

POST ARTIFACT SPECULATION

SPECULATE

POST ARTIFACT BOOKS

Spring 2019

Assignment 1

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PROMPT: This writing assignment is an exercise in speculation. Write a 300-word description of a post-artifact book. This should be an ephemeral “book” that may or may not be possible. You are not restrained by economic feasibility or physical possibility of making this book and it may even be impossible for this book to exist. This may be as much about poetry or science fiction or art as it is about design. As this book does not and will not exist, you can employ the potentiality of any author(s), etc.

Structurally, your writing can take any form (for example, it may respond in some way to your idea that precludes traditional paragraphs). The book you describe might be huge in scale or seemingly insignificant. In your writing, you can describe an entirely new kind of book system or you may be describing one particular book. In either case, try to describe in specific terms. Use all three hundred words to tell us as much as you can. Avoid generic language. Use words to paint a picture in vivid terms. Think about materials and environments. Should we know who reads this book or who wrote it? Does it contain text? In what language is it written? How does the book make the reader feel and what might it mean? These questions are only prompts and there is no need to answer them all.

Resources:

Speculative Design
Speculative Fiction
Futurecasting
Accumulibrary
Mount Qingyuan, China.
Katie Pearson’s Future Library.
“Library of Babel” by Jorge Luis Borges.
Shelley Jackson’s Snow.
Shelley Jackson’s Skin.
Xu Bing’s A Case Study in Transference.
Cecilia Vicuña’s Disappeared Quipu.
Wim Delvoye’s Mountains photographs.
The Book, Amaranth Borsuk, MIT Press, 2018.
The Library Beyond the Book, Jeffrey Schnapp & Matthew Battles, Harvard University Press, 2014.

The assignment is open-ended and there is no clear solution.

THE BAG OF MEMORY

A post-artifact “book” may be just a small bag of grains and fibers. It is going to react on human thoughts and memories, that of the one physically touching the “book”, and turn into a shape that the person can “read”. The grains and fibers can intertwine and mimic a physical page with letters as holes; one page will be enough to contain a book with hundreds of pages, as the content will move forward accordingly as the reader holds and “turns” the page. For people who cannot see the words, the grains and fibers will become a continuous string of braille texts that will continue in accordance with the reader’s reading finger. Depending on the reader’s preference, the “book” can take any physical form and go back to a bag of grains and fibers in seconds.

This flexible form of a “book” makes the content ever-changing. The content of book, to be post-artifact, should not be contained in a concrete piece of data. Rather, it should first be published from the author and remain in the reader’s’ memory to live on. Every reader remembering different parts of the book, the least important parts that literally no one stores in their memory will be deleted from the book. The author of the book, with an ability to directly edit the content, can add and “restore” contents regardless of them being remembered in the past. Some people may use their memory for a common topic to collaborate on a bigger project. This very function enables hundreds and thousands of people to work on a map; they will gather the experiences from a certain area, average out their memories from different places and create a collective travel guide for the neighborhood.



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The content of book,
to be post-artifact,
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a concrete piece of data.

A CONCISE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

is a small, fifty-page book containing factual first-person statements such as:

“I wade ankle deep”
“I find a creaky floor and jump”
“With no one watching, I kiss a window”

These statements are real life experiences recorded by the author. Each page contains five statements save the first which reads:

“This is my autobiography. To fully understand it, I ask that the reader somehow relate to each of my experiences through their own. Once an experience is experienced, denied, or remembered, the reader should record their own observations by triple tapping the statement.”

Triple tapping will cause a gray square to rise out of the book and readers are prompted to enter their own response. Responses must relate to the chosen experience, must be no longer than thirty words, and must be truthful. After entering a response, the square will lengthen to reveal answers from other readers, through which the user can scroll. Each user may provide only one response per experience per year.

Tapping the title of the book seventeen times within seventeen seconds will remove all of the statements within the book and replace them with the responses of another reader/user. The title will then read:

ANOTHER CONCISE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This cannot be undone.



