

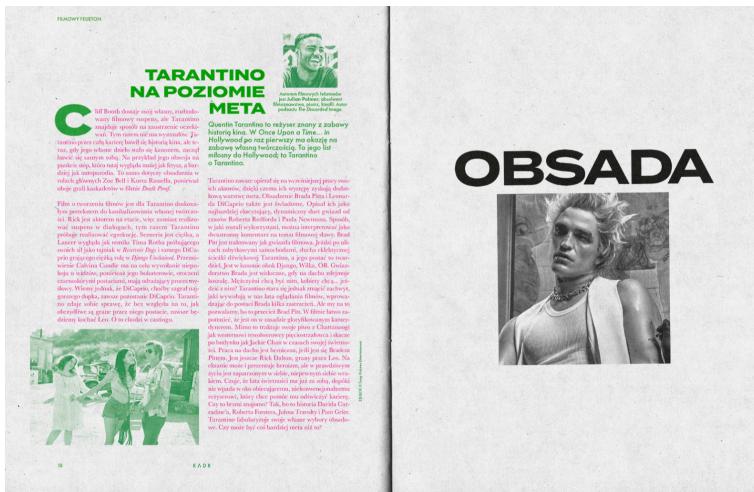
A Perfectionist's Process Book.

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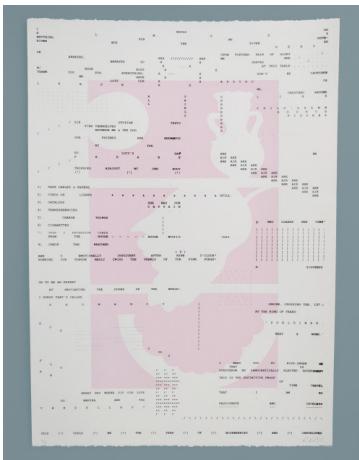
Research

My first choice for my topic was about the idea of the tormented artist. It revolved around the speech titled “Classical Music: The Love of My Life,” and combined it with Terrence Fletcher’s monologue from the film Whiplash. However, after worry that the monologue would be too short to work with, I switched my concept to focus on perfectionism, using the speech “Who Needs Perfection?” by Michael Axelson paired with the Thomas Leroy monologue from the movie Black Swan (2008). This new direction allowed me to keep the same visual language that I was adamant about in the first text pairing. A lot of the inspiration I enjoyed used repeated words as a form of typographic image. This technique conveyed a sense of musicality and rhythm and created a unique texture on the page. The blur of visual and auditory sensations was something I knew I wanted to incorporate since the beginning of this project.



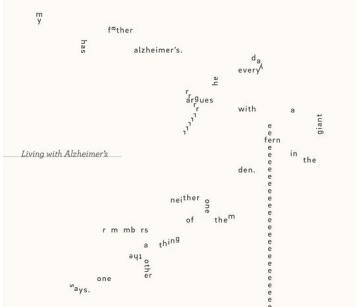
KADR magazine designed by Natalia Michalak, 2022

This spread incorporates duotone images that I find appealing. Restricting the color palette to just green and pink enhances its cohesion. While my initial vision included more colors, I decided to limit myself to two after drawing inspiration from this.



The Quietest Noise On Earth designed by Ben DuVall, 2016

What struck me about this was the way maintained a consistent scale while skillfully conveying a captivating sense of rhythm. I thought that the balance achieved between the uniformity of scale and the dynamic composition added a layer of complexity that elevated the overall aesthetic.



Five Oceans in a Teaspoon designed by Warren Lehrer, 1984

The rotational placement of the letters intensifies the sense of chaos, setting it apart from the one above.

