2017

Ineffable: Latency in Symbolic Languages

Sirah Yoo
Virginia Commonwealth University

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FUCK Stick
REFISE—JAK
IK—MSSIFLJML
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In·effa·ble:
Latency in Symbolic Languages

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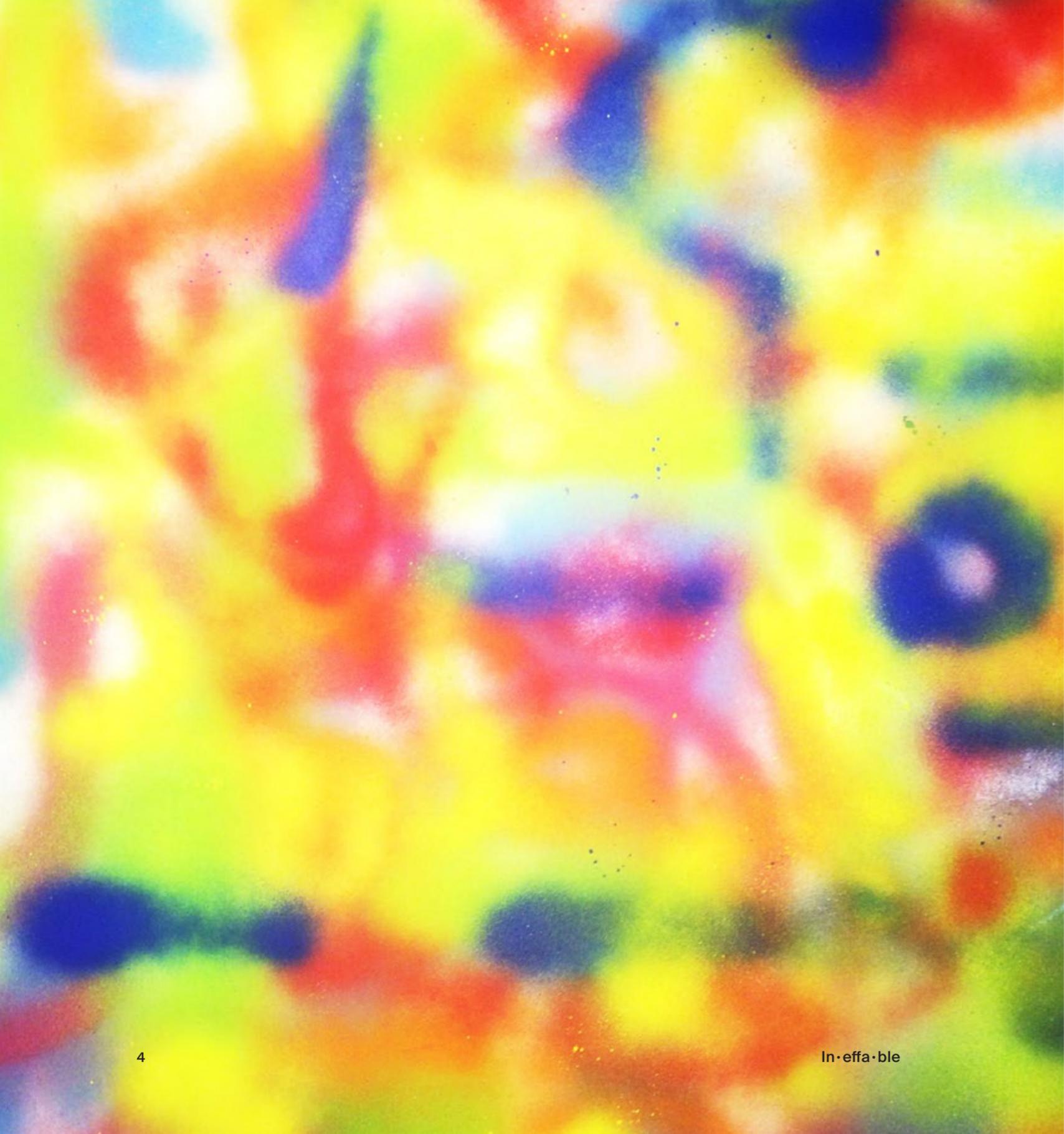
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To Finish Crossing

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DON'T CROSS

PUSH BUTTON
TO CROSS
you are
beautiful

Photograph
The Fan area
Richmond, Virginia
September 2016

BE VOCAL. EAT LOCAL.
Elwood Thompson's
LOCAL MARKET · SINCE 1989

Trump

SUN

OFFICIAL FUEL OF NAS

Galaxy
DINER
Carytown

In·effa·ble

Latency in Symbolic Languages

Photograph
N. Boulevard
Richmond, Virginia
September 2016

In·effa·ble

Latency in Symbolic Languages

Abstract

The design process
        demands

            a comprehensive knowledge

                of
        visual signs and symbols
                    with a focus on visual literacy;

    it is   related   to
        visual syntax,
                semantics,

        and
                the
            pragmatics
            of
    contexts.
            My work is   an
                interdisciplinary investigation
                    into
                how designers integrate polysemantic signs
        into their design process for particular and highly individualized
        audiences.

            By analyzing the role of signs
                    in specific contexts across
            the spectrum of arts,
            society,   literature,   and   semiotics,