An Example

Statement:

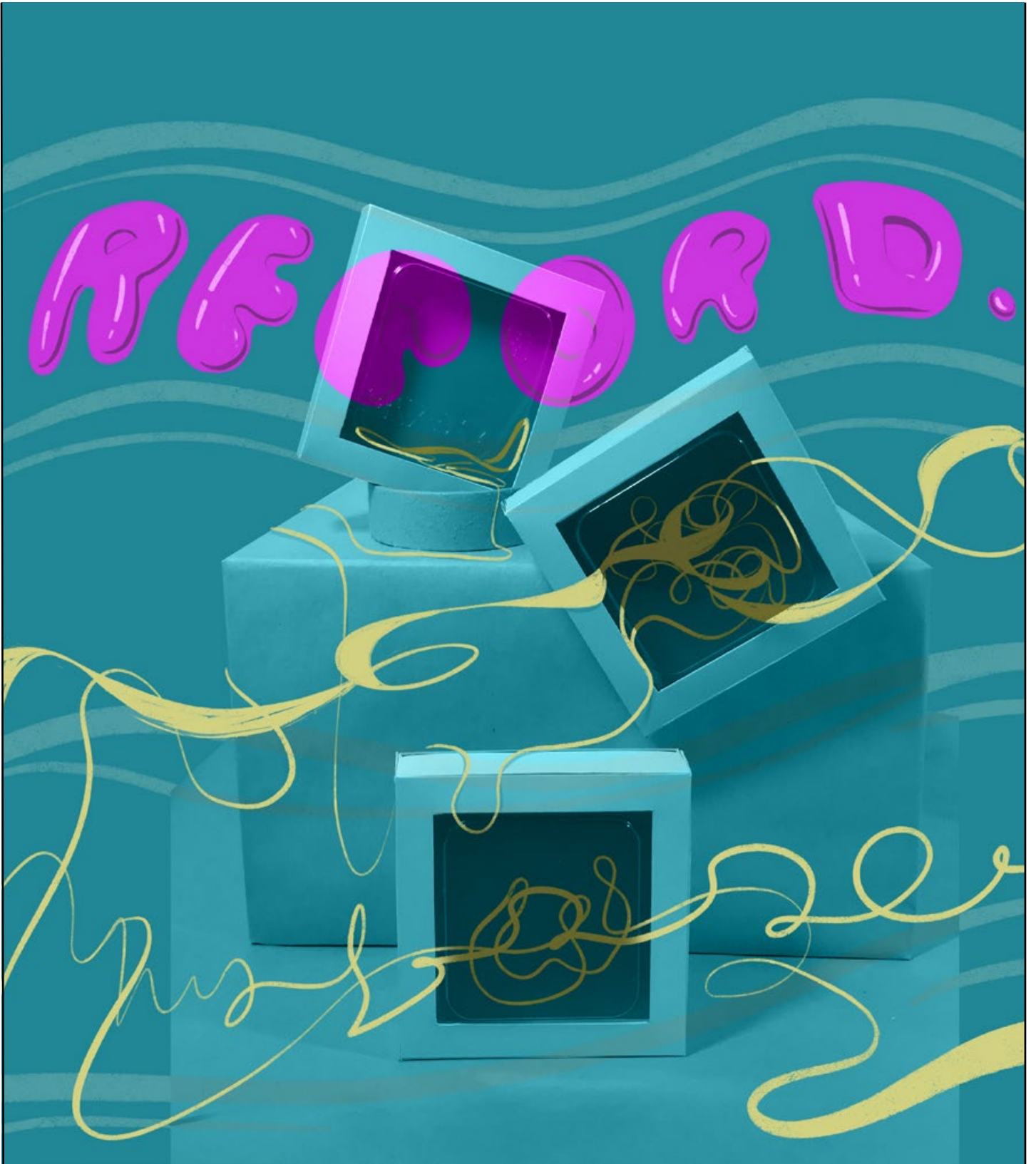
“I climb the stairs, allowing myself to believe”

Responses:

“I climb the museum staircase and pretend that I own it. That this is my grand mansion and that I'm about to enter an equally grand party”

“I quietly climb down the stairs to see my parents wrapping presents and eating cookies. I climb back up the stairs and tell myself ‘they're just helping Santa out’”

“I climb the stairs and firmly believe I should've taken the elevator”