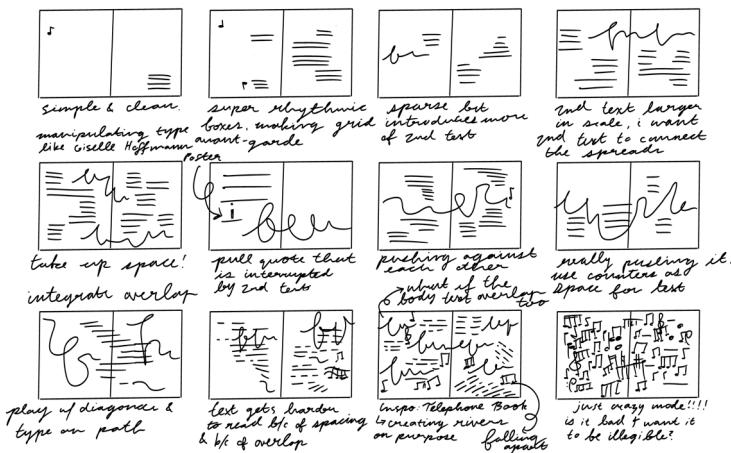


Ryan Carson Zine desinged by Kurt Woerpel, 2017

For me, type on path can be a hit or miss, but I feel that the slight imperfection in this one example was particularly fitting.

Discovery

Initial Book Map



This initial book map provides the overview of my book's design and intended progression. The concept was to start with a clean and straightforward design, gradually intensifying in complexity until it reaches a point where it borders on almost illegible text. The purpose behind this deliberate evolution is to guide the reader through the thematic context starting with clarity and then immersing them into a crescendo. I wanted the ending to be a punch that truly excentuates the impact.

**I'm just gonna lay it out there.
This is why I don't think we
should be together.**

I can't sing, can't even whistle, and, until recently, couldn't really say I played an instrument. That last omission officially changed two weeks ago when I received a certificate that said I'd managed to persuade a professional in the room for 10 minutes that I had a tiny grasp of the piano and had passed my Grade 1. I realize that, of course, when it comes to music, it doesn't matter how much or how little technical expertise one has. It doesn't matter if the sum total of your involvement in music is just as a listener, for music transcends any limits on ability, nationality, religion, or language. It is the most magical act of communication.

I came to class with a lot of type studies but did not really feel compelled with the options saw. The typeface I chose felt too “universal” in a way and did not really harken to the topic. After hours of scouring Arena, monotype, Adobe Fonts, and Fonstand, it’s clear that my largest hurdle was finding an appropriate font that exuded a classical feeling but was still very assertive. I ran into a lot of issues where the calligraphic font was just too dainty or when used for the body copy, rendered the entire thing illegible. Earlier iterations used the typeface Apparel but I eventually landed on Avenir, Snell Roundhand, and Miller Text. I chose a sans serif by default due to monospace serif fonts feeling too typewriter-esque and other serifs feeling too similar to the secondary text.

 Apparel 20 styles · by Linotype...

OpenType Std (CFF)   

The quick brown fox jum

 Avenir® 12 styles · by Linotype

OpenType Pro (CFF)   

The quick brown fox jum.

 Snell Roundhand® 3 styles · by Linotype

OpenType Std (TTF)   

The quick brown fox jumps ov.

Miller Text Roman

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Refinement

After small group discussions, it seemed the bubblegum pink was not ideal for the topic, possibly being too on the nose for ballet theming. I experimented with overlapping elements, but the outcome did not fully satisfy me. I downloaded sheet music from Swan Lake and manipulated them in Illustrator but I felt this process might have been a bit too over the top.

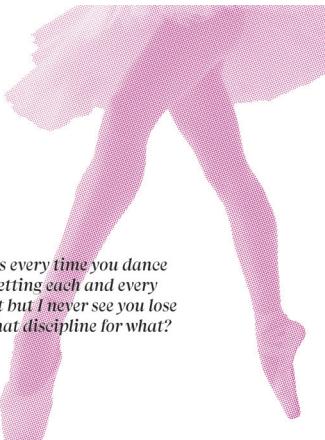
Edigman a quam, cum et rectepluo delopatus
od qui conseid ut lilt lanto
delopus nictat opta. Ate estar san,
quodigilish pauper runde! In rebulus
estar? Ben delopatas ma delopata tagibus, sum
tun pa! Ben delopatas ma delopata
cos et occupatas et aecopatas earo odi ihm, conse-
it hincipere conseid molidom quatur mod utae.
Os delopatatur stacteta sunt pratum noud
item volgatas andareum fugati qui atatecallib