                a designer's understanding of the cyclical
                    nature of   interpretation
                    and reinterpretation
                            in complex
                        environments
                creates
                    an avenue for cultivating
                        a new schema   that provides

```
Audience= A
Symbol·Sign= X
Raw Data= Z
Interpretation= B,C,D,E


A+Z = B
A+Z = C
A+Z = D
A+Z = E
A(X)+B = C + D
A(Z)+B = C + D
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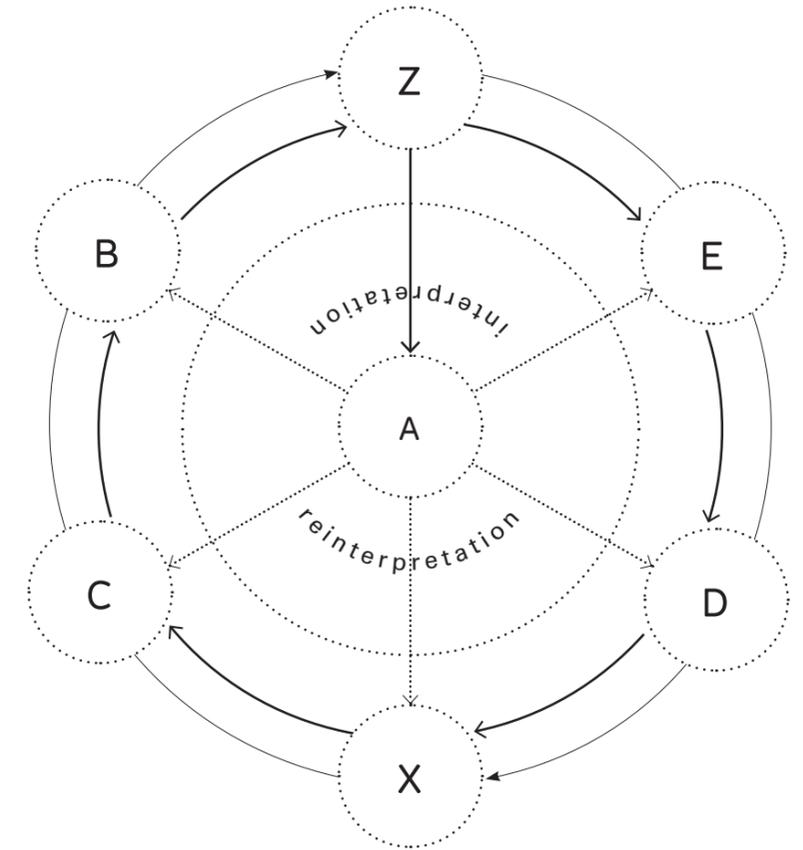

further levels of interpretations   different access points.
                            and
            By removing elements
        from   their original context,

                and fusing these elements into
                new narratives,
                    we   implement
                        new meanings   and
                            shine a light on
                                the value
                                of   interpretation.

Photograph
W. Franklin St. and
N. Harrison St.
Richmond, Virginia
October 2016

"The central concept in semiotics is the notion of sign. A sign, according to Peirce, cannot be seen independently of its object and its interpretant."

—In *Introduction to Discourse Studies* (Rekema, 35)

Introduction

Originial Set of Emojis
Museum of Modern Arts
(MoMA)

Praying hands
Unicode emoji

Symbols rely upon their context. Consequently, a single symbol holds multiple meanings. For instance, an emoji—the most successful symbolic language in the twenty first century— frequently has unintended meanings. Emojis were created in the late 1990s by Shigetaka Kurita, who was a part of a Japanese communications company. They have since exploded onto our digital-cultural landscape. According to *2015 Emoji Report* conducted by emotional marketing platform Emogi, emojis are used by 92 percent of the online population, especially with a growth of mobile usage.

The rapid adoption of emojis by users around the world has raised the question of whether they signify a new phase of language development. Because today's fast paced environment demands short, fragmented communication, people seek ways to infuse emotion into their texts, posts, and email.

Emojis provide a hyper-real dialect to deliver nuances of a speech in an online and mobile world and are embraced for their ability to express multiple feelings and ideas at once.

Suppose that It is your friend's birthday. You send a text. You contemplate particular emojis to accompany your message to represent your emotions. If you unconsciously choose "praying hands," the meaning might be perceived differently depending on the recipient. In the United States, a sign of praying hands indicates praying or pleading, but in Japan, it indicates gratitude. Depending on the countries, environments, or contexts you are in, it could mean: peace, meditation, or solidarity. In this simple example, we see that one particular emoji has multiple connotations for different people. Arguments against the idea of the use of emojis as signifying some form of new language is their very subjective nature and

In·effa·ble

Introduction

complexity. Neil Cohn, a linguist who specializes in visual language theory, describes the new wave of emojis as analogous to a visual gesture rather than a visual language. Emojis are at the intersection of visual language with writing—"a conversion of sound into graphics (a learned synesthesia). They can act like "visual gestures," supplementing or enhancing the expressions of the text. Or, they can be like a pidgin, a hybrid communicative resulting from the intersection of rules of different systems, often using combinations based on basic rules of meaning without a complex grammar."[1] Regardless of the outcome of this debate, emojis are a culturally significant phenomenon. The original set of 176 emojis is now a part of the collection at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

When considered within the context of visual metaphors and literature, pictorial languages convey emotional nuance and the tone of voice in short and succinct form. An attempt to communicate using emojis and symbols, was attempted by Chinese artist, Xu Bing in his book, *From the Ground: From Point to Point*.[2] The intention of the book was to explore ways that narrative can be understood outside the confines of written language. The book tells the story of a man experiencing the frustrations of travel in a tense urban environment. Bing's book opens a new paradigm of writing and reflects the current social phenomenon of constructing crude sentences with pictograms such as emojis. Such sign languages are formulated and interpreted as semiotic indexes by individuals who share the same language and culture.

