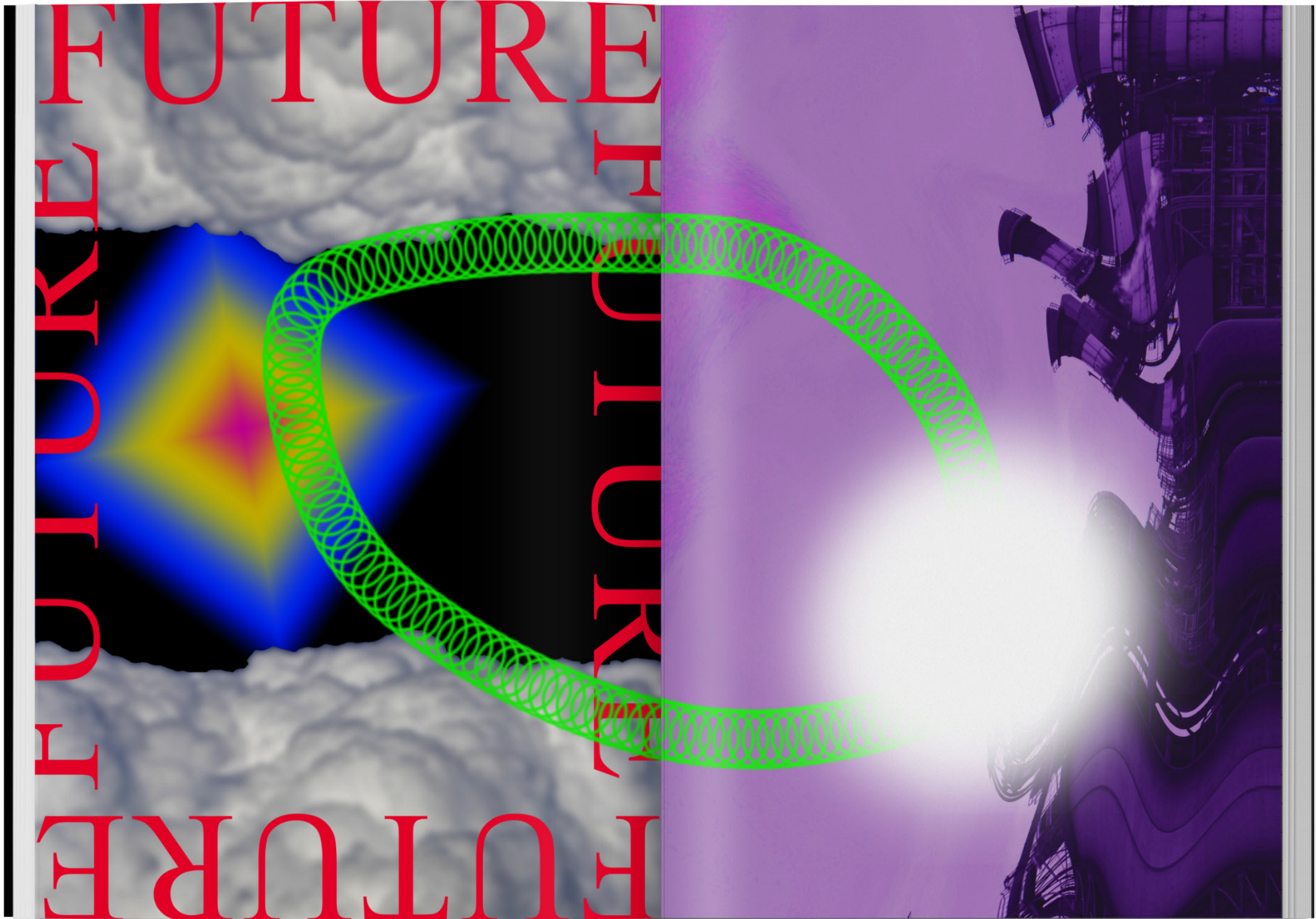








NATURE







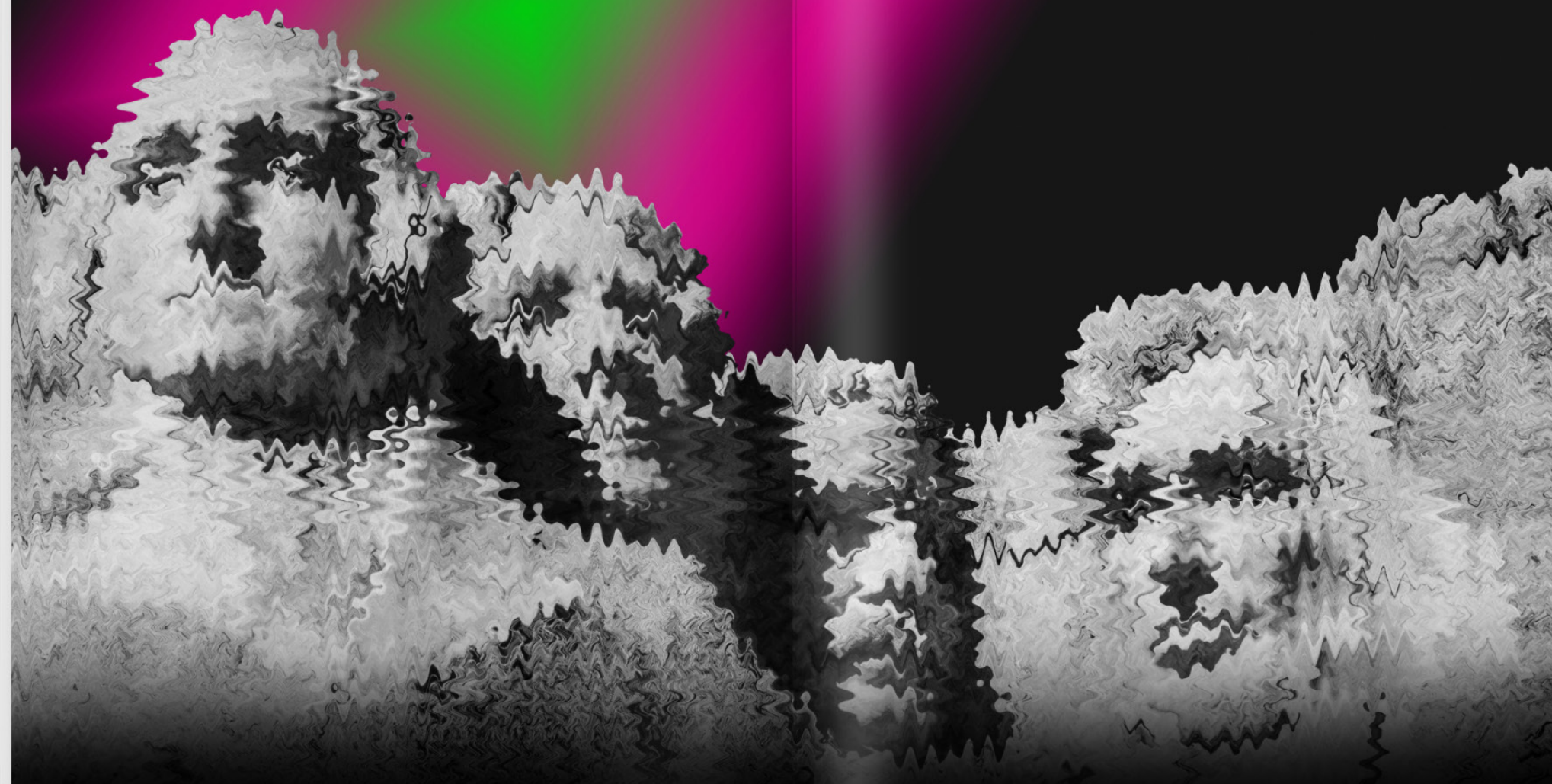








TOMORROW



BEYOND THE REAL

APORIA magazine is based on the concern for the real world, but it tries to explore the possibility of beyond the real. When reading APORIA magazine, readers are likely to be in a state of confusion. What is this page about? What are these images trying to express? What's the meaning of this? As an experimental graphic design magazine, the content of every page of APORIA is not easy to understand. These confusions and uncertainties are part of the reading experience that this magazine hopes to provide. At the same time, it is also a way for the magazine to explore beyond reality.

