

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

AS LONG AS THERE IS MEAT TODAY,
EVERYTHING IS A-OKAY

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Visual Arts

By

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ABSTRACT

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By means of material manipulation and adverse messaging, my work exhibits a critical response to the maleficent control and reliance businesses impose over employees and consumers alike. Through graphic representation and typographic expression I utilize image reproduction techniques and language, tangibly outputting materially driven portraits and visual statements.

I employ material, typography and language that interact with one another in a paradoxical conversation. Exploring consumer habits and business omnipresence, which often reveal unsettling subcutaneous findings. Drawing these abundant connections reflects the all-encompassing presence of business. Ironically, the imposed construct of actively seeking connections and contextual relationships through contradiction, language and design principles – sublimates my unavoidable participation within the global syntax of consumerism and consumer design. The illustration and informing of instances takes on various forms: an enigmatic challenge to myself, a parody advertisement in some impressions and in others a historical dialogue and an expressive visual language derived from my experiences in the field.

Thesis Project Overview

My thesis work visually addresses adverse business regiment. Employing material, typography and language to convey a visual response to oppressive leadership, my work has taken shape as an accumulation and progression of material exploration.

Insulation-etched Portraits

The primary portion of my thesis project consists of insulation-etched portraits of the top 10 CEO's from the 2014 Fortune 500 list¹ (Fig. 1). In calligraphic line art, executives are caustically aerosol etched into mulberry toned residential Styrofoam.

This project connects insulation as a material to the business strategy of insulation, whereby leadership figures insulate themselves from the workforce as a means of detachment and protection, avoiding ethical responsibility and regard for laborers and consumers. By means of insulation, leaders are able to impose demoralizing methods of scientific management in the constant push for increased efficiency, amidst manufactured stress, excessive pressures and distant, carrot-dangled incentives.² Portraying these figures through residential materials aims to further convey businesses' encroaching presence in Americans' lives, eluding responsibility for their actions by insulating themselves of responsibility and connection to their ancillary dependents.

The insulation portraits support my preceding visual explorations whereby I materially depict business leaders as removed megalomaniacs, lacking sympathy and rationale. Viewing people as quantifiable resources, business leaders commonly objectify members as redundancies, necessary of undergoing a 'trimming of the fat'. Whether removed by hired consultants or directly expunged, all participants will face being pushed out to the tune of 'cost saving analysis'; to be replaced by the young, inexpensive and

¹ 2014 Fortune 500 List 1) Doug McMillon 2) Rex Tillerson 3) John Watson 4) Warren Buffett
5) Tim Cook 6) Greg C. Garland 7) Mary T. Barra 8) Mark Fields 9) Jeffrey Immelt 10) Joe Gorder

² Braverman, Harry, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York, NY, USA: Republication by Monthly Review Press, 1998.

inexperienced. Business feeds on the new wave of ambitious prospects, while paying tribute to the top tier. Despite a product in place, business amusingly mirrors a money pyramid. For a handful of people to make a modest living, a few at the top have to make a substantial fortune. This faulted syntax conveniently indicates how the richest 400 Americans have more total income and wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans combined.³

Concrete Type Blocks

The secondary aspect of my thesis project consists of concrete type blocks forming the condensed word 'MEAT' in traditional slab serif type (fig.2), reminiscent of industrial revolution advertising aesthetics. The forms are hollow, suspended in the air, appearing cantilevered and weightless. The term 'MEAT' crudely labels a new member within a hostile environment. Additionally the configuration of characters lend to reconfiguring capabilities through word jumble options 'TEAM' or 'META', potentially identifying a group as well as the self-referential. The growing distrust for corporate models present throughout industries and organizations is a despairing follow-up to a tender rendition titled 'Newbies' (fig. 3), a welcoming group show flyer, whereby text was corner squeezed from a sandwich bag of honey. 'MEAT', my closing statement from this corporate series, uses sculptural typography and graphically represented, materially-derived portraits to take aim at my critiqued subjects. The abrasive term, composed in concrete depicts a key material goal of 3-dimensional typography; an objective set in my 2011 proposal letter.

The basis of my closing investigation took aim to provide sculptural impressions of my critiqued subject through typographic treatments and graphically-represented, materially-derived portraits. Culminating from techniques developed and uncovered through process experimentation, the work continues to reinforce the caustic pedigree of corporate culture. Similar to consumer graphic design formulas — whereby products exploit the contextual setup or visual punch line — the two works constructed follow such

³ Reich, Robert. *Inequality for All*, (72 Productions, 2013), DVD.

advertising strategies in addition to possessing a cyclical 'medium as message', and symbiotic relationship, deriving from culminated explorations and conclusions.

Research and Reference

My research initiatives centered on aspects of material investigation, typographic discourse and the ambiguous quality of language; etymology, phraseology, duality of language, distillation of syntax and the reactive qualities generated by juxtaposing typography and materials. Drawing a creative pension from the avant-garde typographic experimentations developed in the Futurism and Dada movements, I distill the presentation of information to simple forms, embedding nuances below the surface read, through material utilization and interwoven qualities. Typographic history and form correlate to the core of the message; whereby I employ type, image and material to cyclically unite and converse with the subject matter and materials. Referencing assemblage techniques from artists Chuck Close and Vik Muniz, utilizing object arrangement and mark-marking to portray line and value became prevalent in my work, with applications varying in both size and medium. Jasper Johns and Ed Ruscha typographic works were also referenced in creating my preliminary flat-rendered type explorations. Additionally, the 3D typographic constructions of Andrew Byrom and Stefan Sagmeister influenced my type in space explorations.