This can happen at many levels. Diverse types of professionals, followers of religious organizations, fans of sports teams, or even public works employees interpret symbols in idiosyncratic ways, reflecting shared understandings and experiences. These symbols generate semantic ambiguity for those outside of the group who do not share a common or distinguishing set of socio-cultural values.

Internal and External
These different groups share their encoded cultural perceptions through their own words and signs which have been previously agreed upon. They understand a particular message from the signs and how to use that 'internal' message, respective to their own communities. As the example of the praying hands illustrates, a sign's meaning is completely dependent on its existing social context. Further, the shared understanding stemming from a particular social group implies the existence of two groups: "insiders" and "outsiders"—those who can discern the communication, and those who either misinterpret the message or who are passively indifferent. Communication through these cryptic dialects builds an invisible boundary separating these insiders and outsiders. This boundary also creates an access point in which people, especially people from the outside can participate the process of the language development, creating unpredictable discourses beyond the restriction of being insiders and outsiders. In *Introduction to Discourse Studies*, the author Jen Rekema states that "The central concept in semiotics is the notion of sign. A sign, according to semiotician Charles S. Peirce, cannot be seen independently of its object and is interpretant."[3] This concept implies that a social mode of communication designates a specific value

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1. Neil Cohn, "Rules of Emoji," The Visual Linguist, July 20, 2014, , accessed May 09, 2017, http://www.thevisuallinguist.com/2014/07/ .

2. Xu Bing, *Book from the ground. From point to point* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014).

3. Jan Renkema, *Introduction to discourse studies* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2012), 35.
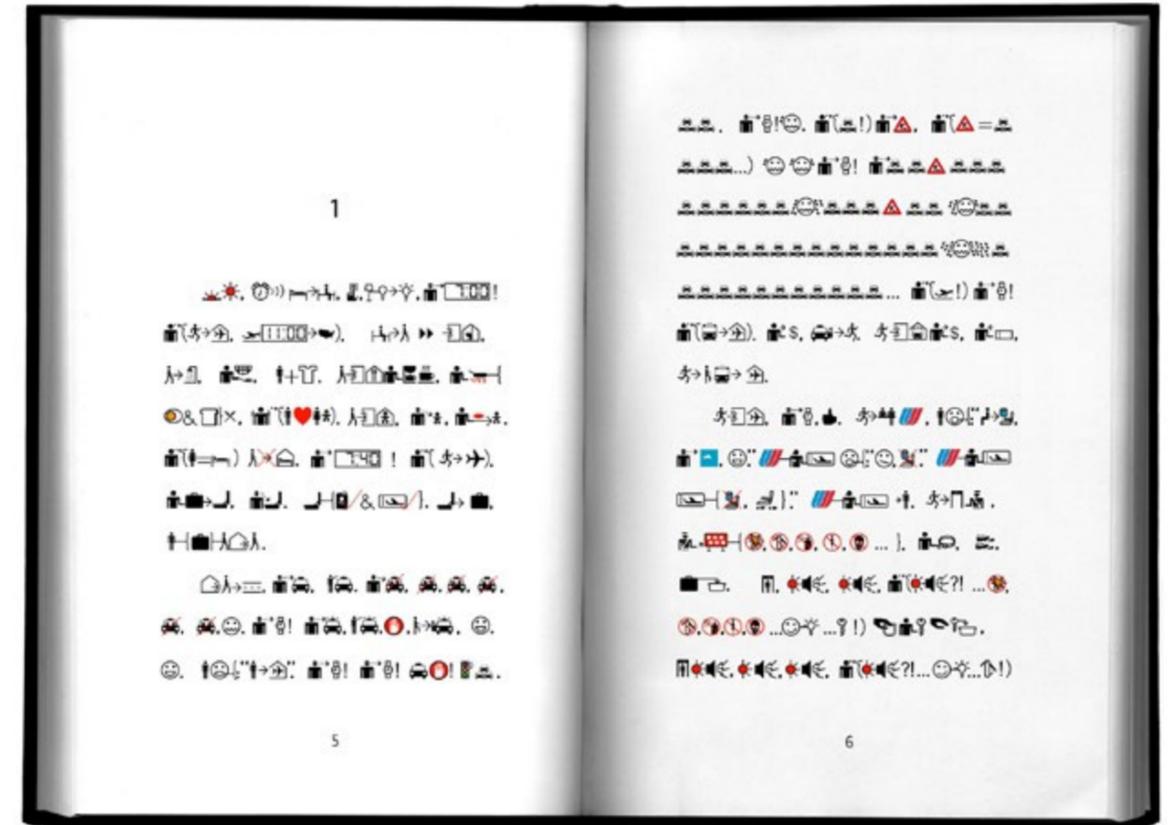
From the Ground:
From Point to Point
Xu Bing

rather than the sign system itself. As a result, a value relates to our individual relationships with society—a line that defines internal and external territories from its meaning.

Perception and Human Agency
In his book, *Communication, Codes & Culture,* semiotician Donald Thomas, describes how people consciously or unconsciously see and understand visual information. He states that "seeing is a form of consciousness, a form that we live within and which we can allow to be out consciousness for us. Why a form of consciousness? In a sense, because it permits

a complex response to the environment, a response that renders raw sense-data into things."[4] The idea of signs, defined as a symbolic language is primarily based on human perception involving levels of interpretation. This interpretation synthesizes raw visual information into a shortened, and abbreviated form of the actualization of the raw material of the sign in the same way it is encoded at the time of its creation. In his another article, *Semiotics: The Pattern which Connects,* Thomas argues

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4. Thomas, Donald W. *Semiotics 3: Communication, codes & culture* (Lexington, MA: Ginn Custom Publishing, 1982), 179

In·effa·ble

that these processes of interpretation "posited a connection between deep and surface structures but never clarified the imputed relation between the description and what was being described."[5] Graphic design provides the tools to convey such structures of interpretations in the actualization of the tension. According to the book *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice,* the actualization is a human agency to act independently to make a free choice while reflecting a structure that is affected by factors of influence—such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ability, customs, etc.—that determine or limit an agent and individual decisions.[6]

Photograph
From Ryland St.
and W. Grace St.
Richmond, Virginia

5. Donald W. Thomas, "Semiotics," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 5, no. 2 (1987): 295, doi:10.5840/ajs19875221.
6. Chris Barker, *Cultural studies: theory and practice* (London: Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2006), 448.

Photograph
From Park Ave and Boyd St.
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph
From Park Ave and Boyd St.
Richmond, Virginia

In·effa·ble

Central to a graphic designer's
work is the problem of producing
what are inevitably subjective
interpretations of a sign, where a
sign is intended to be measured
by the context in which it occurs.