“Semiotics involves studying representations and the processes involved in representational practices, and to semioticians, reality always involves representation. A defining feature of signs is that they are treated by their users as standing for or representing other things.”
(Chandler, 1994, p.15)

If “reality” always involves representation, then APORIA magazine explores the rebellion against reality by breaking the traditional representation of symbols as a symbolic strategy. In different cultures, different countries and different ideologies, the representation of symbols can help people as a means for communication, also can be the interpretation of

<https://images.app.goo.gl/H4N3UrRqvR1VrJGu8>

↑ Figure 11: The Treachery of Images by Rene Magritte, 1929

meaning. However, the symbols shared by specific groups of people also limit their ability to think and to imagine out of their own ideological and cognitive constraints. APORIA tries to create a visual exploration beyond reality by disrupting the conventional representation and reorganizing symbols, and provides a pause for thought. This pause of thought can also be seen in Rene Magri's *The Treachery of Images*. In *The Treachery of Images* in 1929, through the contradiction between the image and the text, Rene Magri creates a kind of struggle which provides a pause of thought in the process of the audience trying to find a stable and meaningful interpretation. In my early experimental project, there was a poster design with emotion as the theme. In this poster design, the contradiction between text and image is also used as a visual strategy. This contradictory symbolic strategy has been developed, and eventually became the symbolic and visual strategy in APORIA magazine.

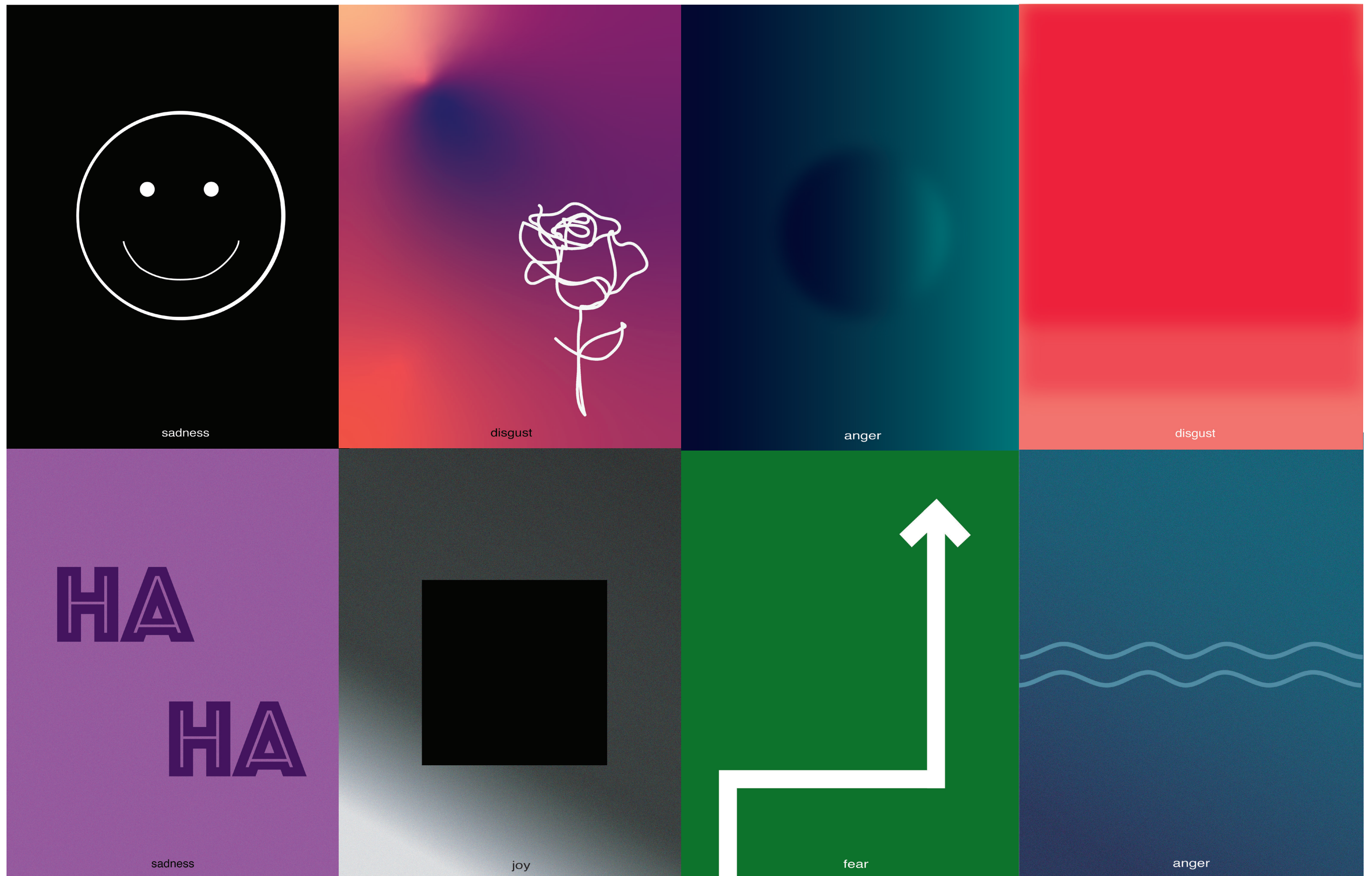


Figure 12: experimental poster project, 2020



↑ Figure 13: Images in APORIA magazine

In APORIA magazine, this pause of thought serves as the key to enter the unreal and beyond the real through the inconsistent relationship between the text and the image. For example, in one of the pages, the original design intention is to express the materialization and distortion of time caused by consumerism in our daily life. However, it is not easy for readers to understand it just by seeing the image. There is no direct and clear relationship between the image (*high-heeled shoes*) and the text (*yesterday*). When reading this page, readers need to try to establish the relationship between the image and the text through their own efforts, and they also need to try to understand the meaning and intention of the visual image by their own interpretation. APORIA magazine takes the inconsistent relationship between text and image as a part of its symbolic strategy to create a feast of visual imagination.

APORIA magazine uses the surreal visual style to create visual works, and uses this destructive and chaotic visual aesthetic style as a means to explore imagination. At the same time, APORIA magazine applies the Surrealist world view which breaks through the logic and reality to try to develop a visual and aesthetics strategy. In Metahaven's various design projects, a unique nonrealistic visual aesthetics can also be seen. As a pioneer graphic design studio in Europe, Metahaven redefined political aesthetics and used their unique visual aesthetics as a design means to research. As an experimental magazine, APORIA tries to use its unique visual aesthetics as a means of expression to carry out visual exploration on social and political issues, so as to triggering thought and imagination beyond the real.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/S7o6PrDof99jFfmDA>

↑ Figure 14: Metahaven: The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda), HD video still 2015

<https://images.app.goo.gl/tox1neJaPTm7uTH59>

↑ Figure 15: Metahaven: The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda), HD video still 2015

<https://images.app.goo.gl/4tDseFJhBMc5rtGLA>

↑ Figure 16: Jean Baudrillard, Luxembourg, 2003

So why does APORIA try to explore beyond the real? APORIA does not blindly criticize reality, but it hopes to break through the rules and constraints of reality and try to explore the possibility beyond reality. From the perspective of design, it takes the unique aesthetics as the visual exploration of the topic; from the perspective of readers, it tries to create a more open and uncertain reading experience. Therefore, it can be said that APORIA magazine is a resistance to the reality. Jean Baudrillard believes that photography cannot convey meaning. He believes that photography can resist violence from the aspects of information, communication and aesthetics. Baudrillard rediscovers the pure events in the images, and used photography as a means of resistance. I used the word *performance* to explain the expression form of APORIA. The reason why I used *performance* is that compared with *visual communication*, APORIA magazine is more interested