Material Momentum

Content supported by material relativity became the primary motif for each piece, experimentation with the materials led to discovery of the final forms, as each material required a unique approach and handling to portray the content in an apparently effortless presentation.

I started by overlaying the 2011 Fortune 500 logos to 4 classic Nintendo game death scenes: *Donkey Kong*TM, *Super Mario Bros.*TM, *Tetris*[®] and *Duck Hunt*TM (fig.4). I rendered the 500 logos in black amongst color-coded pixel blocks, highlighting game play death scenes within the logo grid. I intended to pursue the emotional frame that prompted game players, children and young adults, to reactively destroy their game controllers, embodying the essence of humiliating defeat within game play.

A cannibalized iteration of the same materials later rendered the Monopoly[®] mascot, *Rich Uncle Penny Bags* (fig.5) through vector assemblage of the Fortune 500[®] logos as an extended homage to the notion of corporate game play. Bathing the word marks in Pantone color 187 (murder red), and collapsing forms where needed for facial contours; nuances defined the character's presence, such as the Apple logo placed as an eye (apple of my eye), the Yum logo representing the character's mouth, and the fragmenting of the character's bust to form what can be read as either dripping blood money or vertical barcode lines to depict symbology of commerce. After these two works, my digital output ceased following the format these works established. Later pieces de-emphasized the computer to a utilitarian position used to problem-solve construction, similar to tools such as a ruler or compass.

Digital outputs fell short of emotional charge, as my goal was to invoke visceral reactions; therefore, texture, smell and meaningful physical materials to more directly embody the content would be employed to my first CEO portrait (fig.6). The *Ray Kroc* portrait set the precedent for an escalated viewing reaction as its intoxicating stench assaulted viewers. Substituting ink with a food batter, the portrait consisted of a Big Mac,

fries and a large Coke — blended, then silkscreened and oven baked. The unpredictable quality of the batter led to varied results in heating, resulting in resembling photographic light leaks, burn marks and collapsed halftone rosette arrangements. Kroc was a milkshake salesman who corporatized the McDonald's brothers' burger restaurants, forever altering the standard and efficiency model for fast food⁴; therefore, I aimed to capture Kroc's likeness from the low quality, high calorie food he globalized.

To emotionally reach my audience I diverted from literal executive commentary to contextually frame an academic colleague, Alex Jimenez. This reactionary piece portrayed a former classmate as a portrait comprised of the very medium and product he worked in, Flaming Hot Cheetos. Alex dutifully poured crystal clear resin over Cheetos to create geometric forms, supporting his work and wellbeing through Costco employment. Representing Alex's image in an assemblage of Flaming Hot Cheetos purchased from Costco aided the subject matter's relevance and reaction to the group (fig. 7a). Alex was the 'everyman' of my construct residing within the community; he was an artist, yet a supporter and component of two prominent Fortune 500 companies (Frito Lay and Costco).⁵ Alex's portrait utilized intact Cheetos to form his facial features and hair, while crushed and saltshaker-dispensed Cheeto flakes depict the martyr-like gradient and spotlight / halo. Poetically, the violent disassembly of Alex's image (fig. 7b) gifted a Shroud of Turin like stain on the underlying substrate (fig 7c), which led to secondary and tertiary grease stain investigations.

The first typographic exploration conducted in this series was a garden hose calligraphic arrangement, whimsically rendering 'Beware of the Serpent' and photographed from an elevated domestic viewpoint (fig. 8). Archaically implying the villain had penetrated residential boundaries; the garden hose's snake-like appearance moves in serpentine patterns, referencing the very figure the text cautions against. Constructed in the winter, a time when hoses are least pliable; tests were performed to uncover optimal results, starting with submerging the hose into hot water and ending in zip-tying the forms, while

⁴ Kroc, Ray A. *Grinding it Out: The Making of McDonald's*, Contemporary Books Inc. Chicago, IL, 1977.

⁵ Jimenez, Alex. (CSUN alumnus) in discussion with the author, 2012.

pressure-stabilizing them with bricks atop mason lines forming a typographic baseline and mean line, necessary for achieving even color in regards to character weight and spatial density.

Redundant labor played a recurring role within my work. The sequentially applied mark was commonly performed as I paid homage to redundancy in labor tasks. This form of procedural efficiency came hand-in-hand with an automated trance and a “heigh-ho, heigh-ho” cadence of timing and delivery. The matchstick bridges (fig. 9) were a product of my labor trance, whereby 10,000 holes were rhythmically drilled into plywood. Additionally, the *Sam Walton* copper portrait (fig. 10) followed suit with urine being eye dropped in ¼” applications. This optimal mode of performance embodied my strive for human efficiency reaching machine like precision through automation.