intrinsic value of a sign system and juxta-poses them into an integrated text. These systems draw deeply from the geographical approach, are consistent but flexible, and will help further my understanding and use of visual and audibility in conjunction.

As a graphic designer, I am interested in symbols and the context of their creation. How do humans assign a meaning into a symbol? What allows symbols to have a special mean-ing in particular contexts? I am interested in these obscure languages. Symbols that are nearly similar to lingo—which reflects our social circumstance—have polysemic mean-ings in different contexts. Central to a graphic designer's work is the problem of producing what are inevitably subjective interpretations of a sign, where a sign is intended to be measured by the context in which it occurs. There is a tension between what we have seen through our physical eyes and what is being presented. This phenomenon shows that the complexities of individual signs have the ability to be interpreted beyond their original, intended meanings. Designers know this phenomenon very well and must reflect on a context of signs to prevent people from misinterpretation. Therefore, they have to employ signs in particular ways to enable a system of signs to be used by audiences.

Through my work, I examine how the study of signs merges with pragmatics in visual literacy. It consists of acclimating myself to the context of an original system of signs. I am interested in how inherently figurative images change to non-figurative images when experienced in different contexts. I begin my project by defin-ing a sign system in the urban environment, collecting integrated sign systems (ranging from a hobo sign system to utility signs), going through an in-depth investigation of defining the meaning of each symbol, and repurposing existing systems into a new visual narrative.

In addition to the researching of a conventional utilitarian marking system, I applied the tools of semiotics, identifying the substance of the symbols. I am developing methods that will inform my work by finding and transforming the inherent relationships between an environ-mentally embedded data set and vernacular that is easily neglected. The composition of these various disciplines allow for the creation of a comprehensive narrative drawn from the same information. I develop rules of constraints for establishing the system: a location of words, a material of signs, a color palette, a medium, and a set of directional indicators. These provide boundaries for me to work within and to express ideas visually and phonetically.

An example of such a sign system is utilitarian marks on the streets. We unconsciously pass by these spray-painted marks. Utilitarian codes were developed for the purpose of indicating public and private underground infrastructure hidden beneath the surfaces of city streets. Each state in the U.S. follows the designated color code. It was originally introduced in 2001 by *American Public Work Association* respond-ing to the need for a uniform set of marking standards for the utility industry. A couple of issues arose while coming to an agreement

Moreover, I am mapping out diverse types of code systems to create an alternative visual syntax that incorporates their inher-ent sequence and structure, classifies the

to use "universal symbols" for the purpose of utility marking. Ingrid Burrington, in her book *Networks of New York: An Illustrated Field Guide to Urban Internet Infrastructure,* investigated the taxonomy of manhole covers and deciphered the colorful symbols that are found on the streets of New York City.[1] Her intention behind this was to crack the mystified utilitarian code marking system that is often considered to be concealed. From an interview with *The Intercept,* she points out that infrastructure is often designed to be ignored. The field guide turns the infrastructure into something ordinary and familiar, not intimidating, nor some mysterious process by which symbols and markings appear.[2] On her investigation, the tension between seeking and finding a meaning of a sign is what makes it dependent on the context and its denomination by the user.

Utilitarian codes use glyphs and numbers in a systematic way. A similiar "hidden language" of the streets is graffiti, which is used to communicate messages between gangs who use carefully crafted codes to warn off rivals, and indicate territorial dominance. How do we find the distinction between utilitarian codes and gang graffiti? Although both use marks that are drawn with the almost same material, there is a different social acceptance in our perception of how these systems establish an invisible and isolated form of communication. Unlike utility codes, graffiti marks are often considered to be nothing more than vandalism, but they are actually part of a sophisticated underground vernacular language that is