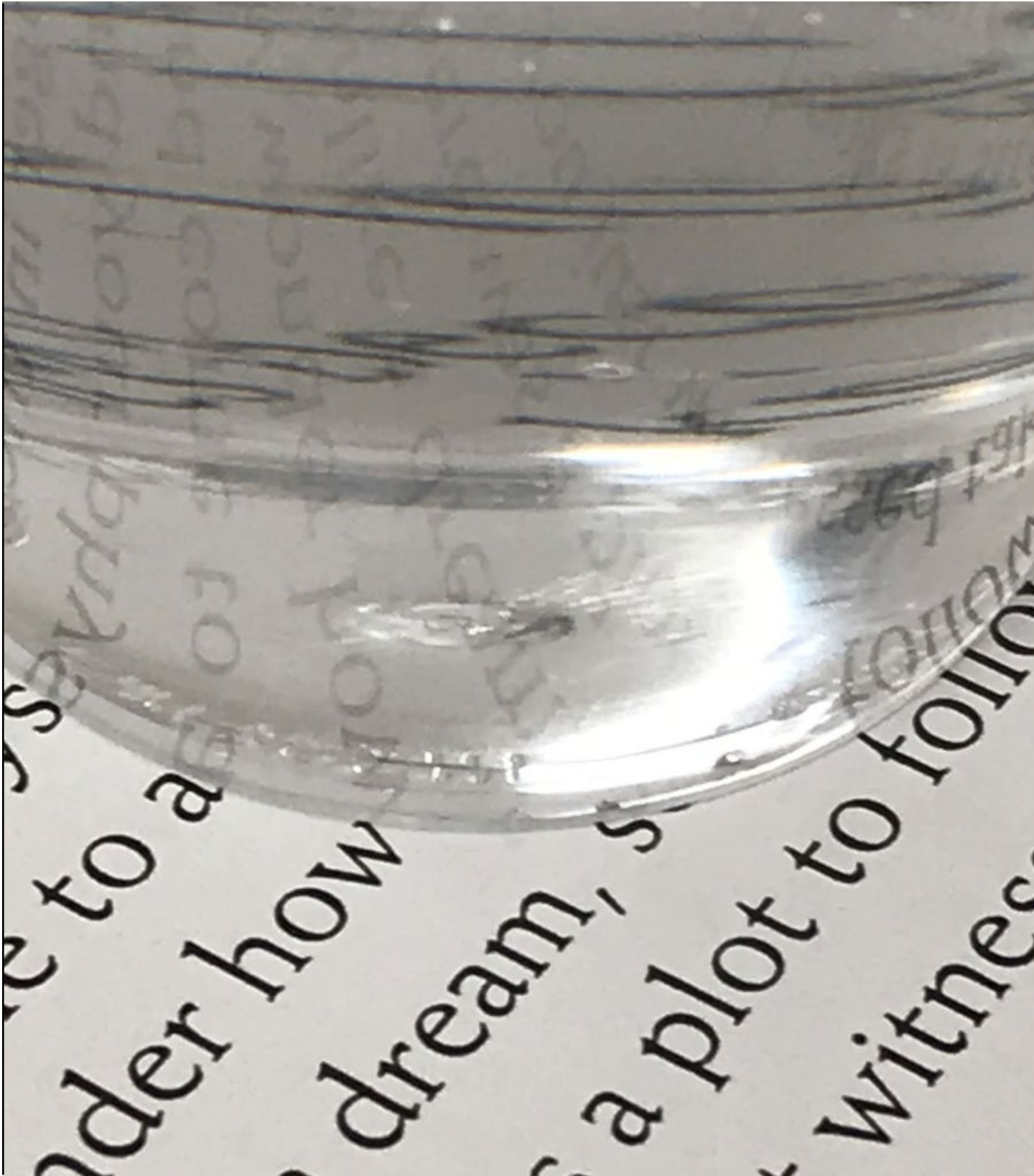
WATER TASTING

Similar to Proust's Madeleine, the post-artifact book now consists solely of consumption. We eat and we drink words. The books aren't everywhere, The book consumes you and you consume it. Stories are told through experience as if it were your memory upon the taste of water. Take for instance this glass of water.

Ian places a glass of water onto the very surface which you are reading this. Now take a closer look. Ian points to the water in the glass, and not the glass itself.

You take the cup by your hand and place it up to your lips. The taste is as neutral as water could ever be. Nothing unusual here. Ian tells you it usually doesn't take that long to kick in. As you descend into madness, you lose your sense of self. You take on a new name and a new history, and fully believe it too. You forget all that you know in favor of this new persona. Your senses become obfuscated, and you are no longer in the same world you once knew. Years seem to pass by of lived experience, and your physical form still hasn't moved from it's spot. Your tales climax and come to a close, and you bat away the sleepies from your eyes. You may wonder how long you were gone for, and the answer is around 30 seconds. Unlike a dream, someone wrote and chose your experiences, and this time there was a plot to follow. And while it's closest relative is the dream, the book you just witnessed takes its time to marinate in your mind for weeks.