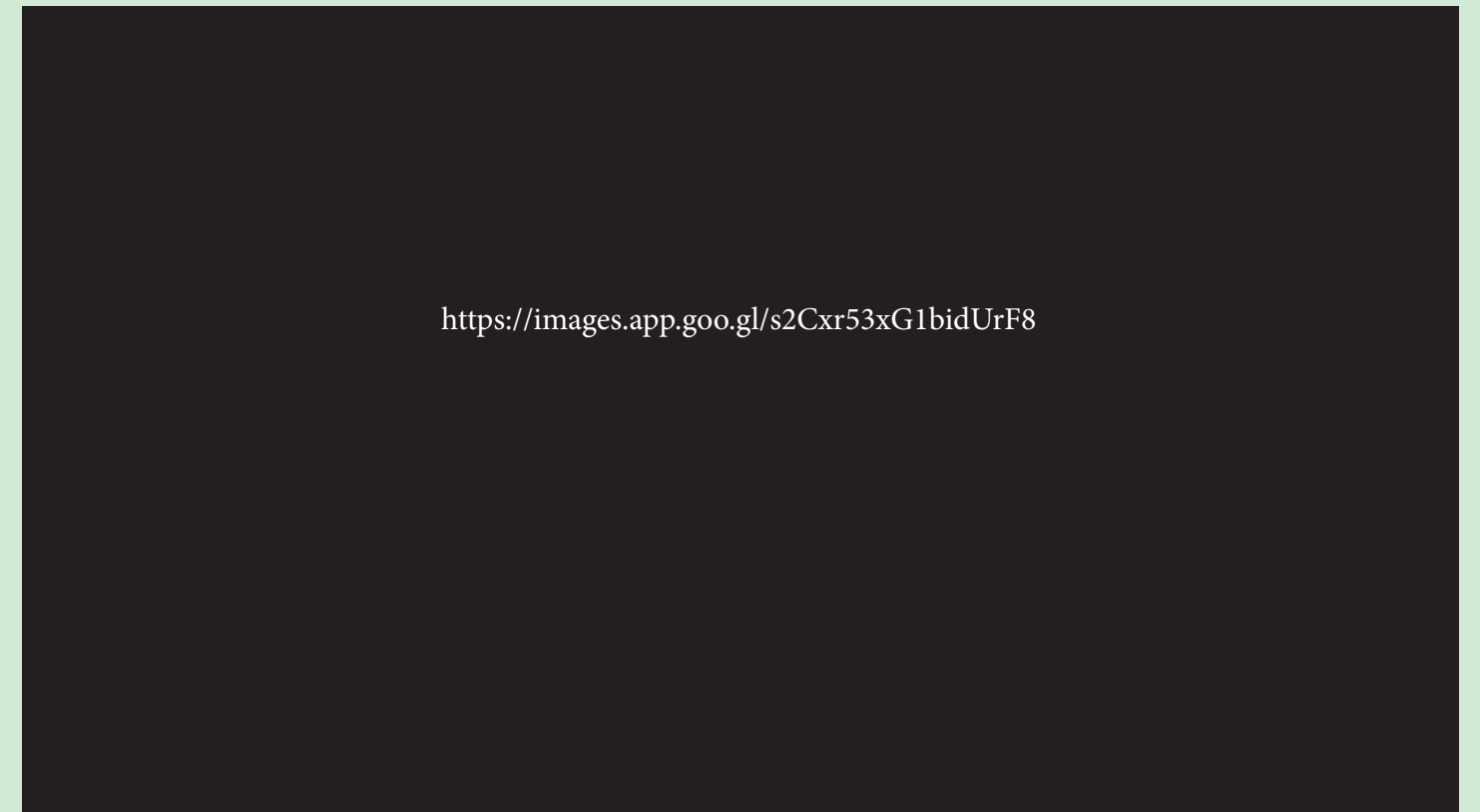
in *visual performance*: using visual as a pure expression and exploration, rather than focusing on the visual meaning and message ultimately conveyed. It is the rebellion against reality and meaning.

In the first *Surrealist Manifestos* published in Paris in 1924, André Breton pointed out that surrealism is to resolve the conflict that has always existed between dreams and reality and to achieve an absolute reality, beyond reality. Salvador Dalí said, “*Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be the shackles limiting our vision.*”

In APORIA magazine, destruction is not only to destroy, it has become a way to explore possibilities, a thought tool to break through and beyond the real.

GOOD UGLY DESIGN

APORIA magazine is an “ugly design”. *Design elements: a graphic style manual* puts forward 20 golden rules for good design in the book. If you read through APORIA magazine, you will find that it not only does not abide by these 20 rules but also breaks many so-called golden rules of graphic design. Nowadays, many conventional rules of graphic design have been broken, and there are more and more “ugly graphic designs” that have been created. In August 2007, Patrick Burgoyne who is the chief editor of Creative Review, wrote an article on the Internet called *The New Ugly*, in which the concept of *the new ugly* was proposed. In such an era of great emphasis on aesthetics, designers who do not want to stick to conventions begin to try to break through the barriers of aesthetics and the original aesthetic order. In the first two decades of the 21st century, *the new ugly* as a rule-breaking, radical, and ugly design style was gradually formed (Burgoyne, 2007).



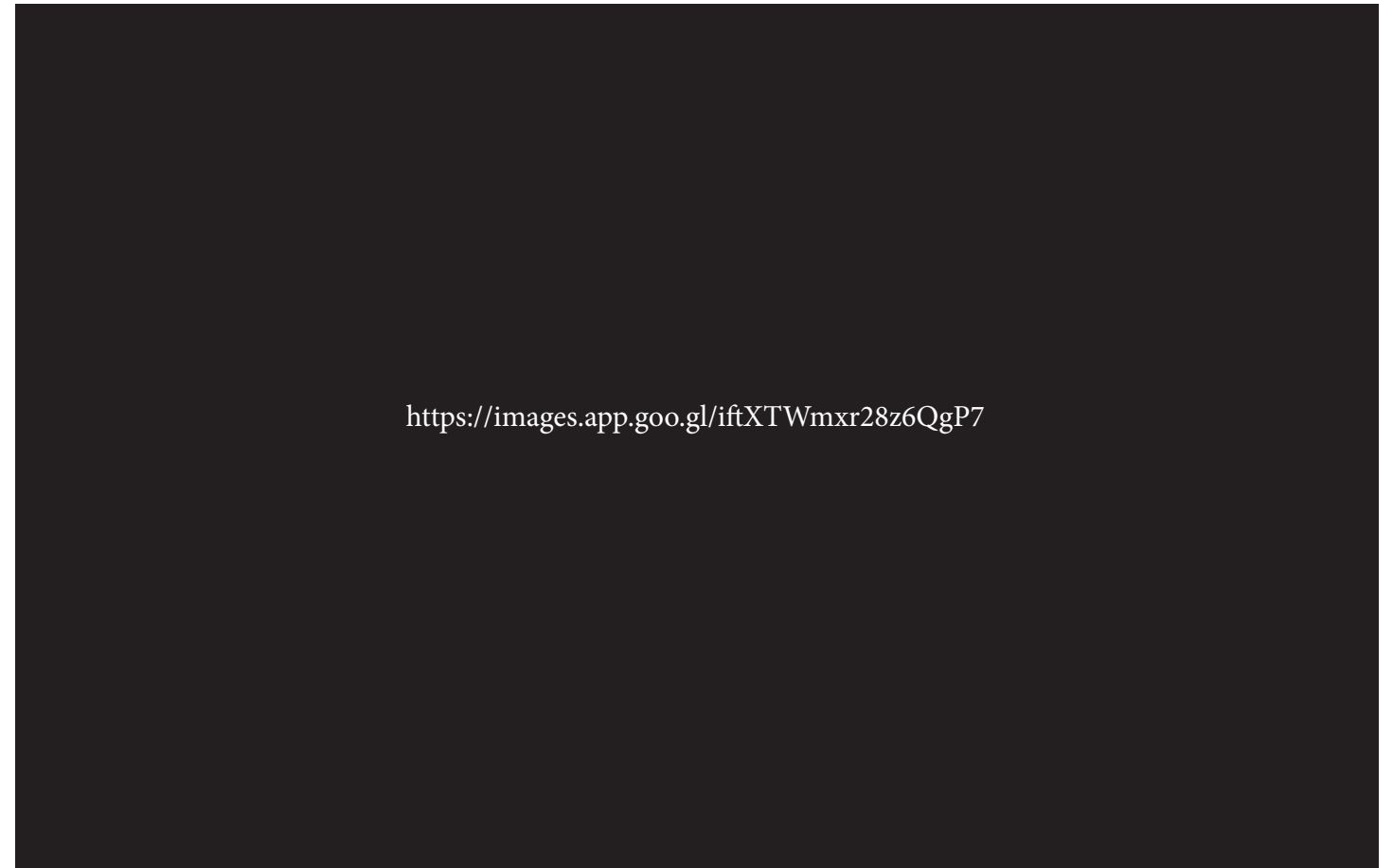
<https://images.app.goo.gl/s2Cxr53xG1bidUrF8>

↑ Figure 17: Darius Ou, Autotypography project, 2012

APORIA magazine as *the new ugly* design, not only ignores the general design rules deliberately but also intends to break some common sense of graphic design. First of all, APORIA does not follow the regular magazine design rules. It has no articles, no page numbers, no text description for readers to refer to. Secondly, APORIA magazine does not have a layout standard. Each page is designed as an independent image, and there is no standard editorial layout from page to page. Finally, APORIA magazine tries to develop a rebellious ugly style and tries to break the stereotype principle of good design. Darius ou, a designer from Singapore, is also the challenger of graphic design rules. Within a year, Darius Ou created 365 posters trying to break the stereotype of “good design”, and he is one of the important advocates of Singapore’s *new ugly design*.