Following material breadcrumbs became a recurring theme in my work. The Cheetos[®] portrait stain remnants led to an exploration of ink trap type investigations (fig. 11a). By material cause and business need, ink trap typefaces were designed to aid phone book printing; designed with omitted corner notches, as ink seeps to connect intersecting corners of text when applied to inexpensive newsprint at fast speeds. Rather than using costlier paper, ink trap type emerged as a necessity and as a financially viable alteration of the font, aligning to the credo, ‘addition by subtraction.’ Substituting Classic Lays[®] potato chips in place of ink; test experiments of point size and thickness of chip application ended in a completely rendered character set of Bell Centennial, a premiere ink trap typeface designed by renowned typographer Matthew Carter.⁶ By stenciling knockout areas and salt dispensing greasy, crushed chip crumbs followed by the application of heated light, the simulation of seeping ink with potato chip grease was achieved. ‘*Trap*’ from the term ‘ink trap’ rendered the final statement (fig. 11b), back-lit to emphasize the grease presence. The experiment additionally led to yet a third impression, similar to a grease letterpress transfer, where the grease-stained reverse type was pressed against paper in a newsprint pad, transferring the text to a correctly oriented

⁶ Sherman, Nick. www.nicksherman.com. Web. 2005.

grease print (fig 11c). Following additional ephemeral breadcrumbs, the Sam Walton copper portrait shed turquoise flakes, providing relevant material for an offspring based, urine-flocked portrait of his son Sam R. Walton on cardboard (fig. 10).

Type in-space investigations were conducted; whereby mason line vectors plotted string lines within a space, allowing me to model forms in 2D and 3D (fig. 12). These studies led to another domestically set application, as vector points mapped 24' of excised soil in a four corner point backyard setting, marked by physical and illuminated bounding boxes. Titled *I Agree to the Terms and Conditions (Purple X)* (fig. 13), I utilized the dug out 24' letter 'X' to signify a checked box of commitment, in both ownership and technological agreement, namely to highlight the laissez-faire approach to contractual demands businesses pose upon consumers, in commitment severities ranging from a home purchase to digital application updates. Ambiguously present, the 'X' was rendered in Verdana, a ubiquitous web- derived typeface, also crafted by Matthew Carter.

My typographic works ventured into a material design glossary whereby the typeface and material display symbiotic relationships. The exploration *Condensed* (fig. 14) visually illustrated condensed type comprised of manually condensed milk. Evaporated milk was applied to flat glass, whereby the material underwent a second evaporation or condensing act, becoming encrusted in a frantic fragmented manner. The aspect ratio of the glass further emphasized the condensed aspect, as the end cap characters 'C' and 'D' rose and fell, to further denote the rising and settling spirit of condensing.

Rendering Egyptian cotton bed sheets in Egyptian, slab serif type was another exploration to accompany the design glossary body of work (fig. 15). In addition to the visual pun, distressed sheets form the term *Distressed* through the elemental constraints of bed sheets and pillows. The basis of the design glossary examinations aspired to correlate abstract notions, unite material and content, while utilizing applicable and contradictory language by way of a materially derived graphic design toolkit.

Aligning Artistic Process and Career Practice

As a graphic designer, typography emerged as an expressive instrument. Conveying volumes as a conduit of communication, type in its purest sense exists to transmit information, to invoke action, thought or contemplation, by means of language — set forth by a spectrum of emotional tone and contextual delivery. I specifically gravitated towards the use of classic typefaces, recognizing them as monumentally charged components of typographic discourse, prominently embedded in social, historical and commercial commentary. Their tried-and-true omnipresence proved duly suitable and relevant in rendering examinations of judgment and material exploration.⁷

The mediums I utilize engage in cyclical conversations; connecting aspects of content to displaced qualities of materials. I aim to balance connective content while maintaining an approachable surface read. The typeface and the material will do what they want to do.⁸ The materials spoke and revealed solutions, as the answers resided in the process.

I accredit my collaboration with process and materials in providing answers to inquiries posed after the initial concept, and ultimately navigating the work to its final form. Distilled figuratively, the subject matter exploits labor, therefore aspects of labor and automation of tasks were required to parallel the content. This is not to say that all answers stemmed from repeated action, as refinement also sanctioned logistical and conceptual problem solving. Forging simple concrete forms to suspend on the wall required levels of testing and construction plans in addition to precision cutting and assembly, as well as weight specifications for mounting. By any workable means necessary, the end product aims to resemble honorable design standards, whereby the execution appears seamlessly constructed and yet simple and approachable in surface nature.

⁷ Hustwit, Gary, *Helvetica*, (Veer / Swiss Dots, 2007), DVD.

⁸ *Helvetica*, 2007, DVD.

Conditioned to acknowledge their role as subservient components within a global service industry, designers are paid to think and produce viable and aesthetically pleasing solutions. The designer's objective is to manipulate the viewer's perception of information, de-emphasizing loss, exploiting increase, and dressing up beneficial interest points. The designer is a chief propagandist, a master of manipulation, visually and linguistically. Factual information is essentially present, however the method of delivery is toned accordingly to achieve the highest human emotional connection a story can offer.