used to communicate through a humanized symbols. While utilitarian marks consist of predefined symbols and abbreviations of names of utility companies, graffiti employs more idiosyncratic symbol sets that identify individual groups. The styles, and uses of symbols are actually designated by these groups.

I am interested in how messages are coded and decoded outside of the formal confines of written language. I want to explore how codes are constructed and subsequently interpreted by learning them. By using temporally written and arbitrarily composed symbols and signs, I am able to create a new context at a juncture between the insiders and outsiders—those who understand the embedded narrative and the "hidden" meaning of language and those who do not. The question presented in this paper is how does one convert a language to work within the confines of a particular piece of communication?

If we consider the study of communication to be the study of meaning, in what sense and to what degree can semiology contribute to our understanding of meaning? We read signs and symbols to find a deeper and latent meaning that communicates through the very concrete objective nature of the element. Symbolic languages can by used to produce alternative, implied meanings by a process of rearrangement of words or phrases taken out of context and given a new order. I believe the meaning-making process allows us not only to create new meaning, but helps us to identify the world.

1. Ingrid Burrington, *Networks of New York: An illustrated field guide to urban Internet infrastructure* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2016).
2. Cora Currier, "A Walking Tour of New York's Massive Surveillance Network," *The Intercept,* September 24, 2016, , accessed May 09, 2017, https://theintercept.com/2016/09/24/a-walking-tour-of-new-yorks-massive-surveillance-network/.

**Photograph
N. Boulevard and
W. Broad St.
Richmond, Virginia**

Candidacy Project

Birds,
An Experimental
Typeface System
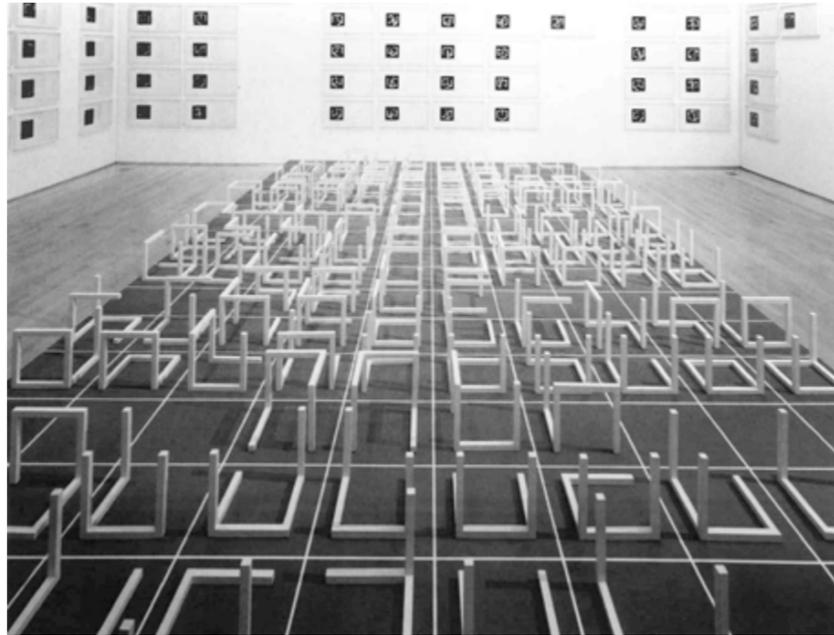
Reference
Incomplete Open Cubes, 1974
Sol Lewitt
Artist, 1928-2007

Birds,
An Experimental Typeface System

According to the book *The Psychology of Graphic of Images* by Manfredo Massironi, "perception of graphic elements and forms is different from perception of more everyday imagery. Graphic elements can be perceived and interpreted as objects, edges, or textures."[1] Massironi states that perception is a chain of events by introducing a perception game called "the genesis of birds." This is a short and quick drawing game that examines our perpetual process and the ability to recognize a feature with a shared mechanism for primary visual processing.

This recognition process is called "visual object recognition" in the area of perceptual research. This involves a visual state that processes objects from observation of a "distal stimulus" that activates recognition.[2] He also asserts that "the specificity of graphic communication requires a fundamental honesty. Although the world depicted is fictional, the creator of graphic form is not trying to deceive the viewer, but attempting to communicate clearly and convincingly."[3]

1. Manfredo Massironi and Nicola Bruno, T*he psychology of graphic images: seeing,drawing, communicating* (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), 215.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
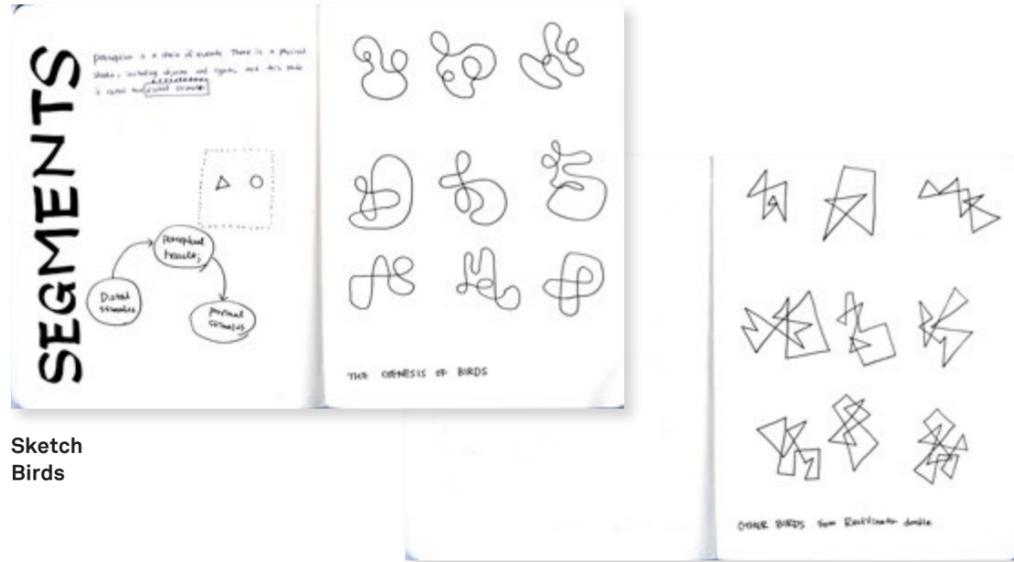
Sketch
Birds

In a psychology study, Dr. Gerald S. Hecht explains sensation and the perception process: "The distal stimulus is the object in the world. The proximal stimulus is the representation of that object within a sensory system. The 'trick' is to get from the proximal stimulus back to a perception of the distal stimulus. Somehow, the brain must process the information received by the various sensory systems, and convert that information into meaningful perceptions (sights, sounds, tastes, etc.). Thus, perception is an active and biological process."[4]

Typography serves a significant role in visual communications as written languages are an efficient tool for communicating information. *Birds* is an experimental type system that explores the use of highly abstracted ligatures to convey both explicit and implicit messaging. In typography, ligatures are two or more letters that are connected to form one character as a single glyph. I wanted to create a type system that uses "doodles" as a pictorial system evoking the idea of an ideogram.

4. Dr. Gerald S. Hecht, "Sensation & Perception Study Guide," *Dr. Gerald S. Hecht*, accessed May 05, 2017, http://www.psiwebsubr.org/SUBR/studyguides/381/ psyc381exam1studyguide.html.

Birds, 2016
Type Specimen Book
7 x 9"
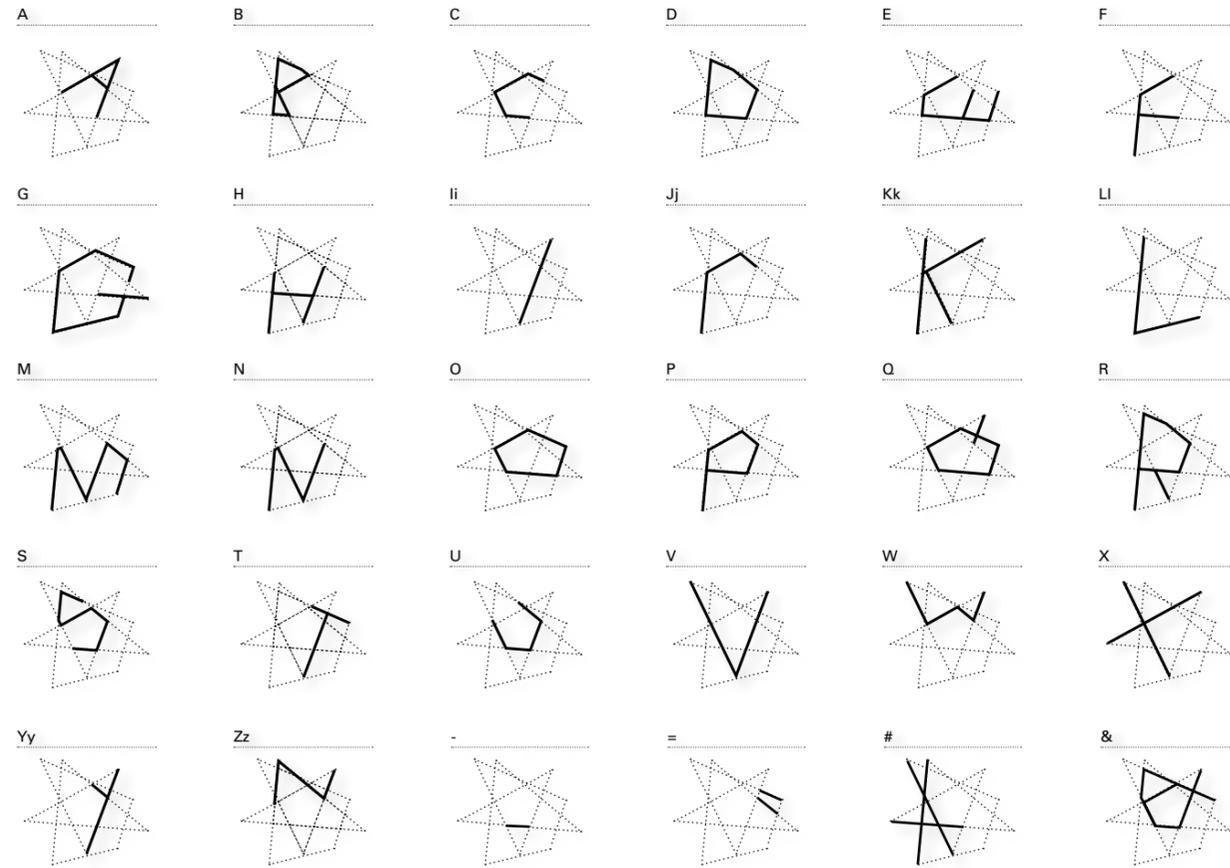
Birds Typeface
2016
Capital letters
Digital rendering
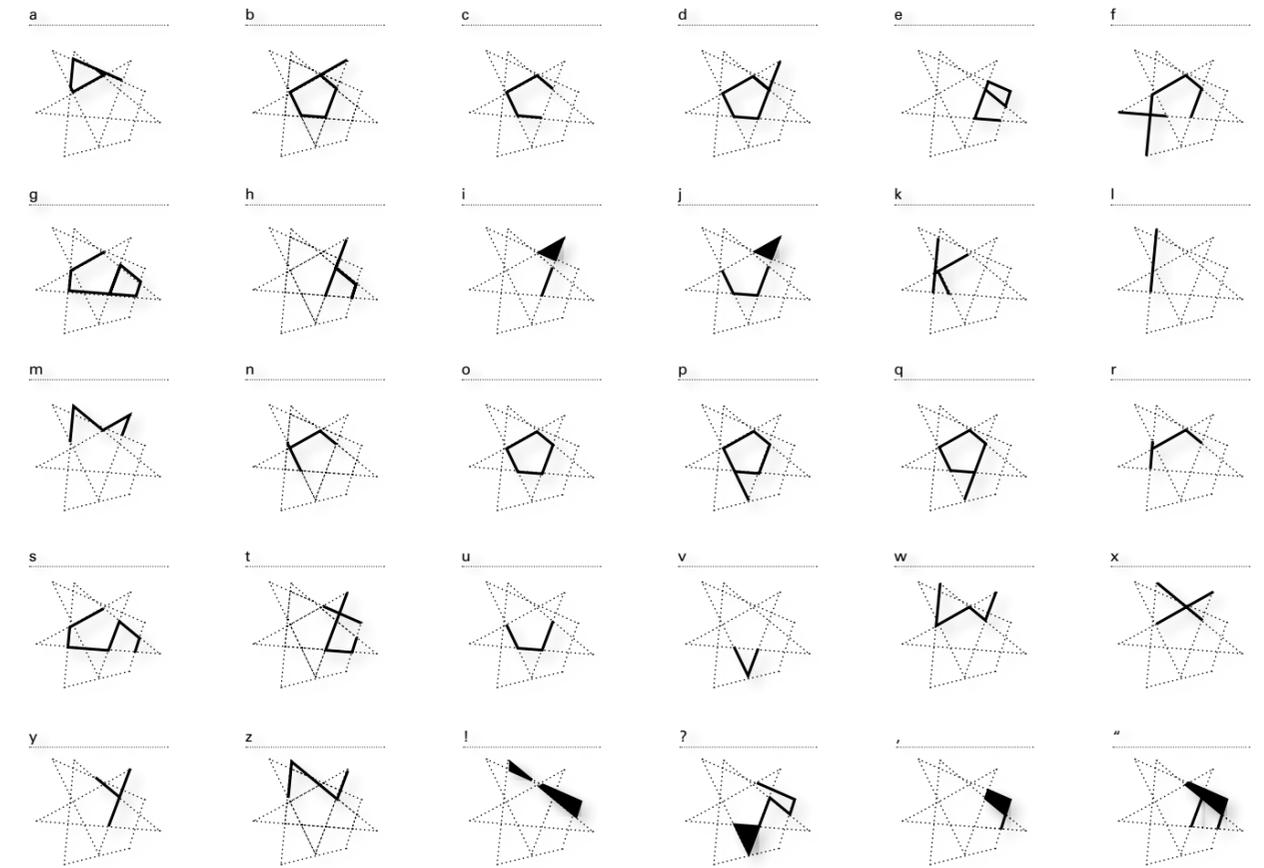
Birds Typeface
2016
Letterform