Steven Heller, director of the design department at the New York Academy of visual arts, published an article entitled *Cult of the Ugly* in the magazine EYE. In the article, he points out that in the past, design often represented beauty and order. But now, the existing systems in the design world need to be reevaluated. The orders have been greatly impacted, and different forms of conflicts have followed. So how to define ugliness in the postmodern design environment is critical (Heller, 1993). With the proposal of this question, more and more graphic designers began to rethink the standard and purpose of visual aesthetics. Meanwhile, with the tide of postmodernism, a strong storm of judging ugliness appeared in a provocative manner, and the rational aesthetics was challenged by the perceptual ugliness. After that, various works of *ugly style* began to enter the public view. APORIA was born out of such a design intention: *rebellion*. APORIA magazine uses exaggerated and complex graphic design techniques to arrange images and challenges the principle of *good design*. Through surrealist graphics, dazzling colors, and chaotic layout, APORIA has passed a rebellious attitude to the conventional design rules with the provocative design language and developed its own visual aesthetics.

APORIA magazine tries to use a rebellious design style as a means to resist the conventional aesthetic rules in graphic design and to explore the potential of graphic design. This spirit of exploration in graphic design can always be seen in Quentin Fiore's design work. In order to convey McLuhan's media theory visually, Fiore decided not to design the book of *The Medium is The Massage* according to the conventional method at that time. Through a large number of images and scattered texts as a visual strategy to create a pioneering book design. Although this is a design work more than 50 years ago, Quentin Fiore's breakthrough thinking and unconventional design at that time are still very inspiring today.



↑ Figure 18: Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore,
The Medium is The Massge, 1967

So what's "good" about APORIA magazine? What does this "good" mean? As mentioned above, APORIA is a rebellion against good design, so it seems to be a paradox to say that APORIA is a good design. In fact, this *good* does not mean that it is *good design*, but that the provocative design language and the breaking through thinking of design are *good*. As Steven Heller said, "*ugly design can be a coherent attempt to create and define alternative standards* (Heller, 1993)."

As an attempt to break the conventional design, the *ugliness* of APORIA magazine is to break through the conventional aesthetic and some design standards, and also to try to explore more possibilities and potential of graphic design.

SOCIAL-POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TOOL

As a design practice to explore the potential and possibility of graphic design on social and political issues, APORIA magazine tries to explore and develop a visual communication and design aesthetic strategy that can bring more open dialogue and interpretation on social and political issues. Meanwhile, APORIA wants to invite readers to read uncertain visual content in a more open manner. This kind of uncertainty can be seen clearly in the *TOILETPAPER* magazine. As an art magazine, *TOILETPAPER* is very good at discussing contemporary social and political topics with an *open* attitude. This magazine is an art platform for self-experiment, but anyone can buy and read it in the form of printed matter. Although *TOILETPAPER* has a unique way of expression, behind its grotesque appearance, there is no lack of serious thinking and sharp views on such social-political issues as consumerism, media, and even religious politics.

In fact, before the APORIA magazine was finalized, there was a draft version in black and white. The design style and visual aesthetics of this black and white version are completely different from APORIA magazine. The visual information in the black and white version is very specific and clear, and the visual content of related social-political issues is relatively



↑ Figure 19: Toiletpaper magazine, 2017

<https://images.app.goo.gl/N4dRG5fc58VC16Ef6>



↑ Figure 20: Adbusters magazine

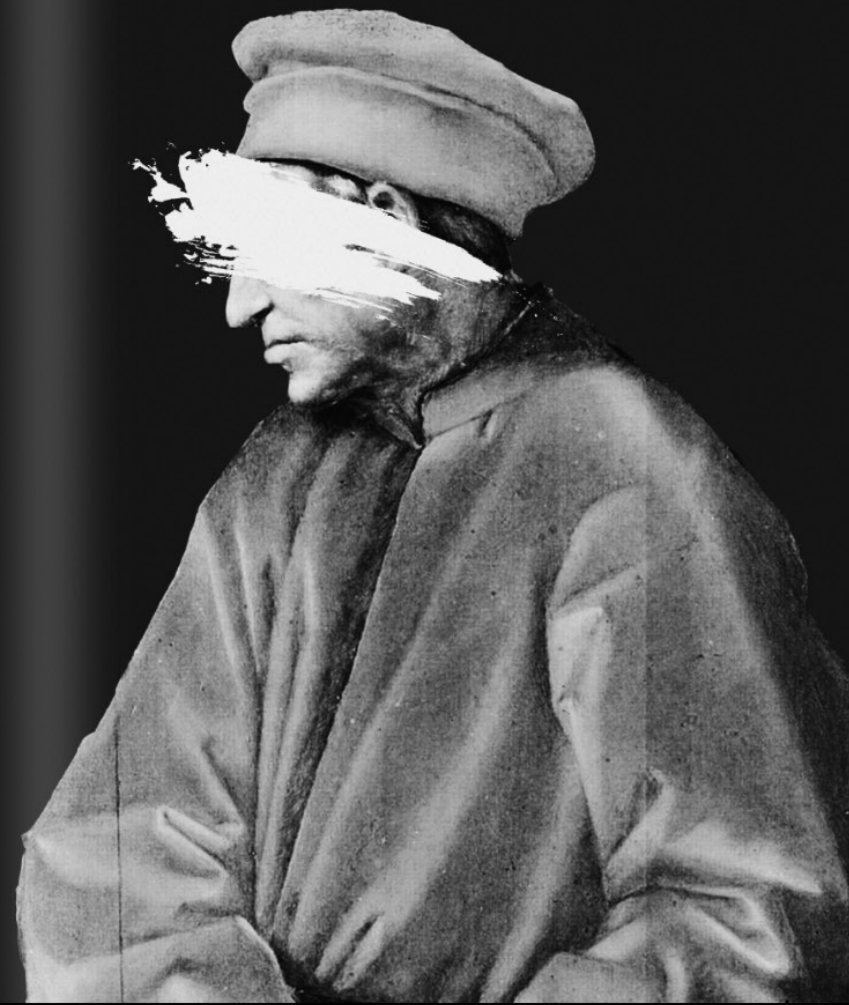
<https://images.app.goo.gl/jSX8q86JoACukGRr8>

radical and persuasive. Therefore, in this draft all the visions are created in an attempt to persuade the readers. As a radical and anti-capitalism magazine, *Adbusters* is excellent in visual persuasion. Through its unique visual strategy, *Adbusters* is very radical and powerful in the visual expression of social and political perspectives. However, the information *Adbusters* conveys through graphic design is relatively subjective and manipulative. As designers, especially graphic designers, we are very good at conveying specific information and significance through visual communication. However, does this manipulation limit the audience's interpretation freedom? Does this radical visual expression bring more integration or more differences to society? Can visual aesthetics with reconciliation ability become a kind of cultural and social adhesive? After reflecting on the visual strategies and visual aesthetics of social and political issues in the black and white version, APORIA tries to explore the visual dialogue in relation to social-political issues with a more *incomprehensible* visual expression strategy.

Capitalism as Religion



Money Became God



↑ Figure 21: Black and white version of magazine design



SIN

Not want to be rich is a sin

Anti-corporation is a sin

Anti-consumerism is a sin

Not progress is a sin

**GO SHOPPING WITH
YOUR FRIENDS,
GO TRAVELING
WITH YOUR FAMILY,
GO SPENDING
YOUR MONEY AND
FULFILL THE
OBLIGATIONS OF
A FAITHFUL
CONSUMER!**





Corporation

/ˌkɔrpəˈrɑʃ(ə)n/

noun



The corporations are the biggest contributors to market economy and technological progress, and they are also the glorious organizations that carry out missionary activities to the public. They not only disseminate religious ideas to the masses through advertising and public relations, but also hire labor to increase productivity and capital growth. Because corporations have a major impact on economic growth, they not only receive the love of believers, but also have special protection from the government and the laws.

This issue of APORIA magazine has launched a series of visual explorations on capitalism, consumerism, political propaganda, and other related topics. This *incomprehensible* visual strategy refers to visions that cannot be easily understood. This *incomprehensible* is also a kind of rebellion. APORIA tries to weaken the certainty in visual communication and to bring more open space for interpretation. For example, there is one page about political differences. First, there is a gradient Communist symbol in the middle of the image; second, there is a blurred White House as the background; finally, there are the words of HOME in the upper left corner and LAND in the lower right corner. The design intention of this page is to show the difference between the *multi-party* system in the United States and the *one-party* system in China. Although this difference is politically obvious, what APORIA hopes to create is a more open interpretatant opportunity. Therefore, it is difficult for readers to understand the creative intention. Readers need to associate and reflect on the symbols in the image to get their own interpretation. Metahaven is very pioneering and excellent in this respect. When looking at Metahaven's movies and visual products, it is difficult for the audience to understand its intention and the concept that the designer wants to convey. However, there is always deep and rigorous research and thinking behind its incomprehensible visuals. In a book called *Open Works*, Umberto Eco points out that open works provide readers with an open possibility. Readers can choose their own perspective, decide which is the prospect and which is the background, and freely associate what they see (crow, 2010).