The influence of these books is stronger than any psychedelic tool on the black market, as these books take you on journeys with teachings and insight, rather than your typical cosmic unfurling and ego death which you can come to expect from, say, DMT. It also has a profound impact on what we choose to write. Nearly all writers decide to stop writing about certain topics, like war and anxiety, and much of the world's sufferings go undocumented until collapse of modern civilization. Because it takes up so much mental and emotional energy to experience these stories, writing becomes a revered area of practice, then everyone writes, then no one writes, then no one reads, and at a certain point, everyone forgets knowledge and entertainment all together in favor for utilitarianism.



FOOTPRINT

This post-artifact book is written by an anonymous traveler who records all the stories he gathered during his travel.

The author wants to record his experience and to show his love of traveling around the world to his readers and followers. He uses his stories to introduce the culture and the people where those stories come from. He sculpted the stories on anything he can find on his travels. Sometimes the story is on the surface of a stone, sometimes on the trunk of a tree, or even at the bottom of the cliff. However, since he does not want to make his story bothering beautiful views of some places, he likes to put it on the place which is not obvious. There are some stories that are sculpted on multiple trees or stones, so it might take time to find the whole story. The book is written in multiple languages, each story is written by the language people use from the place where it happened, as the author thinks his story belongs to the place. There are translations and photos on the internet as well but some of the travelers still love to find and read the original ones. In his stories there are tribes that does not really like him, there are locals who helped him when his wallet was stolen. Not all the stories are happy-ending, and not all the stories are exciting. Some of them are just peaceful small stories, or more likely to be a diary. The book is not finished yet, as the author is still traveling, and every story becomes one of his footprints.



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TEXT FLOATS

My post-artifact book deals with something that has meaning to me: water.

Water is significant to me because of my birthplace. I was born in Qingdao, China and lived close to the ocean but at the age of six, I left my hometown and moved to Los Angeles, California. I don't have many memories of Qingdao, but the fun memories of the ocean are still clear in my head.

For this book, the materials are the ocean, sheets of glass, and black paint or ink. The black paint will be used to write Chinese calligraphy letters onto multiple pieces of large scaled glass. Each character will be the size of a large luggage box. With the characters written as a story on the glass, they will then be dipped into the ocean. When the glass is in the ocean, the Chinese characters will slowly float off the glass and into the ocean. Each character will float on the surface of the water and appear exactly as it was written onto the glass. The characters will be slightly transparent because they are in water. As for the time, they will only stay in the water for around 3 to 4 hours after which they then will disappear in the order they were written.

The
first
word
would
disappear
followed
by
the
second
word
and
so
on.

**The
first
word
would
disappear
followed
by
the
second
word
and
so
on.**

The
first
word
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second

The only way for the audience to come in contact and read this book is to go underwater or in the sky. From the sky, the words will be large enough to read and the book can be seen as a whole. As for going underwater, the reader will be close to the characters and will not be able to see the book as a whole. This book will contain poetry from Chinese culture that talks about one's hometown or good memories.



POST ARTIFACT BITE

Through the lense of someone with an eating disorder, their thoughts and struggles are written on their body parts. This is the book they carry with them.

The bulging curve on my stomach, arms, and thighs are written in permanent ink on pages filled with delusional insecurities.

I worship the pattern and repetition of rib cages, the sharp edge of collar bones, and the barren gap between thighs. I practice this religion in hopes of one day looking like that. I have a desire to look sick and gangly.

Some find it cold, some find it soulless—but, there is so much beauty behind the basic, the nude, the natural. The uncomfortable frigidity of a blank canvas and the long harrowing tunnel of emptiness is beautiful to me. After all the suffering, I want to feel enlightened.

The grumbling of my stomach preaches the verses. But blueberry pie, the root of all evil, gets in the way. Sinful words in nutrition labels and numbers of extra pounds on the scale are engraved in lonely cravings.

It's just a bite. It'll be quick. I cave into these lonely cravings. Bless me, father, for I have sinned.

Each bite I take, I feel myself getting bigger and bigger. I have no self control. I really want to stop, but I can't. Each monstrous gulp is met with a heartbeat of anxiety.



I can't bare it any longer. I slice the layers of my skin open and pull the fat out of my body. I finally feel the lightness of air. Words flowing through the wind make a swift landing on blank pages.