Despite global business imposition, this bitter syntax I address has allowed my experiences to inform my work outside the construct, creating a discourse of critique, utilizing the very tools and products of the entities and figures being examined. Melding product, advertising and design principles into one process has evolved my commitment to material and process.

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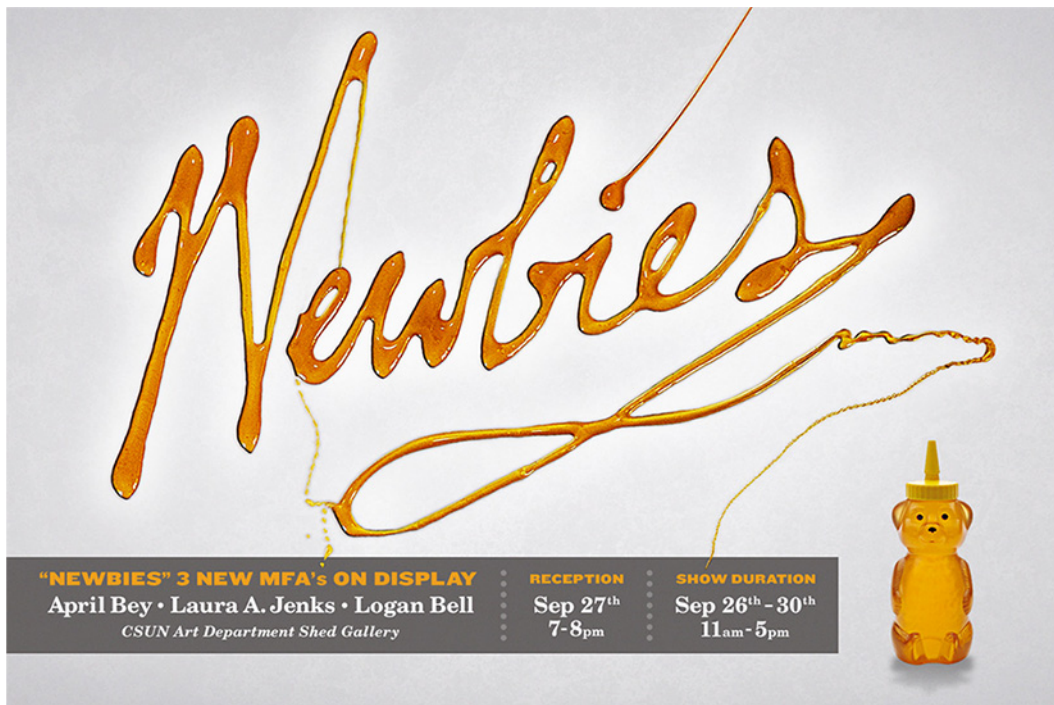
Appendix Images



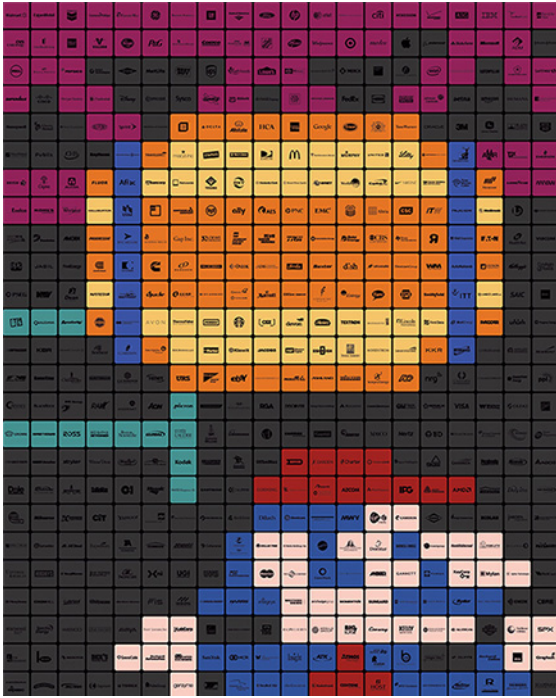
(Fig. 1) *Insulated CEO's: Warren Buffet*