As a social-political practice and a tool to trigger social and political dialogue, APORIA magazine creates and explores in relation to social-political issues through an incomprehensible visual communication strategy.



↑ Figure 22: Images in APORIA magazine

VISUALIZING REBELLION

APORIA tries to think about the relationship and potential between visual culture and visual communication in the era of globalization. Visual culture refers to the way of life in which an individual observes the world through a specific visual text. One of the most remarkable characteristics of visual culture is to visualize non-visual things. Because of the development of the Internet and technology, we are living in an era of visual wealth and vision domination (mirzoeff, 1999). At the same time, because of the development of globalization, the division and conflict between cultures are also increasing. The *global village* is a concept proposed by Marshall McLuhan, which is used to describe the phenomenon that the world culture is shrinking and expanding at the same time of instant cultural sharing realized by global technological progress (Dixon, 2009). On the one hand, people are more connected than before the electronic age, and technology enables people to obtain information from all over the world faster and more conveniently. On the other hand, this kind of globalization may also aggravate cultural conflicts, lead to cultural division, or lead to cultural domination of more developed countries.

But it is the existence of contradictions and divisions that makes me even more convinced that designers play a very important role in the process of globalization. Visual communication has a very important influence on how people think and interpret the meaning, but what if there are some biases and assumptions in visual communication itself? In the *politics of Design*, Ruben Pater questioned the universality of visual communication. At the same time, Pater points out that many designers, especially those from the western world, are not aware of their cultural and political biases and how these biases limit their design practice. In the process of research, I acknowledged my cultural and political biases that may exist. Therefore, the visual strategy and aesthetic strategy developed and created through the APORIA magazine is not only an exploration of the possibility between visual communication and social-political issues but also a resistance to social-political biases. When we use the rebellion as a means of fighting these contradictions and differences, we are not just designing for a single culture or a single country anymore. We are for the reduction of contradictions and mutual misunderstanding, we are for the diversity and compatibility of globalization.

***It's the visualizing rebellion, and
also rebellious visual.***



Here, I would like to conclude my thesis with a bold and unrealistic hypothesis:

When more graphic designers use rebellion as a visual communication strategy of social and political practice, can we move towards a more open and inclusive future?

FURTHER RESEARCH

I used APORIA magazine as a means to explore ways and means that graphic design could interpret possible social-political issues, and developed and created a rebellious visual communication strategy. In the process of my research, I realized that my own cross-cultural experience and personal ideology have a great impact on the research itself, and also may causes some cultural and political biases. It is based on the reflection and acknowledgment of these biases that I began to decide to carry out research and design in a way of self-reflection. It is because of this that I was able to find the feature of *rebellion* from my personal experience and take it as the direction and center to promote the progress of research. This *rebellion* is a thought tool to break through and go beyond the real, a style exploration to challenge the conventional design and aesthetics, and a visual practice to trigger social-political dialogue.

What I want to do through this work is to invite the audiences to think, not to telling them something which is what we traditionally do. We are in an information society where people have all access to all the information they could possibly ever want, but we are not in a thinking society. Therefore, I am using APORIA magazine as a means to explore the ways in which graphic design could interpret possible social and political issues, and how can visual communication be used as a social-political communication tool as a way to invite audiences to think.

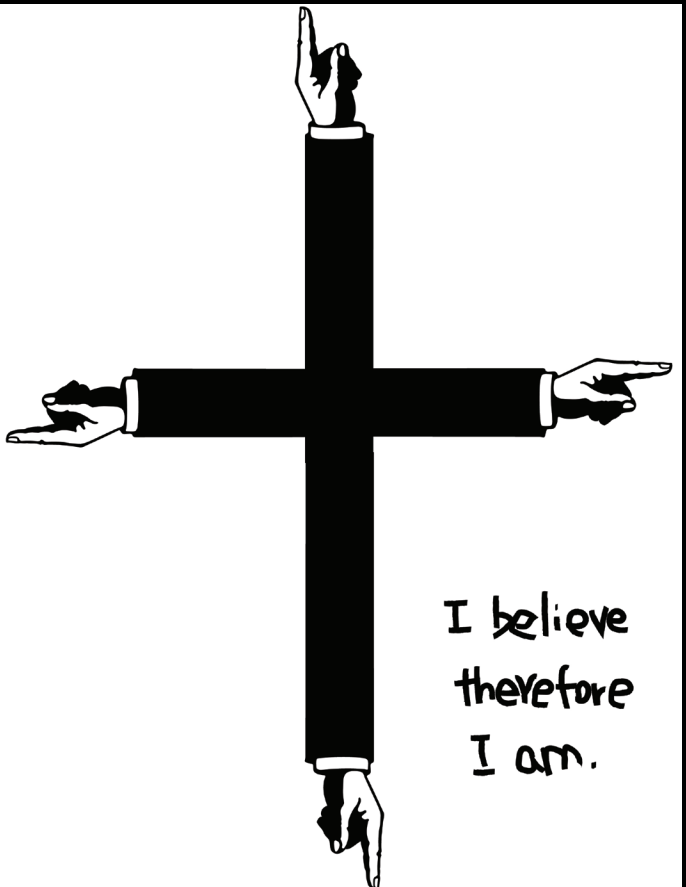
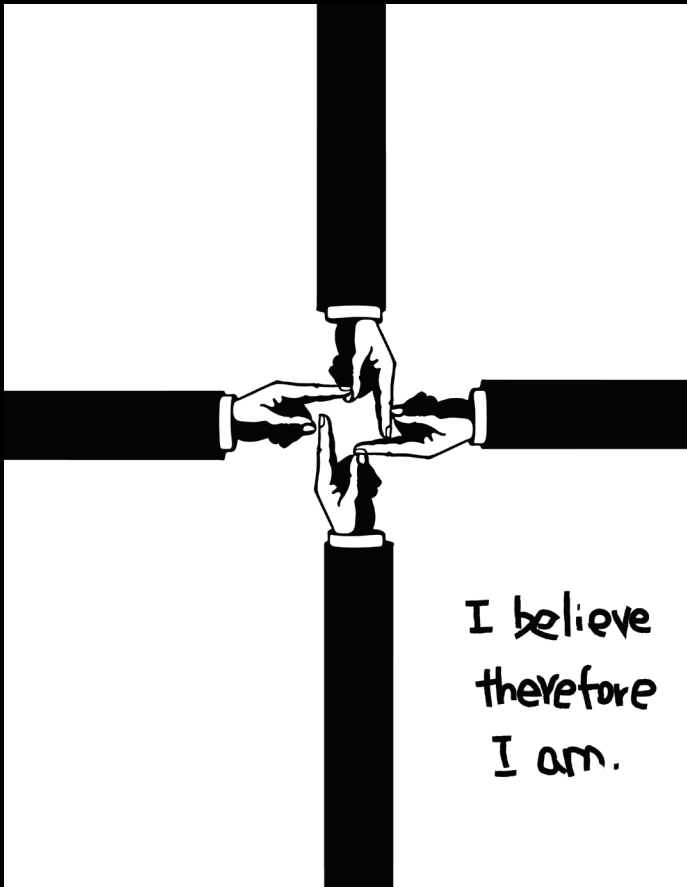
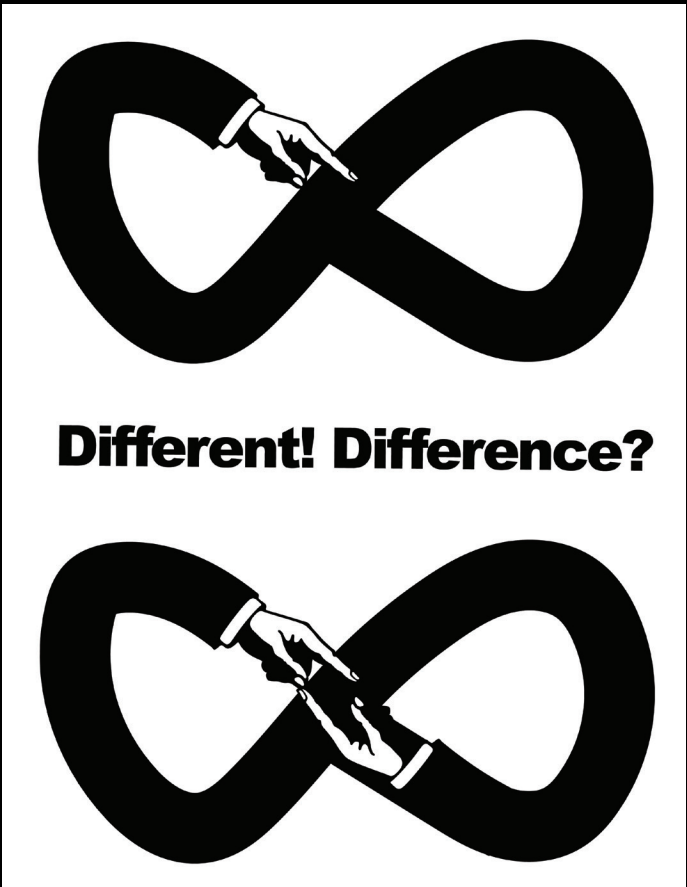
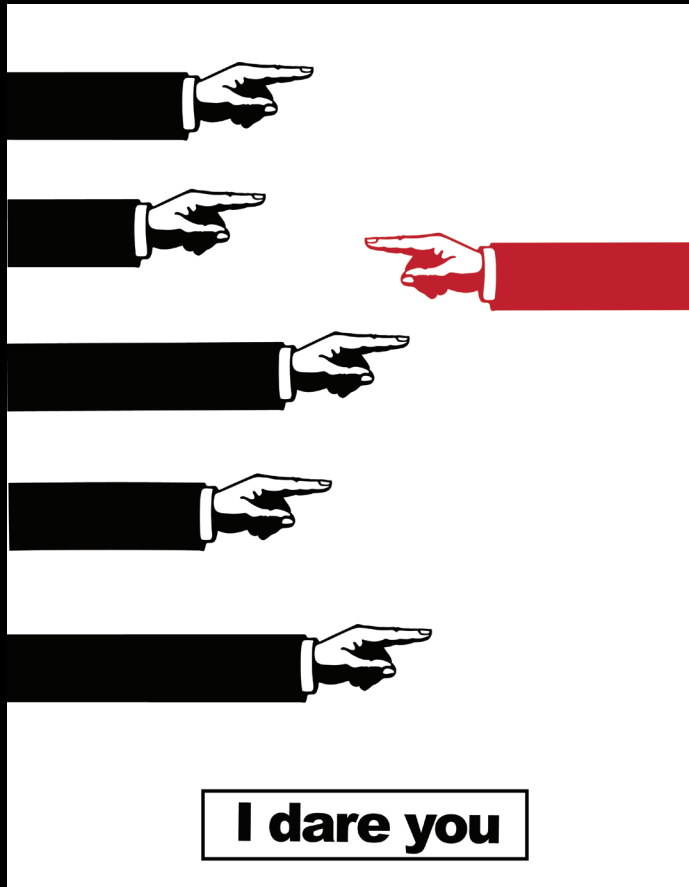
I designed this magazine as a way to think through some of the tools designers might use in order to create spaces for people to think. The magazine is for me to explore what these tools might be. It is a research mechanism for me to use design as a way to better understand what I am proposing, which is a series of actual things that designers should be considering in order to create an incomprehensible visual communication that will invite the audiences to think.