Lowercase
Digital rendering

Birds is a new type system
based on the geometrical
abstract morphologic space
that uses typographic ligatures.

Poem divided into stanzas

This type system originates from a doodle that contains arbitrary straight lines. In this project, the bird is: an inspiration, an object that renders a bird form, and a system of using a ligature that ties all letters. As a consequence, the joined ligature system creates a simultaneous sensory effect that represents a flock of birds.

By adapting a content of a poem, *The Birds,* by William Blake to display this typeface, the visual structure becomes more prominent than the letters. Because of its legibility with connected ligatures on each letter, it is intended to be used as a display typeface in a minimal type size.

This visual poem is engaging with the *Birds* type system, and it enhances the structure of the contents.

First Stanza

Second Stanza

Third Stanza

Fourth Stanza

Fifth Stanza

Birds Typeface, 2016
Experimental Type System

In·effa·ble

Birds Typeface, 2016
Experimental Type System

Candidacy Project

Birds

First stanza

Second stanza

Fourth Stanza

Third Stanza

The Birds
by William Blake

Fifth Stanza

Birds is a new type system based on the geometrical abstract morphologic space that uses typographic ligatures.

This visual poem is engaging with the *Birds* type system, and it enhances the structure of the contents.

Birds Typeface, 2017
Experimental Type System

Birds Typeface, 2017
Experimental Type System

Google search
Hobo Signage, 2016
Sign System

Poster
Hobo Signage, 2016
Mixed media:
Rat wire, torn
jeans, cookies

Candidacy Project
Hobo signage

Hobos in the early twentieth century developed a set of idiosyncratic symbols as a means to communicate within their loosely organized society. From the early the 20th century to the Great Depression, hobos played a significant part in the history of America. They were nomadic workers who traveled across the country seeking work, taking it wherever they could not staying in one place for a long time. Their secret codes spread throughout the nation with the improvement in the American Railroad System—the hobos' primary means of travel. Life as a hobo was dangerous. Individuals struggled with poverty and the hostility of many train crews and police forces in the towns through which they passed. To cope with the uncertainties of their lives, hobos developed a system of symbols to deliver information to their fellow travelers about what to expect as they entered unfamiliar places.

The symbols would be written with chalk or coal to provide direction, useful information, and warnings to those who followed them.

The language of the hobos relied primarily on the use of expressive geometric shapes and a minimum of recognizable letterforms and numbers. The language had a limited syntax and was used largely to "tag" certain places as either welcoming or dangerous. Messages had to be easy to read while looking like little more than random markings to everyone else who came across them. The code featured repeating elements such as circles and arrows that were used to indicate direction. In some codes, hashtag symbols or crossed lines signified warning. The hobo sign system is considered one of the cryptolects according to *The Guardian magazine:* "a secretive language used to confuse and exclude others and affirm the character of a marginalized subculture."[1] In the *Web Urbanist*, an author by the single name, Delana, observes that the hoboglyphics were mainly cryptic and nearly impossible for people outside of the hobo community to understand their connotation: a cross mark in a circle, for example, meant "this place is already taken by someone else." However, hobos are rare today as the railway industry has been declined and it is much harder "to hop on and off of a freight train undetected." [2] As a result, hobo language is largely unused today.

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1. Gary Nunn, "In with the in crowd: secret languages can confuse, exclude or empower," *The Guardian*, April 08, 2016, n.pag, accessed May 05, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2016/apr/08/in-with-the-in-crowd-secret-languages-can-confuse-exclude-or-empower.
2. Article by Delana, filed under Graphics & Branding in the Design category, "Hoboglyphs: Secret Transient Symbols & Modern Nomad Codes," *WebUrbanist,* July 11, 2013, n.pag, accessed May 01, 2017, http://weburbanist.com/2010/06/03/hoboglyphs-secret-transient-symbols-modern-nomad-codes/.

Sketch
Hobo Signage, 2016
Sign System

Good for begging

Shower

Religious place

Nothing here

Free food

People are mean

May sleep here

Good for hangout

Bathroom

Change your battery here

Bad man lives here

Good for working

Transportation

Free doctor

Storage place
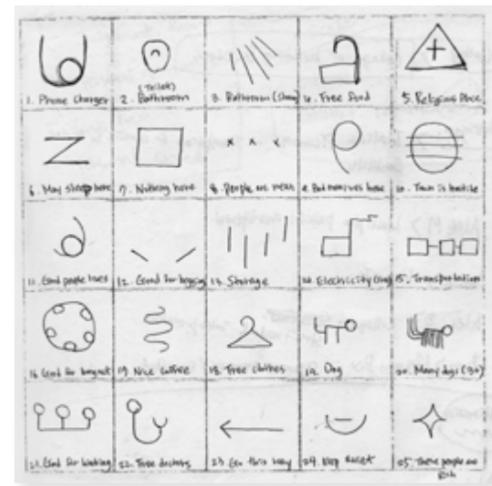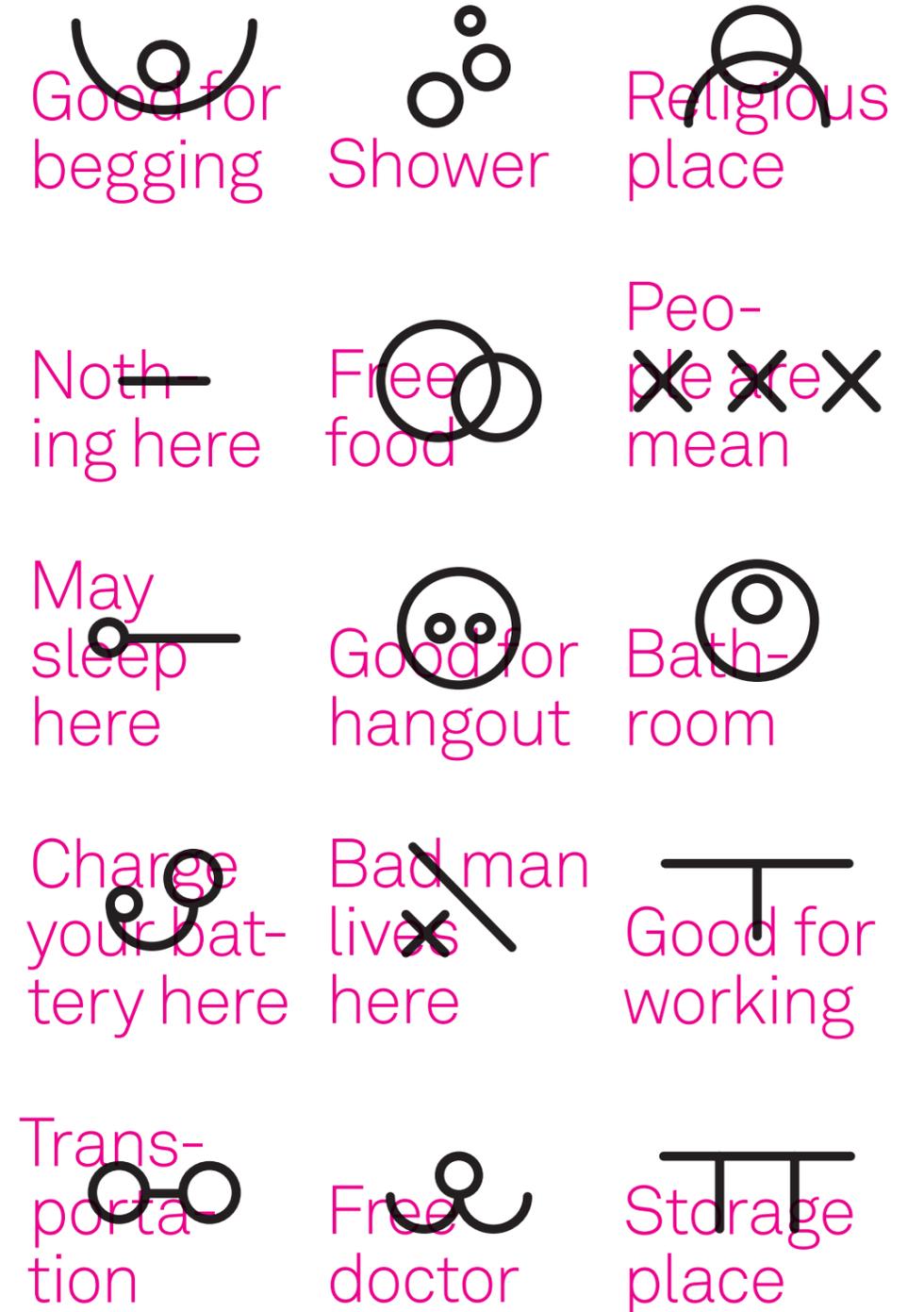