Edigman a quam, cum et rectepluo delopatus
quodigilish opta alle nosenrit delopatus
sleect opta alle nosenrit fuga. Ate estar san,
quodigilish pauper runde! In rebulus delo quian,
estar? Ben delopatas ma delopata tagibus, sum
tun pa! Ben delopatas ma delopata
cos et occupatas et aecopatas earo odi ihm, conse-
it hincipere conseid molidom quatur mod utae.
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od qui conseid ut lilt lanto
delopus nictat opta. Ate estar san,
quodigilish pauper runde! In rebulus
estar? Ben delopatas ma delopata tagibus, sum
tun pa! Ben delopatas ma delopata
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od ihm, conseid hincipere conseid molidom
quatur mod utae. Os delopatatur stacteta sunt

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tun pa! Ben delopatas ma delopata
cos et occupatas et aecopatas earo odi ihm, conse-
it hincipere conseid molidom quatur mod utae.
Os delopatatur stacteta sunt

*Really? In four years every time you dance
I see you obsessed getting each and every
move perfectly right but I never see you lose
yourself. Ever! All that discipline for what?*



*Seduce us! Not just the prince but
the court, but the audience, the en-
tire world. Come on! Your fouettés
are like a spider spinning a web.*

*Attack it!
Attack it!
Come on!*

Once again, I wasn't satisfied with what I created—ironic, considering the topic revolves around perfectionism and how it can poorly impact your mental well-being. This sentiment led me to start my second InDesign file for this project. It's the first time I've felt so stuck in a creative rut, and none of my creations brought me joy. In this attempt, I aimed for the book to be loud and bold, with a strong use of royal blue. I introduced variations in scale and overlapped elements, both in images and text. Moreover, I incorporated music note pngs, but upon integration, they seemed unsophisticated and clipart-like.

I started my book again—officially marking this as my third InDesign file. This book has been a behemoth to me and I have been still stuck in a creative rut. After creating a whole new book, the last approach felt too cluttered. Even though I wanted it to be chaotic, it ended up feeling disorganized, and the design system was all over the place. I decided to try something new by taking a more understated approach to the chaos.

Additionally, I moved away from the png duotone and halftone treatment because the circular pattern was getting too distracting. The pngs did not fit the grid, so I searched for new images, regular jpegs that were boxed in. Using neutral beige, pinks, and navy, I attempted to create a new design system centered around these images and the repetition of figures within them. Some photos I found had too much grain and noise for my liking, but they were taken by Yevgeny Umnov from Russian ballet productions which I found interesting. I decided to incorporate this aesthetic into the book, keeping the grain to give it a more vintage quality that matched well with the duotone.

However, while the overall aesthetic was much more appealing, and the process of creating the book was much smoother compared to before. Still, it felt like something is missing. Some pages stood out, but others left me feeling confused about where my focus should be. This chaotic approach to the book seemed to undermine the visual hierarchy and made some visually interesting pages lose their impact. On the other hand, it was challenging to strike a simplistic tone without it seeming like the work was not put in.

It was at this point that I recognized that the speech I chose needs to be truly internalized because I felt an uncanny resemblance to Natalie Portman losing her sanity in *Black Swan*.

Perfection

Firstly, why is perfection impossible? Perfection – being correct in every detail – escapes our practical attempts to achieve it. Firstly – much like beauty – perfection is in the eye of the beholder. One person's perfection in one meal is only fit for pigs in the view of another. Notions of perfection are therefore relative – relative to the individual to their culture, to their notions of 'right' and 'wrong'. Thus, perfection defeats any notion of an objective definition.