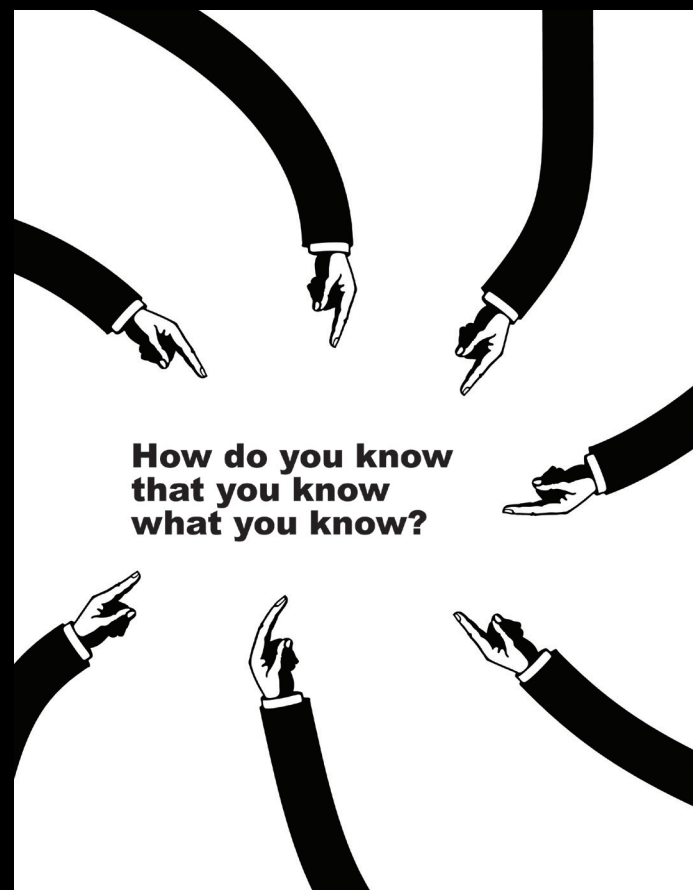
Therefore, it also can be said that what I designed is not the magazine itself but the mechanism that I am proposing in order to create this incomprehensible visual communication. Therefore through this Aporia project, I am proposing this mechanism in order to create incomprehensible visual communication as my design outcomes.

I do not have the intention to develop this Aporia magazine into the real world, but this incomprehensible visual communication mechanism will always be involved in my further research and professional practices, meanwhile, I will take the same spirit of rebellion as a way of design philosophy and reflection in my future professional practices. As a professional designer and visual researcher, I will keep investigating the rebellious attitude and the provocative design language as a way to explore the potential and possibilities of visual communication.

I believe that graphic design can make progress only when designers constantly seek non-conventional ways to challenge existing rules and principles.

APPENDIX 1: Poster Design

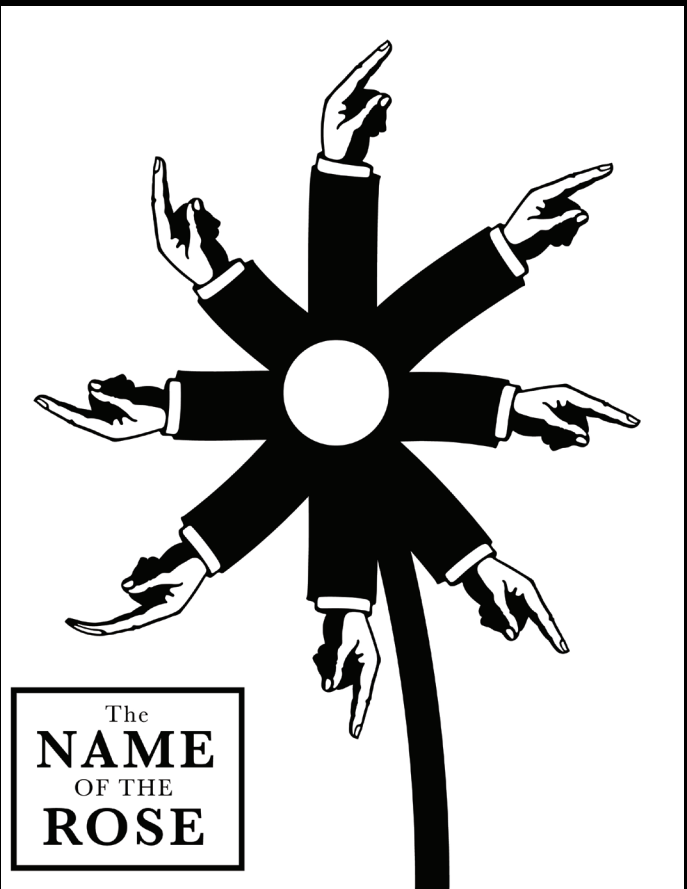




How do you know
that you know
what you know?