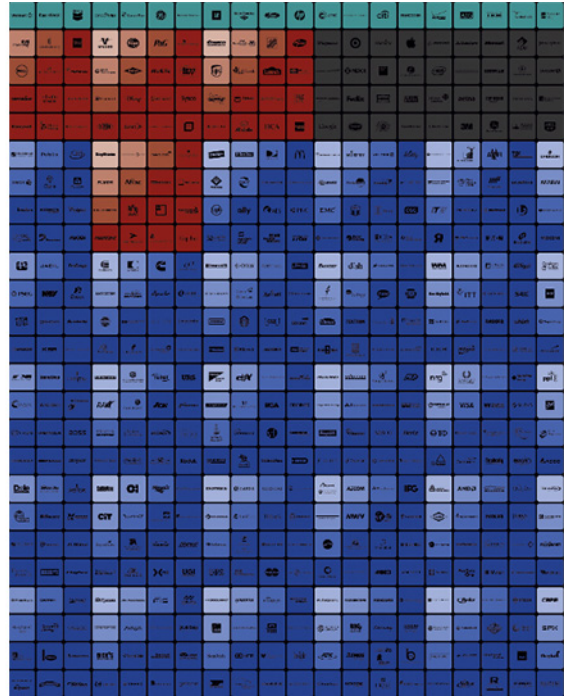
(Fig. 2) *Meat*



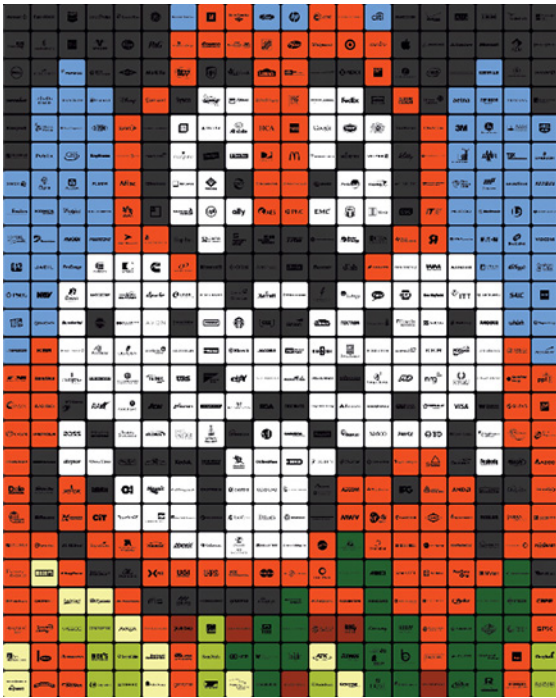
(Fig. 3) *Newbies*



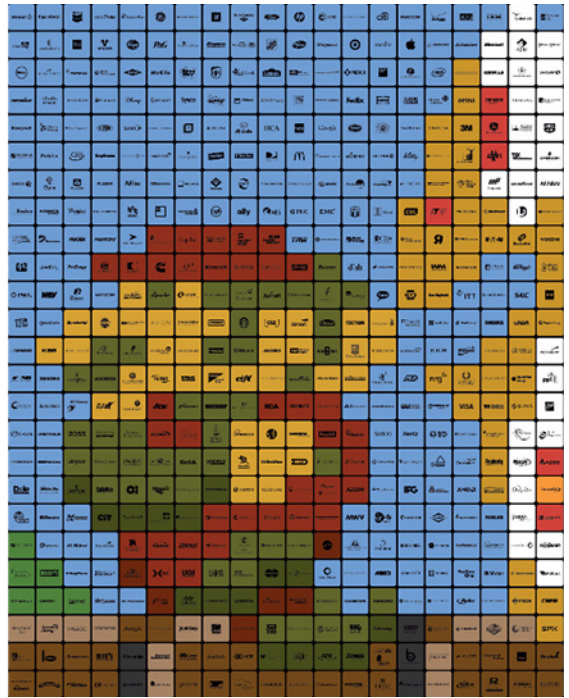
(Fig. 4) *Donkey Kong*TM



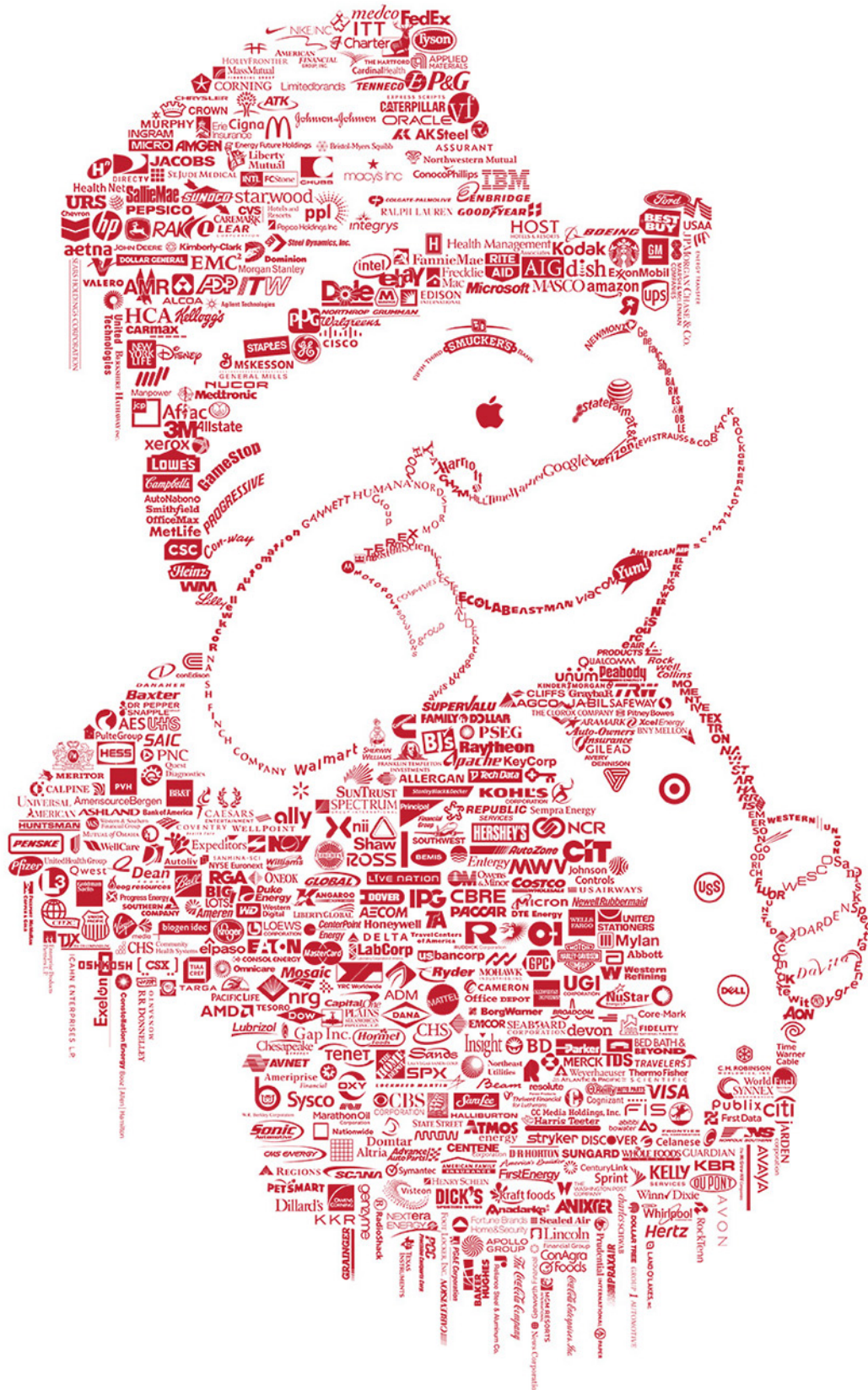
Tetris[®]