The calligraphic typeface complemented the pull quotes effectively, but needed to be reined in and made more legible for the body text. After this, I continued to undergo more font exploration to find a balance between style and accessibility.



Witnessing the evolution of this final spread has been intriguing. Initially, it was extremely dynamic and somewhat chaotic and now this iteration made it completely lackluster. This change between different creative expressions is a testament to the fluid nature of the iterative and experimental nature of the design process.

An happy accident occurred during the assembly of this project—it naturally became a diagonal arrangement. My recent decision to introduce a splash of color to the backs of the pages resulted in a stunning gradient effect on the spine. However, the production process brought its own set of challenges. Working with thicker weight paper posed difficulties, particularly in managing the natural creasing that occurred during folds. I also encountered countless printer issues, resulting in each page turning out in a different color.

Furthmore, I explored numerous cover iterations ranging from more minimalistic approaches to vibrant and elaborate designs, mirroring the thematic elements found at the end of the book. I settled on a simple cover and decided that I wanted the book to be very unassuming. After all, who would want the cover to spoil the book?

The last day of class left me fine-tuning the newly incorporated feather elements and revisiting the final spread yet again. I realized that there was an excess of sans-serif font on the spread, creating a visual imbalance that felt more assertive and almost aggressive compared to the previous iterations. Recognizing the need for a more harmonious design, I revisited the typography so that it could simultaneously maintain the impact without overwhelming the viewer.

In addition to the existing two-dimensional elements, I decided to incorporate a ribbon into the binding, serving both as a decorative touch and as a conceptual reinforcement. The ribbon contributed to the overarching theme of presenting a seemingly chaotic book in a perfectly tied and cute bow. This addition aimed to symbolize the juxtaposition between disorder and a meticulously crafted exterior—all in all, accentuating the paradoxical nature of the project's prompt.



Criticism

In addition to the comments expressing concerns about the suitability of my font, I also received criticism regarding the overall cohesion of the book. While I intended the conclusion to be shocking, maintaining the book's design system proved to be extremely challenging. The final spread, designed to be chaotic, posed a big problem as the numerous elements I wanted to incorporate required redistributing them throughout the book. This decision, although necessary, disrupted the intended impact of the last spread.

Addressing criticism related to composition were more successful. Implementing suggestions to enhance the dynamism of the layouts brought about positive changes and I really enjoy the opacity treatment on the repeated words. However, I found myself grappling with an issue. While I cherished the chaos in the later parts of the book, it created a tension with the simplicity I aimed for in the beginning. Despite that the beginning sections were intended to be straightforward, I began to feel that they were underdeveloped in comparison. This struggle reflected my commitment to both chaos and simplicity.

Reflection

Overall, the reception of my book has been overwhelmingly positive, and I believe it is important for me to acknowledge and appreciate that. As an artist, especially a perfectionist artist, I feel like it's normalized to scrutinize and identify every perceived flaw in my work. However, I'm making a conscious effort to embrace a new perspective—one that steers away from self-deprecation. Now, I am making an effort to embrace all the positive decisions I've made throughout the process of creating this book. As I reflect, it becomes evident that each thoughtful choice, be it in design, composition, or thematic elements, has contributed to the overall resonance of this project.

Recognizing the transformative impact the Interconnection project has had on both my design sensibilities and my approach to the creative process, I can genuinely say that I am content with my final deliverable. Admittedly, this "aha" moment, occurred only after navigating through the challenges presented by four different iterations of InDesign files. I truly feel like I have found a deeper sense of satisfaction in my work, not just in this class, but throughout the entire semester. I recognize that imperfections are an inherent part of any creative endeavor.

Process Book Designed and Bound by Chandra Phenpimon for Typography II at the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, Fall 2023.

Body copy is set in Avenir designed by Adrian Frutiger and released by Linotype.
Header text is set in Snell Roundhand designed by Matthew Carter released by Linotype.