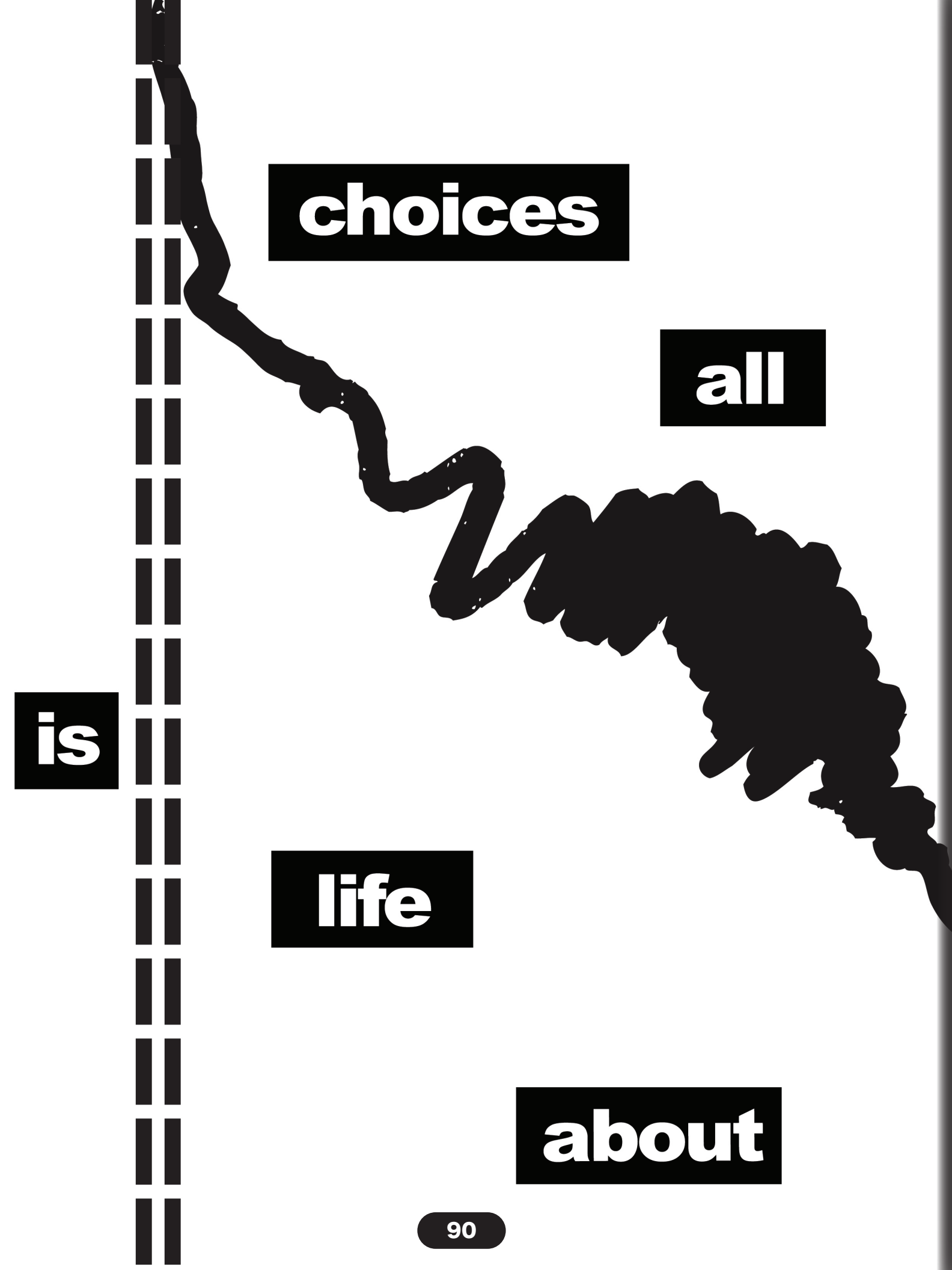
**don't
believe
a word**



The
NAME
OF THE
ROSE



creative process



is

choices

all

life

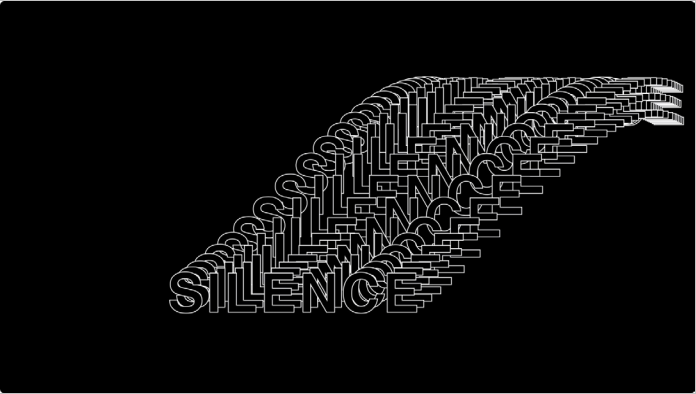
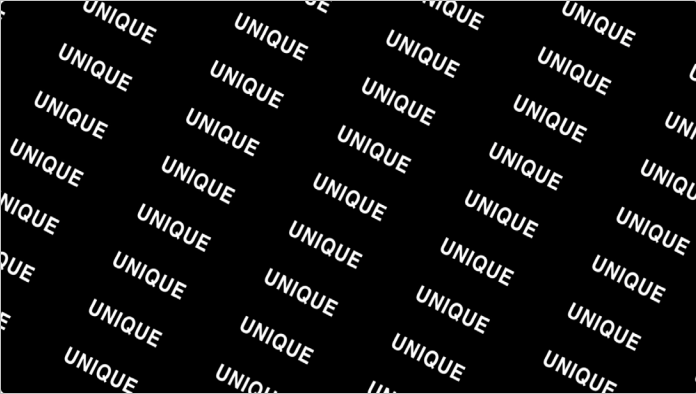
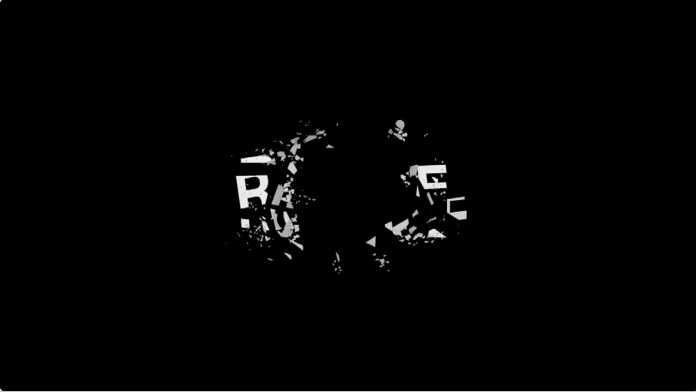
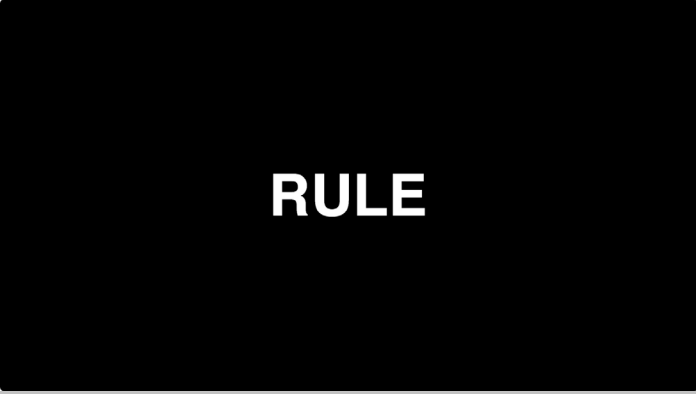
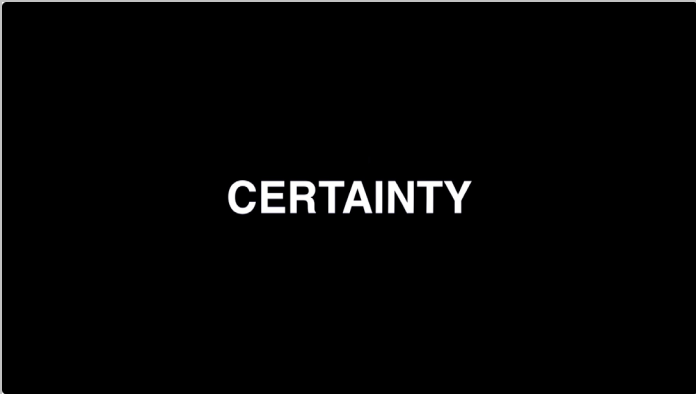
about