*Duck Hunt*TM



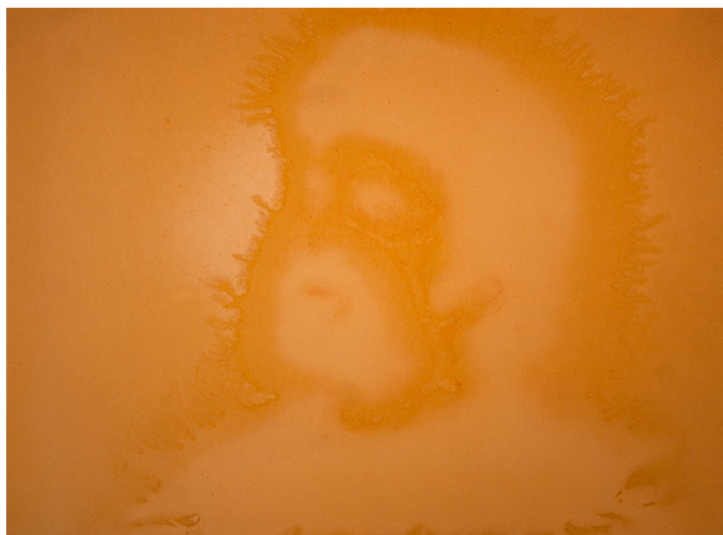
Super Mario Bros.[®]



(Fig. 5) Rich Uncle Penny Bags



(Fig. 6) *Ray Kroc*



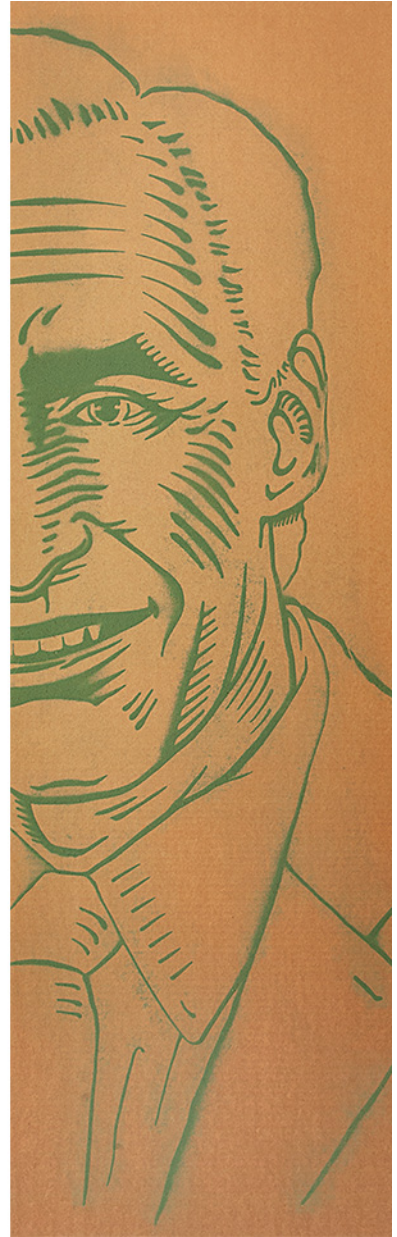
(Fig.7) *Alex*, Dissassembly, Shroud of Torin stain