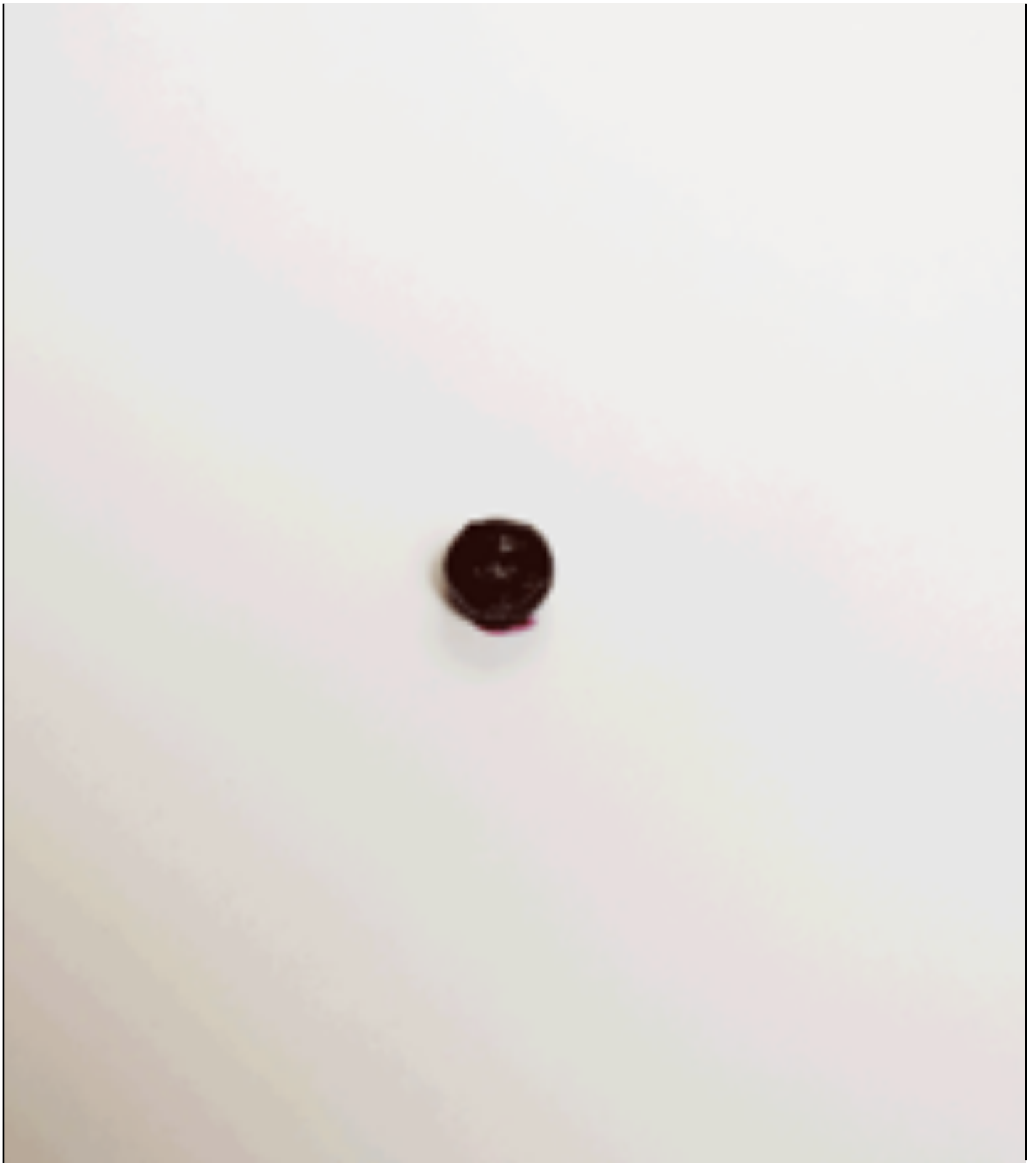
The words in my head telling me I'm too fat or not good enough are scribbled on the lines. The stylized curves from my fat work as intricate typography. The playful line weight taunts me, over and over again.

When will I ever get to the chapter of recovery.

This is the book I carry with me.

Written, printed, and published.

It will
never go away.