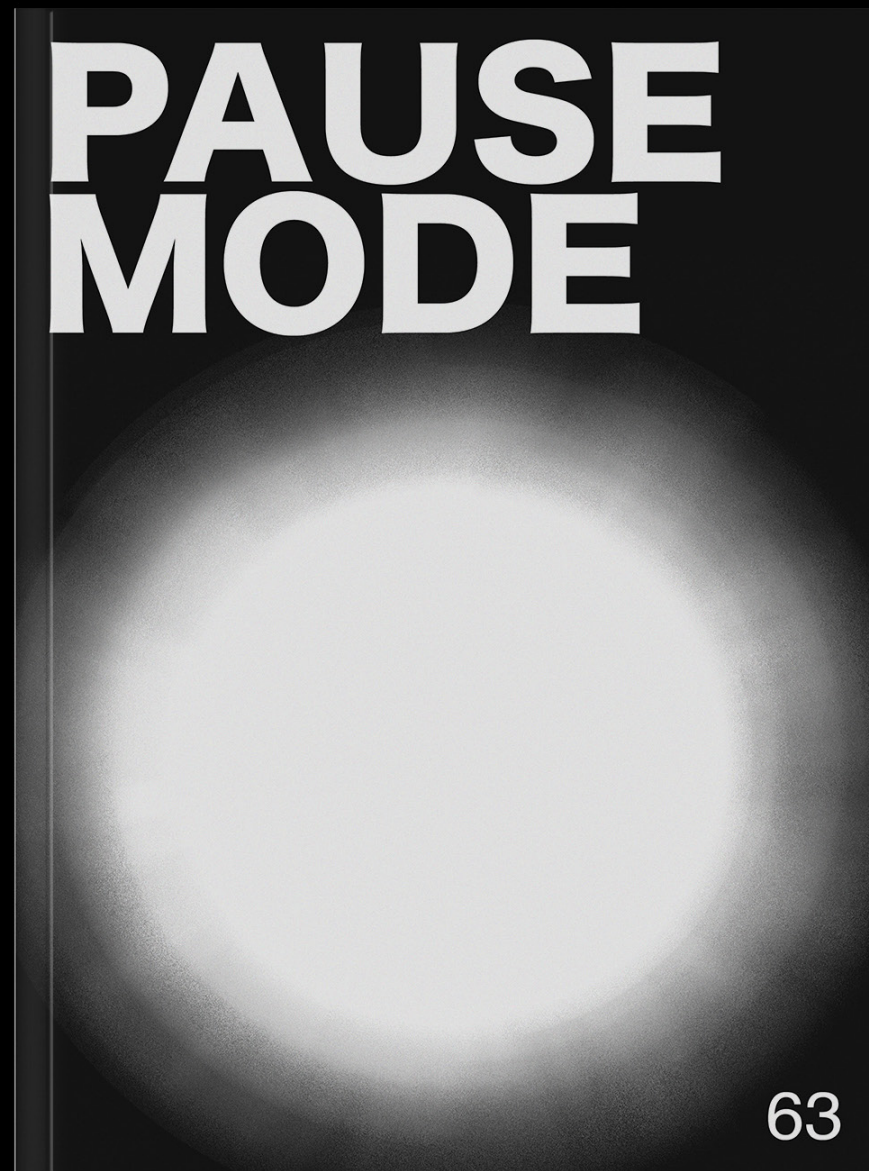
honesty

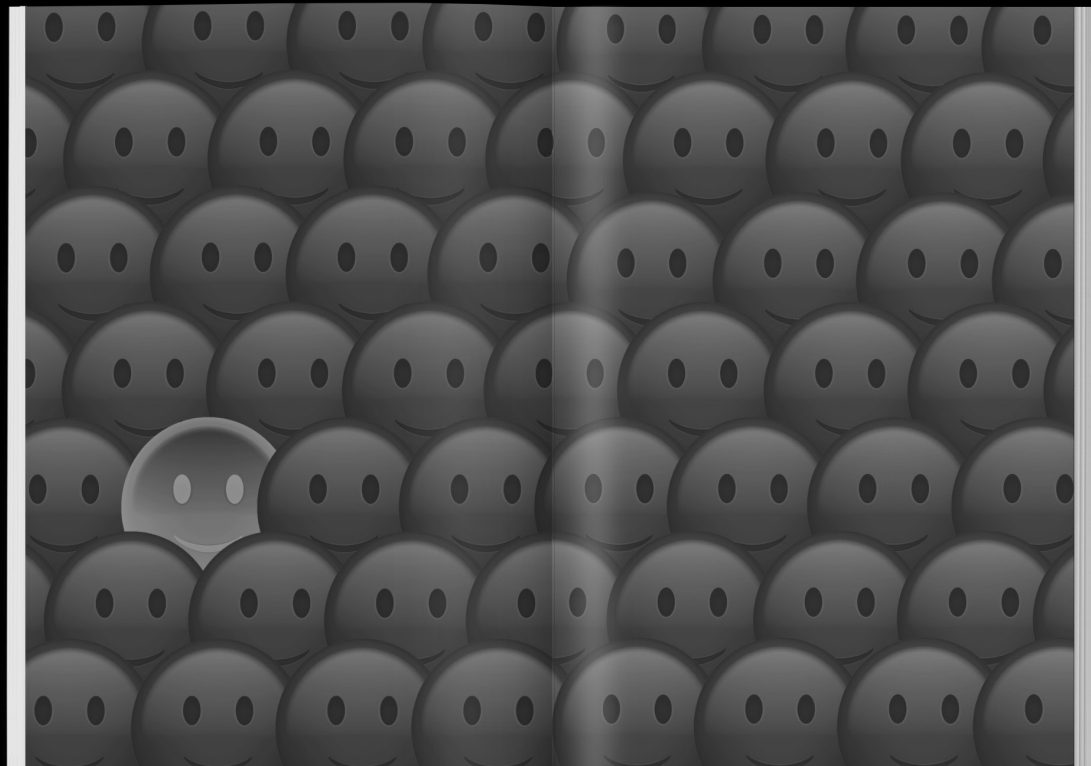
APPENDIX 2: Textual Animation

Through this animation project, I tried to investigating cognitive disequilibrium from semiotics perspective.

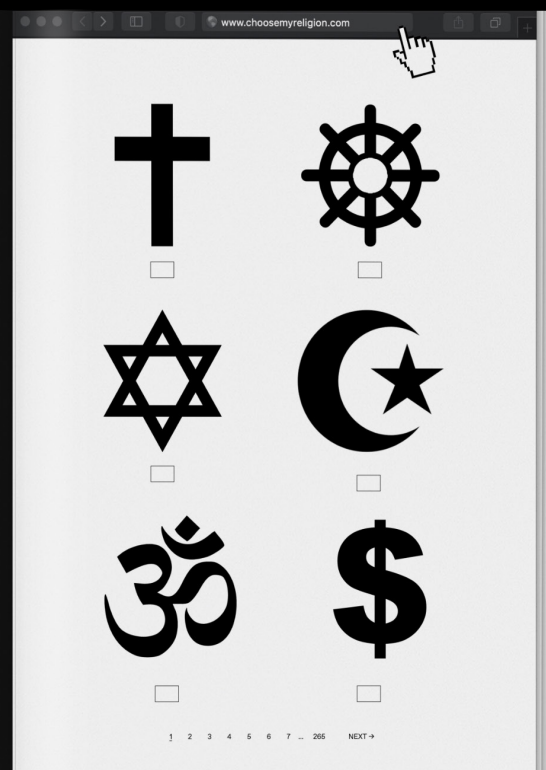


APPENDIX 3: Magazine Design





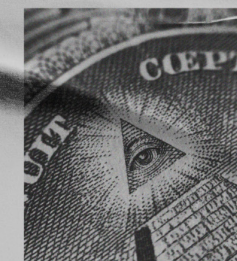
What
is
your
belief?
choice



The New York Times

THE RAPIDLY RISING NEW RELIGION: CAPUT

Last Updated Nov. 17, 2035, 11:39 a.m. ET



Since its first entry into the public eye in 2029 to today, caput has become the most popular religion among young people in the United States and Europe in just 6 years. Many people think that the rapid rise of caput is because it has largely

helped the United States to successfully recover the economy from the 2027 financial crisis. According to the latest statistics, there are currently 30 million followers of caput in the United States alone, and the number is still growing rapidly.

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LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: Chinese elementary school’s class room. (2012)
- Figure 2 : Film Still from Malèna. (2000)
- Figure 3 : Picture of Tiananmen square and Parliament Building. (2020)
- Figure 4: Film Still from The Truman Show. (1998)
- Figure 5: Film Still from Fight Club. (1998)
- Figure 6: Dunne & Raby, Needy Robot, 2007 from Technological Dreams No. 1: Robots. Robot 3: Sentinel. Photograph by Per Tingleff. (2007)
- Figure 7: The MAGA hat. (2018)
- Figure 8: Illustration from Visible Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics in The Visual Arts by David Crow. (2003)
- Figure 9: Frank Owen Gehry, Disney Concert Hall, California. (2003)
- Figure 10: cover page of APORIA magazine. (2020)
- Figure 11: The Treachery of Images, Rene Magritte. (1929)
- Figure 12: experimental poster project, 2020
- Figure 13: Images in APORIA magazine. (2020)
- Figure 14: Metahaven: The Sprawl: Propaganda About Propaganda, HD video still. (2015)
- Figure 15: Metahaven: The Sprawl: Propaganda About Propaganda, HD video still. (2015)
- Figure 16: Jean Baudrillard, Luxembourg. (2003)
- Figure 17: Darius Ou, Autotypography project. (2012)
- Figure 18: Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore, The Medium is The Massge. (1967)
- Figure 19: Toiletpaper magazine. (2017)
- Figure 20: Adbusters magazine. (2019)
- Figure 21: Black and white version of magazine design. (2020)
- Figure 21: Images in APORIA magazine. (2020)