Vector Drawing
Hobo Signage, 2016
Sign System
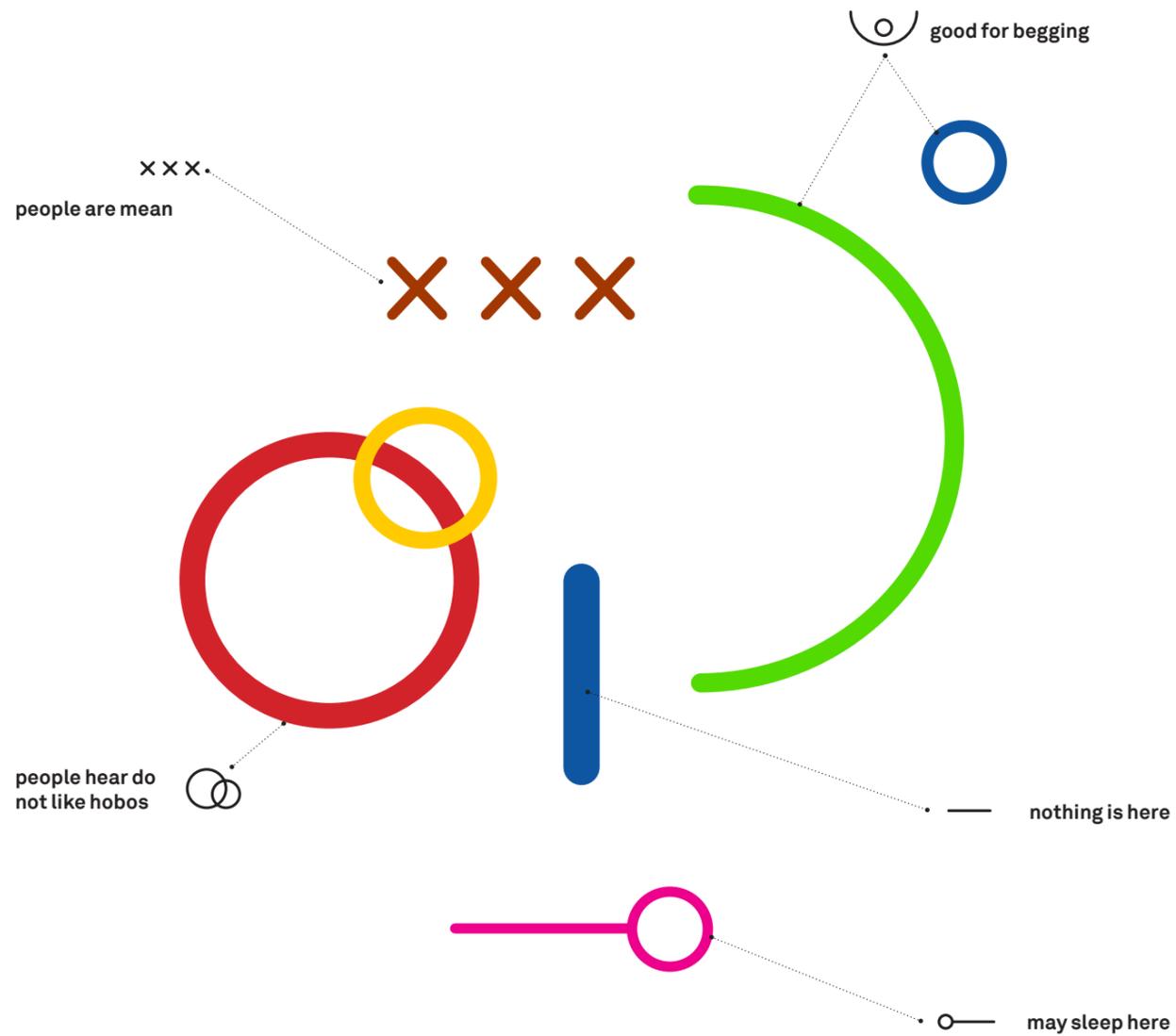
good for begging

×××

people are mean

people hear do
not like hobos

nothing is here

may sleep here

(hello)

● People are mean here

because

●● People here do not like hobos

therefore

● Nothing here

So it might not

● Good for begging

However, you

● May sleep here
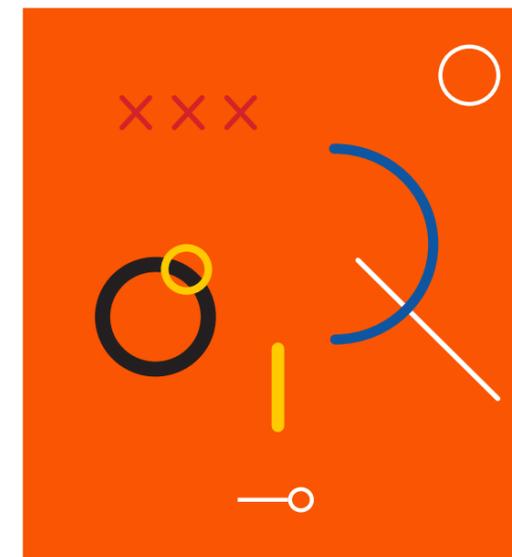
Designing for a specific community is always challenging, especially for a designer who is outside of the community. This project aims to create a new signage system for hobos.

Fundamental to most examples of hobo signage is the notion that geometric shapes can be visually as well as verbally expressive. While this signage system is now obsolete, a universal communication system based on modern circumstances and even modern technology can be developed for the current nomadic culture.

this is
the place

kind woman
tells sad story

good chance to
share a food or
good place
to handout

bread

food for working

Diagram
Narrative of Previous Signs
Hobo Signage
2016
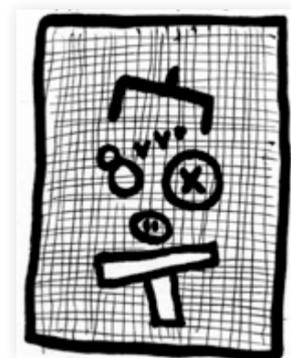
Sketch
Hobo Signage
2016

Promotional poster, 2016
Mixed media:
Rat wire, torn jeans,
bamboo basket, fabrics

Promotional poster, 2016
Mixed media:
Rat wire and other
found objects

Promotional poster, 2016
Mixed media:
Rat wire and other
found objects

The culinary approach solves the problem of spreading the new sign system in a confidential setting with hiding the information with a designed label that is clandestinely coded. As an object, the cookies contain the information of the language in a form that is easily distributed. And, they leave little traces once they are eaten.

Hobo Signage, 2016
Sign System
Promotional material
Cookie wrapper

The distribution process of the sign system was the biggest consideration for this project. How do I educate modern-day hobos about this new language confidentially? How do I access this community? My approach to these questions was baking cookies that introduced the glyphs of the new symbol system and their meaning. Once I created a set of hobo symbols, I made customized cookie cutters that I can use to 'engrave' codes on the surface of cookie dough.

Hobo Signage, 2016
Sign System
Promotional material
Engraved sign

In·effa·ble:
Poems of the Sidewalk

Photograph
From E. Franklin St.
and 17th St.
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph
From W. Franklin St.
and N. Laurel St.
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph
From W. Franklin St.
and N. Harrison St.
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph
From N Laurel St.
and Cathedral Pl.
Richmond, Virginia

As I began my second year of study, I was fascinated with finding hidden meaning behind obscure languages that socially, and culturally materialize in urban environments. I began by identifying coded languages that exist our contemporary environment and became particularly interested in the presence of utility codes. I was interested in finding the relationship among utilitarian marks and symbols, the form of abbreviations that are used in such systems, and the culture that are reflected by them.

As designers, we frequently repurpose visual forms in various combinations to designate new meanings. In this project I asked, what is the purpose behind the obscure languages on the streets? In cartography, how are map legends created visually? What types of visual languages are used to indicate the location of geographical information? When something is reproduced and repurposed, what original, intended value persists through its reproduction?

Photograph
From N Laurel St. and
Cathedral Pl.
Richmond, Virginia

In·effa·ble

Photograph
From N Laurel St. and Cathedral Pl.
Richmond, Virginia

To begin this project, I drew from the notion of psychogeography—a process that defamiliarizes urban environments permitting the perception of one's surroundings or the objects of everyday life with fresh eyes. Defamiliarization offers a unique opportunity to see the signs and notations found on our streets. These "hidden" languages then become a voice of a street. When I took different pathways through the city, these obscure signs, symbols and notes formed, in their atypical syntax (multi-colored hieroglyphs, dashes, commas, and other punctuation) a very special meaning. This research opened up to the possibility of other "hidden" languages embedded in our environment and how those languages facilitate privileged and possibly covert communication existing just outside of our notice.

**Photograph
From Summit Ave.
Richmond, Virginia**

**Photograph
From N. Boulevard
Richmond, Virginia**

These "hidden" languages— just like a foreign language is perceivable with the right tool for understanding— becomes a voice of a street.

In·effa·ble

Photograph
From N. Boulevard