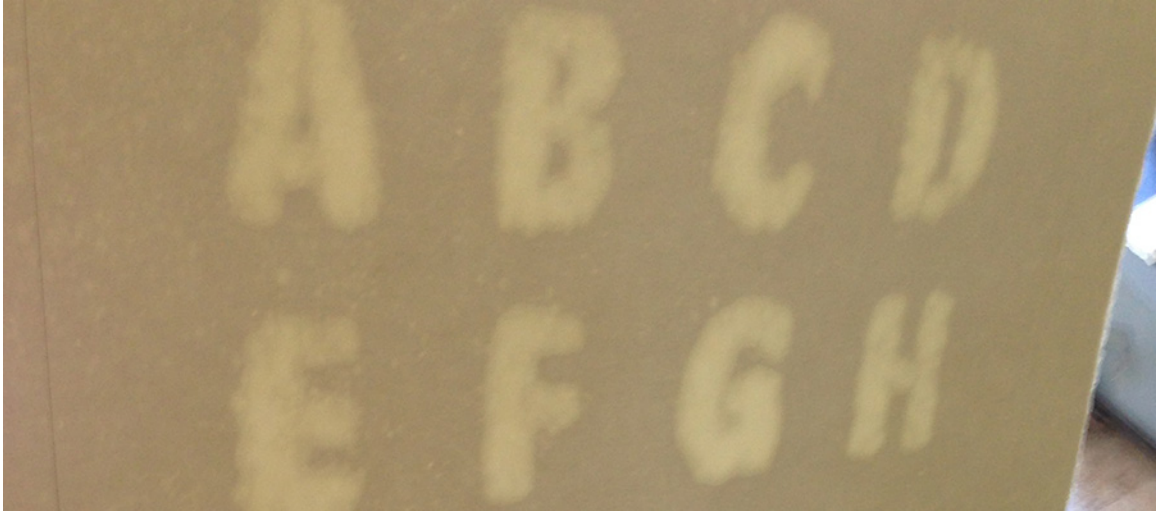
(Fig. 8) *Beware of the Serpent*



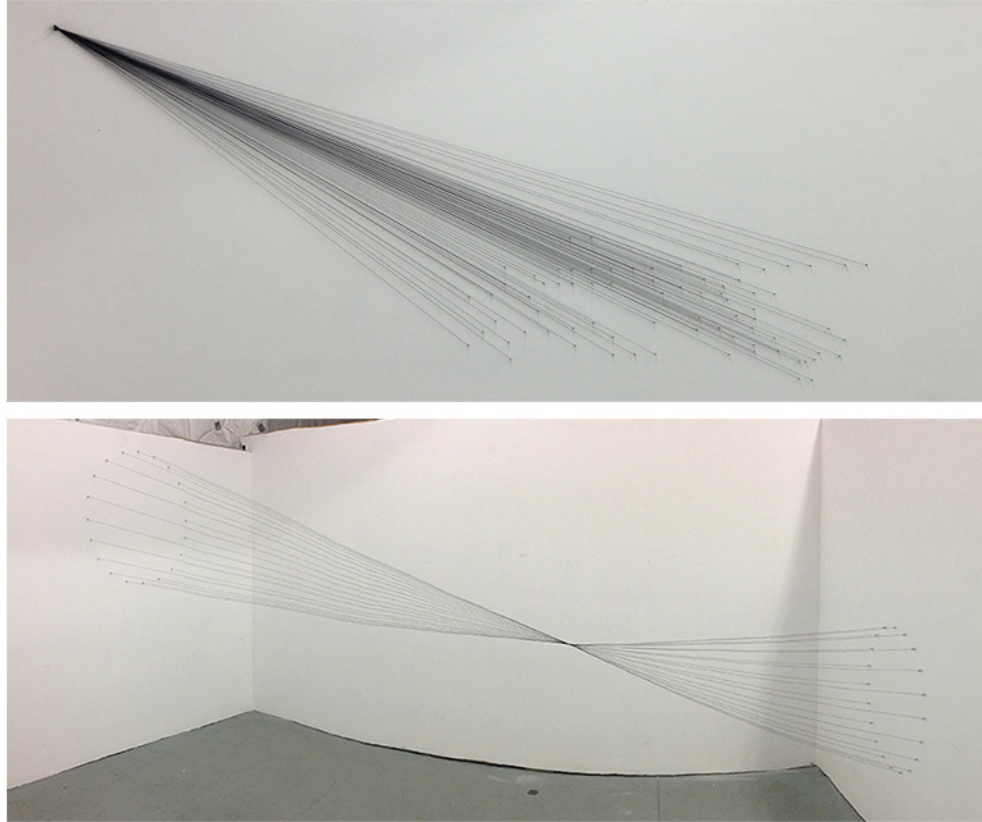
(Fig. 9) *Macarthur '07, Gilmore '11*



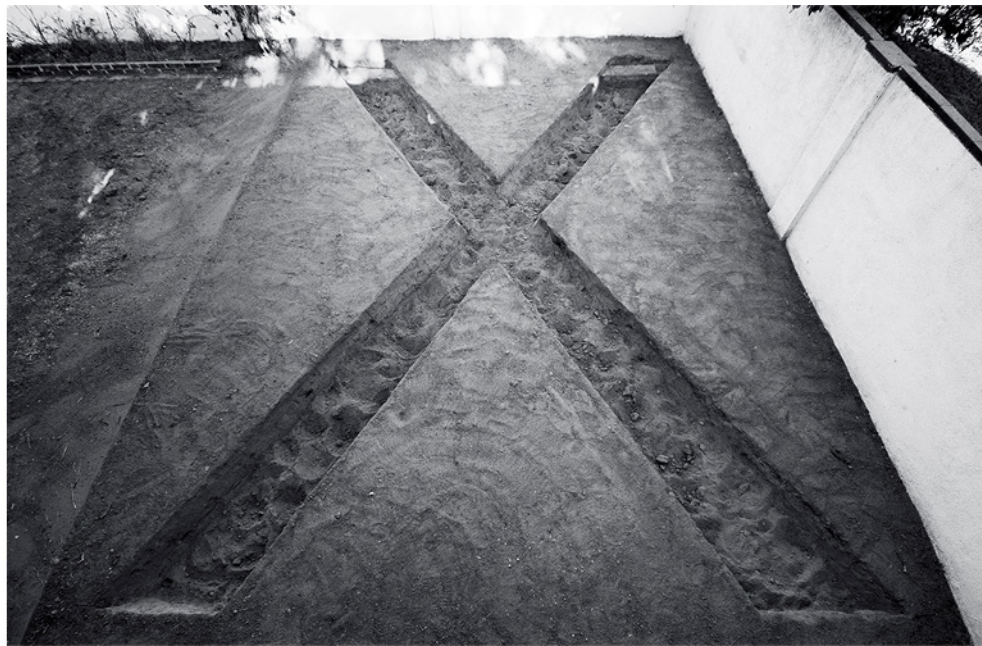
(Fig. 10) *Sam Walton, Sam R. Walton*