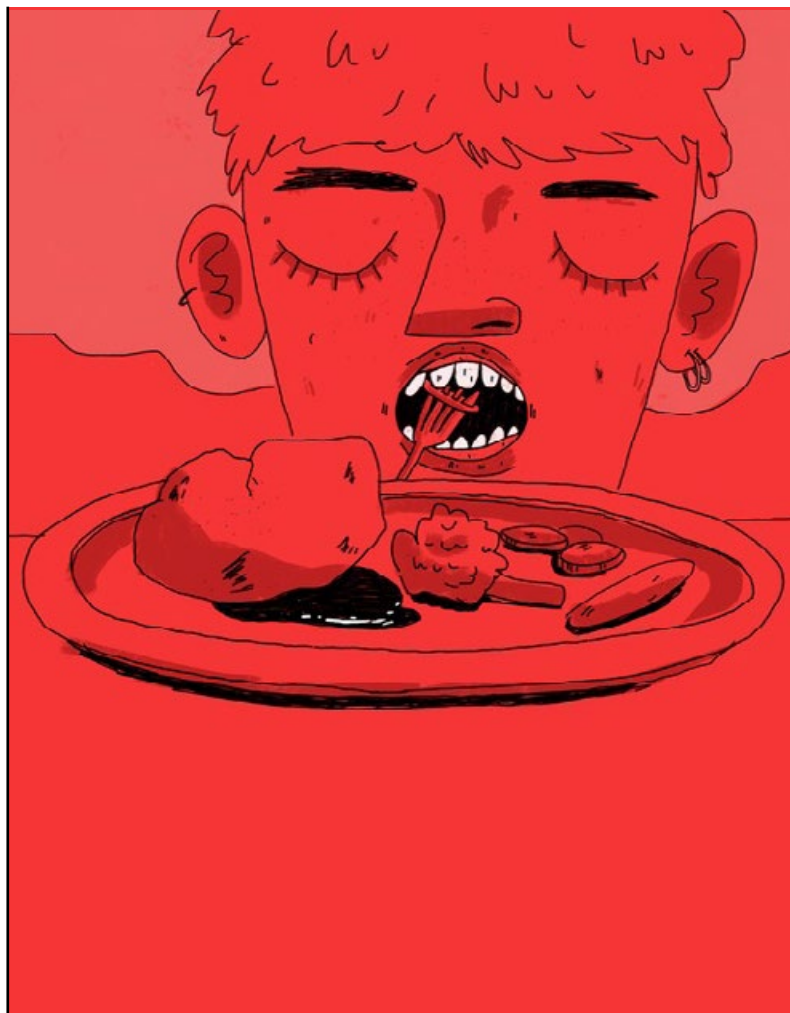
ALPHABET SOUP

The minute I taste raw parsley, no matter where, I'm immediately a 10-year old seated at the Passover dinner table at my grandparents house. I can feel the color of the rug in the room with the plastic over the furniture. I smell mothballs and matzo ball soup.

Taste can transport us to different times in our own lives, and possibly in this book, the stories and lives of others. Using food as a medium to tell these stories, taste and smell are used as story markers, moving around the plate to move throughout the story. Choose your own adventure by selecting different patterns at which to consume the narrative.

Moving beyond the physical realm of possibility the stories encased on these plates would be otherworldly and familiar, comfort food and spice. A single story served only once, and forgotten soon after it is consumed, as if waking from a dream you will forget to write down. Experienced as ethereal, and as slow moving or hurried as the consumer pleases. Take out boxes for those who prefer to read slower.

Tasting memories you can't recall physically doing because the stories you're tasting won't be yours, but are realized as if you had, the nostalgia and visceral nature still the same.



If you could smell
your childhood
school
gymnasium would
you still taste the
sweat in your mouth?
Can you taste some-
one else's?

SLEEP READING

When I was in high school, I used to put a textbook under my pillow and sleep on it at the night before exam, wishing the knowledge would come into my brain automatically so I can remember it when I wake up. It sounds funny but if there is a kind of books that people can “read” while they are sleeping, it will save lots of time and energy and will be the post artifact book in my imagination. By saying “reading” a book while sleeping, I mean to experience the book in dreams. The book would be smaller and lighter than regular books we read nowadays, probably as the size of a palm; it would have different shapes depend on readers’ requirements. Since it has to trigger dreams, I suppose it would be put beside the reader and emit a specific type of light, smell, or sound which makes people sleep quickly and fall into dreams of the book. If the book is a fiction or comic, readers would go through the plot as the protagonist, or as the third person like watching a 3D movie, which depends on the novel. If the book is a textbook or academic article, I assume it would be more like getting psychological suggestions by “reading” it so that readers would remember what they want after they wake up. The book also can record readers’ thoughts and opinions while experiencing the book; the authors can record what they want their readers to know in the book as well, so if someone want to know what others’ thoughts while “reading”, they can choose between “show other readers” and “show the author”. In addition, the book is like a mobile device: users need to download contents from an online library built for this book (which means the contents can only be activated by using the book) and they can take it with them wherever they travel.



to
experience
the
book
in
dreams.