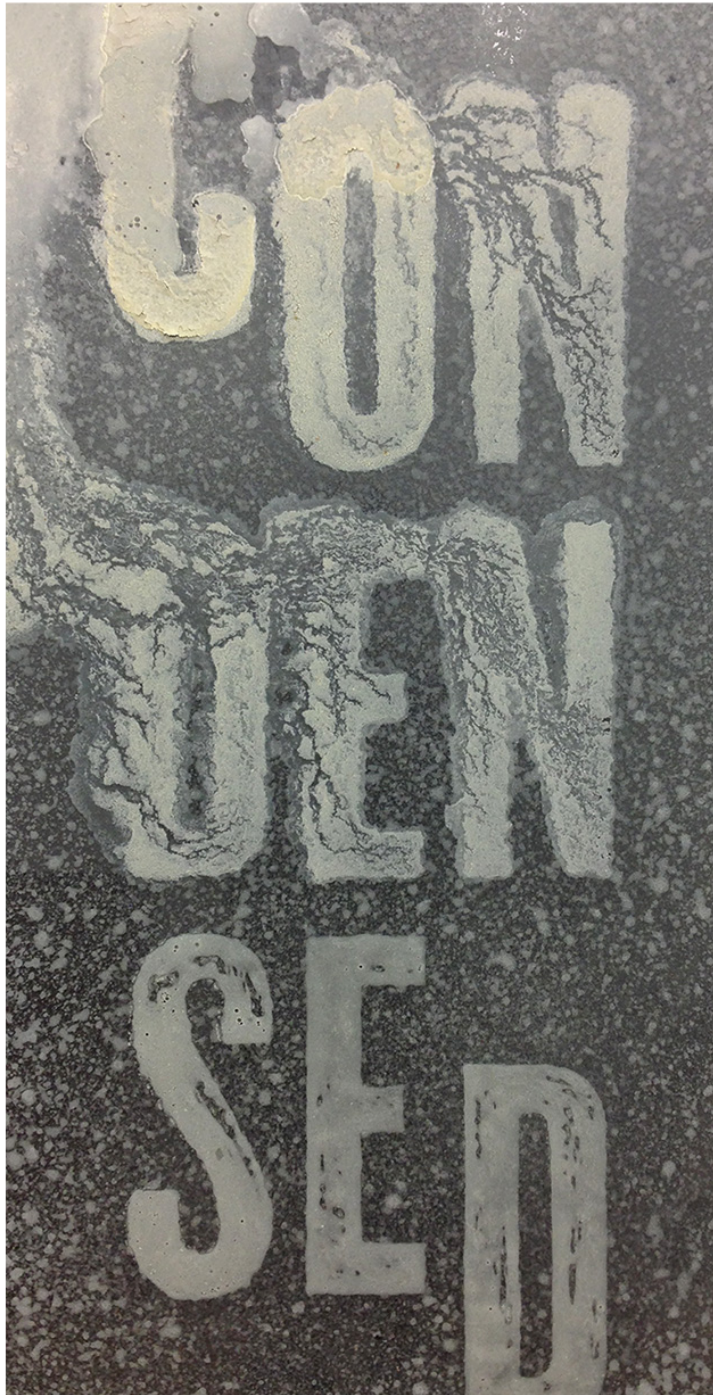
(Fig. 11a,b,c) Potato chip based ink trap explorations



(Fig. 12) Vector string explorations



(Fig. 13) *I Agree to the Terms and Conditions*



(Fig. 14) *Condensed*



(Fig. 15) *Distressed*