Richmond, Virginia

In·effa·ble

Process

In addition to the utility codes, I also collected marked or etched notes on the streets made by random individuals. People often engraved their names or a specific numbers or dates or even a 'secret' message on wet concrete to commemorate their presence. This collection of two different records— personal coded notes and 'official' utility indicators—cultivated a bizarre narrative about the sites chosen for investigation.

Photograph
From N Laurel St. and
E Franklin St.
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph
From Grove Ave. and
N Morris St.
Richmond, Virginia

Photograph
From W Franklin
St. and Ryland St.
Richmond, Virginia

In·effa·ble

Process

With each pathway I investigated, I collected fragments of these texts and adjacent incidental marks on these surfaces and converted them into a script. My "visual poems" give voice to these inscriptions by presenting visual data from the streets, the ground, and the sidewalks and fusing them into an integrated text. The scripting process provides a comprehensive narrative while containing the unfiltered information of the secret glyphs.

In considering how to give form to these abstract scripts I turned to examples from the practices of concrete poetry. Examples include the sound poems of Kurt Schwitters, experimental music notation by Toshi Ichiyanagi and the work of Barbara Kruger. From these influences, I began to create a compositions that use language as an element from the environment, giving found snippets a prominent role in a new context by revealing and highlighting them. This process is based on a notion taken from poststructuralism—a chain of signification, an emphasis on the arbitrary association of signs. The mechanism of poststructuralism does not assume that a sign is defined by itself. It demands a parameter, a context, to understand the sign. Once I change the context of signs by injecting and overlapping a different system, the result is that identical signs shift their role as a component of the composition and become expressive beyond their original contextual meaning.

Photograph
From W Broad St.
and Ryland St.
Richmond, Virginia
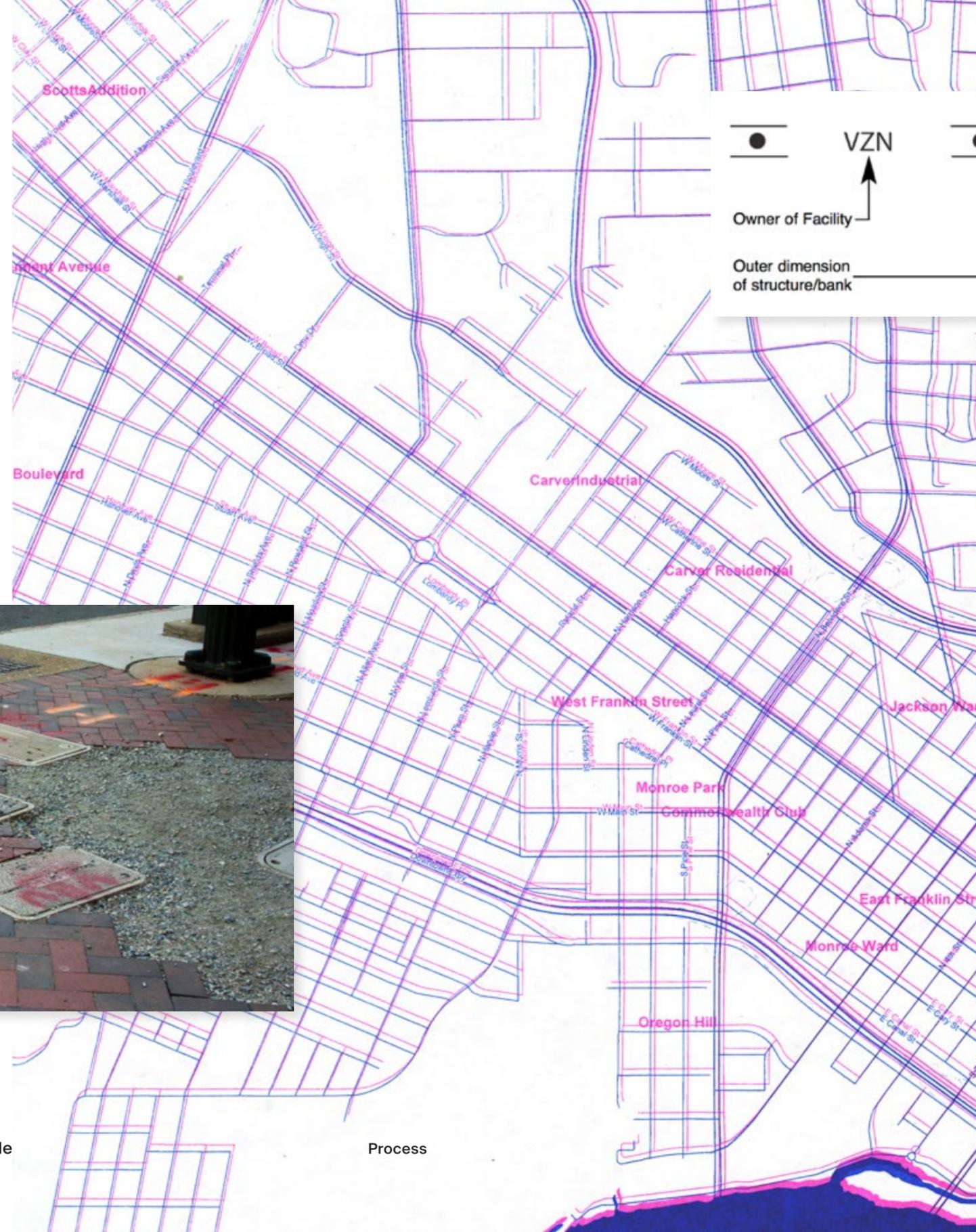
Virginia Marking Standard
Marking Practice Rule no.9
APWA

Map of Richmond
Risograph
11 x 17"

In·effa·ble

Process

**Poems from
the Sidewalk**

Visual Poems

In·effa·ble

Process

↑36

ZAYO
ZAYO
▲52 ← — ZAYO
bill was here
997 ▲ 1288
→
↓1
con — HLL

cody
2011 4/7
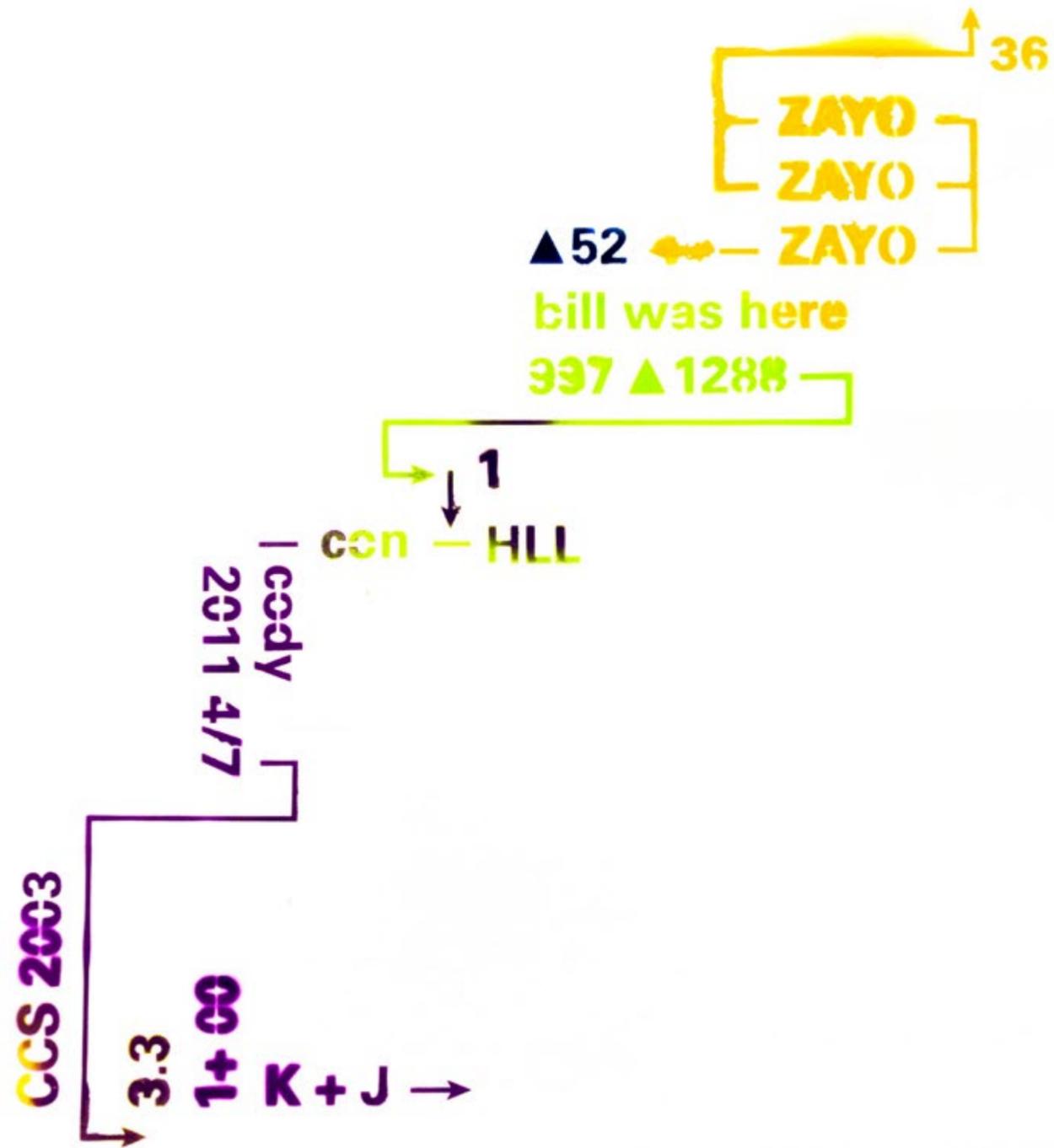
CCS 2003
3.3
1 + 00
K + J →

ZAYO
Name of Utility company.

↑36

Cor
City of Richmond.

— ZAYO —

Lines
Each mark indicates
the utility position.

— ZAYO —

— ZAYO —

→ ▲52 —

bill was here
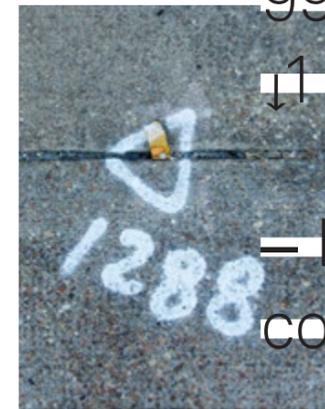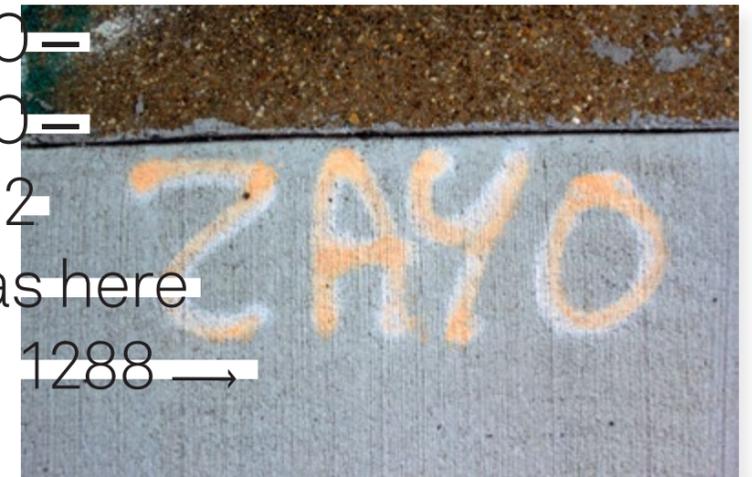
997 ▲ 1288 →

↓1

— HLL

cody 2011 4/7

— Cor

Poster
From W. Franklin St.
and N. Harrison St.
to W. Franklin St.
and N. Laurel St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

— ccs 2003

↓ 3.3

1 + 00

K + J

In·effa·ble
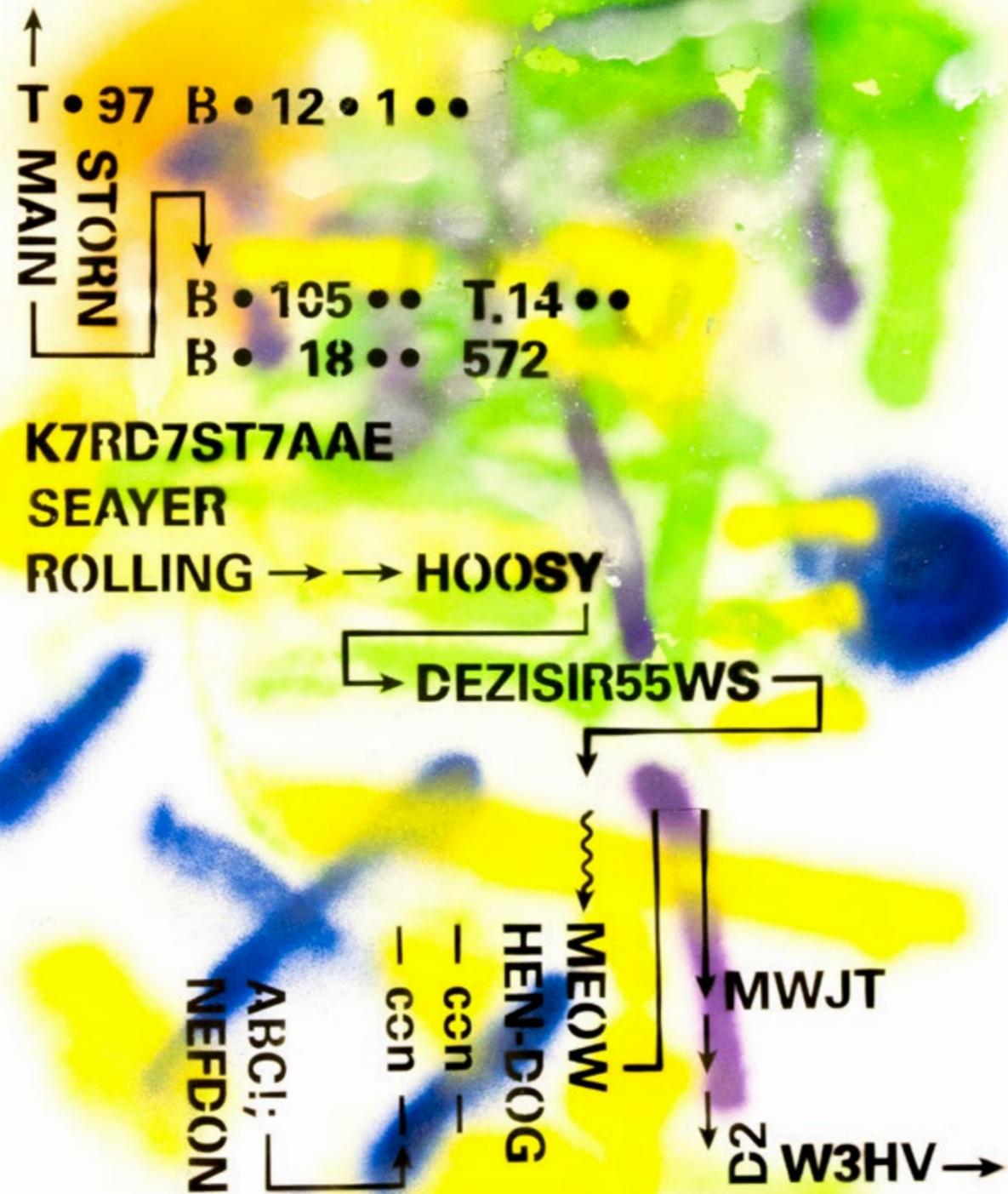
T
Tap: A 3-way utility
connection, especially
a pipe distribution
connection to a
service or lateral.

Dots
The dots indicate
the position of each
cable or duct.

Numbers
Numbers adjacent to
the lines indicate depth
to the top of the utility
in centimeters.

T · 97 B · 12·
1 · ·
STORNMAIN
B · 105 · ·
T.14 · · B · 18 · ·
572
K7RD7ST7AAE
SEAYER-ROLLING
— HOOSY NEFDON ABC!;
— cor — — cor — DEZISIR55WS
HEN-DOG
⌇⌇⌇➤ MEOW

— MWJT — W3HV
— D2
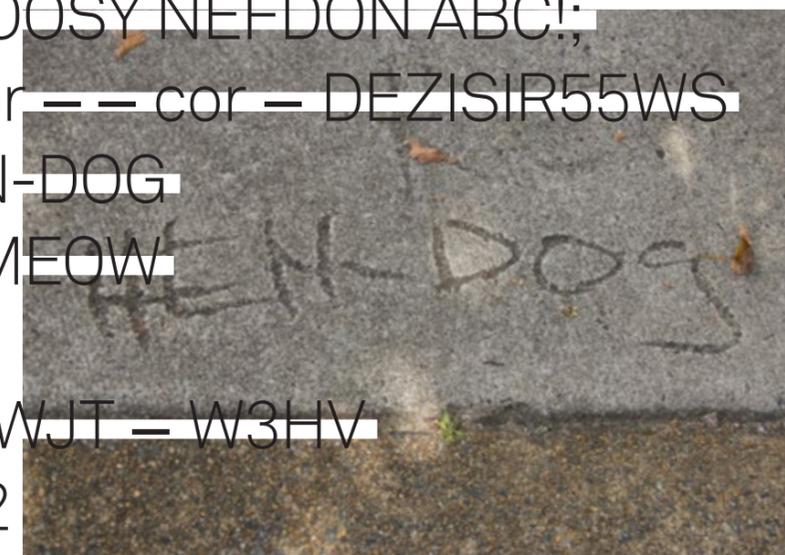
Poster
From N. Boulevard
and Grace St.
to Park ave and Boyd St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

Process
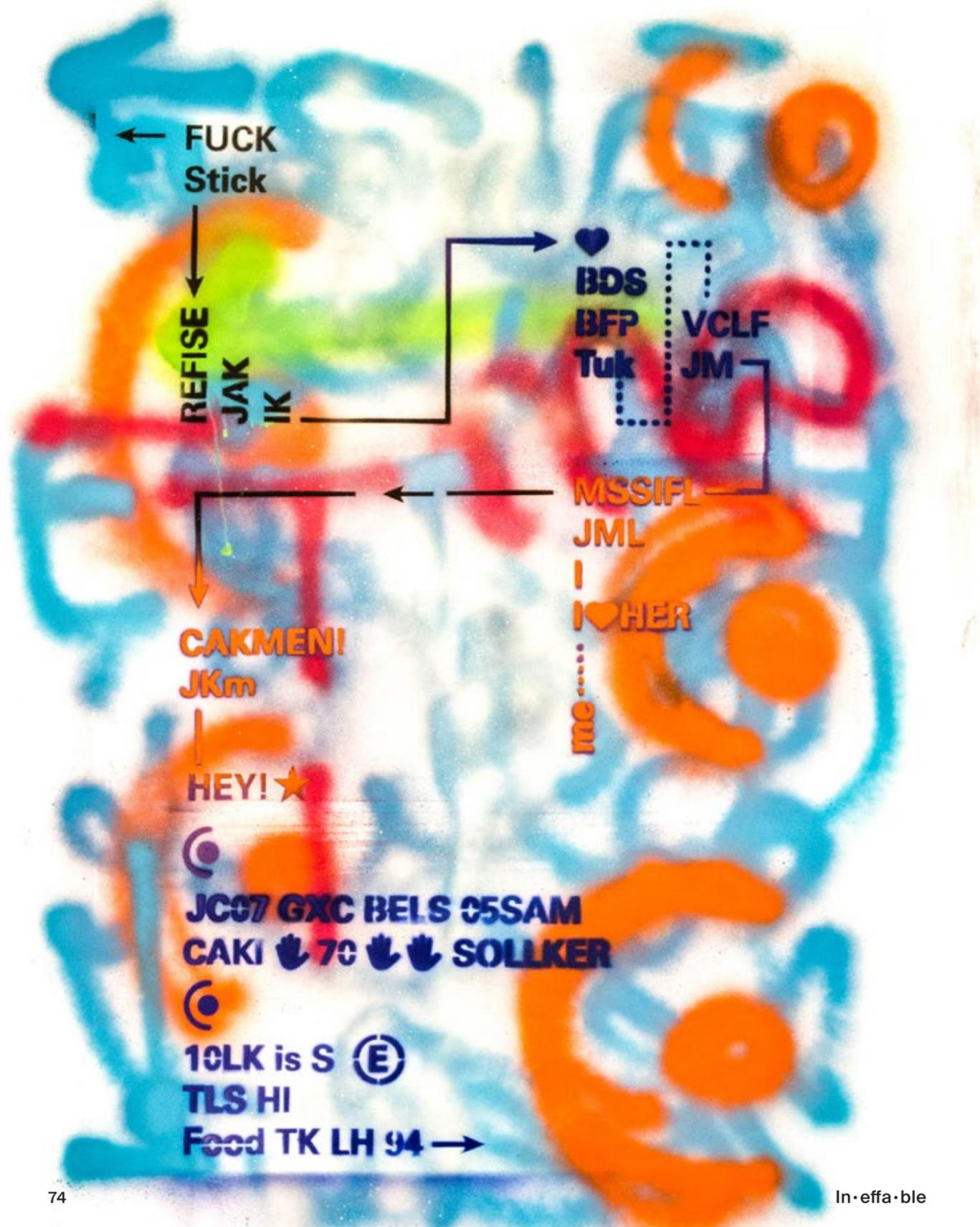
FUCK Stick
— REFISE — JAK
— IK — MSSIFLJML — I — I♥HER
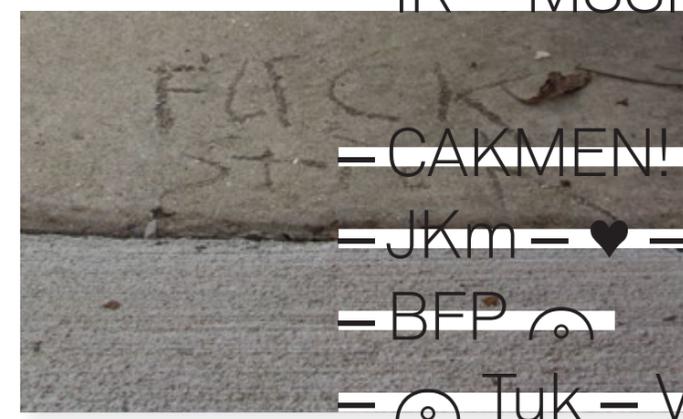
— CAKMEN!
— JKm — ♥ — BDS
— BFP ☺
— ☺ Tuk — VCLF — JM
— me — HEY!
— ★JC07 — GXC — BELS — 05SAM
— CAKI ☜70☜ ☜SOLLKER☜
— ☺ 10LK is S ☺

— TLS HI
— Food
— Ⓔ
— TK LH 94

Poster
From W. Franklin
St. and Boyd St.
to Park Ave and Boyd St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

Poster
From W Broad St.
and Shafer St.
to W Broad St.
and N Harrison St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

In·effa·ble
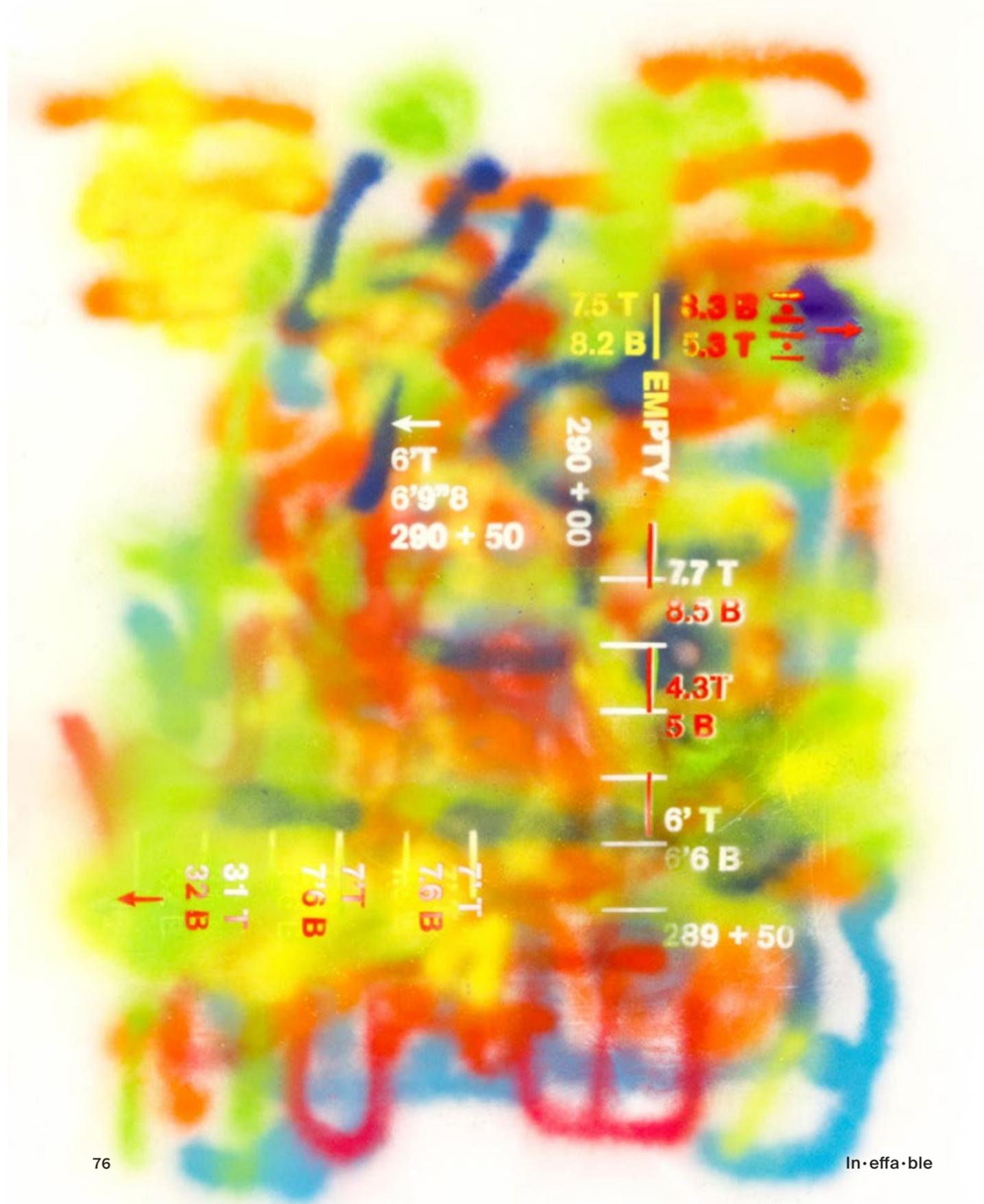
8.3 B

– 5.3 T – –
– EMPTY →

– 6'T – 6'9"B
– 290 + 50
– 7.5T 8.2B
– 290 + 00
– 7.7T 8.5B
– 4.3T 5B
– 6'T 6'6B
– 289 + 50
– 7'T 7.6B
– 7'T 7'6B
– 31T – 32B
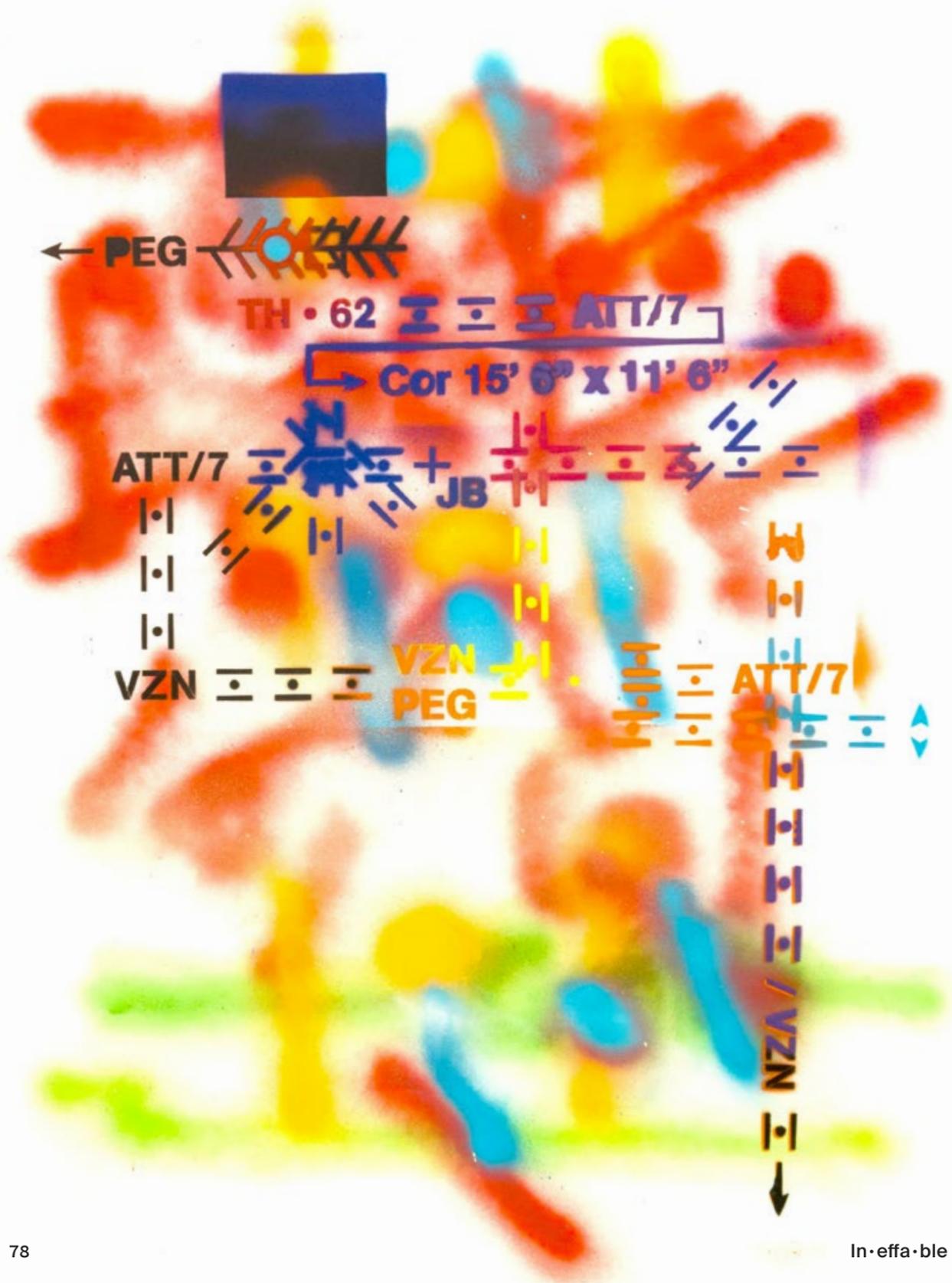
PEG
Peg Bandwidth.

VZN
Verizon Company.

■ PEG

⌗

⤛⤛

TH·62

—·— —·— —·—

ATT/7

—VZN

—+JB

—

—

—

—

—

—

—Cor

15' 6" x 11' 6"

—·— —·— —·— —·—

/VZN —·—

Poster
From E Main St. and 17th St.
to E Main St. and 18th St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

In·effa·ble

⊢ ɸ

— Coe 9' Pe

— Cor

— . — . — .

— . — . — . —

— . — . — . — . — . — . —

— ◯
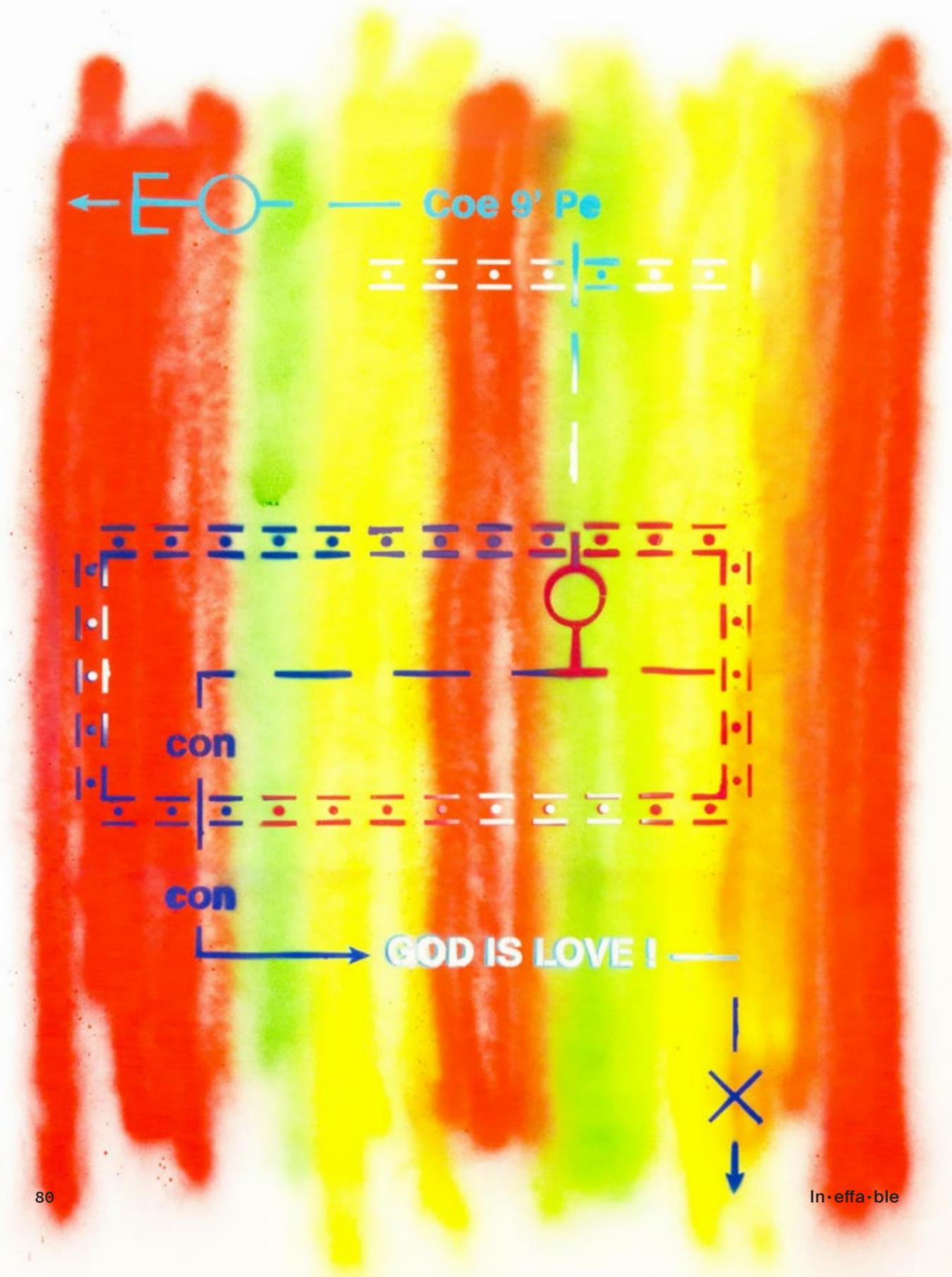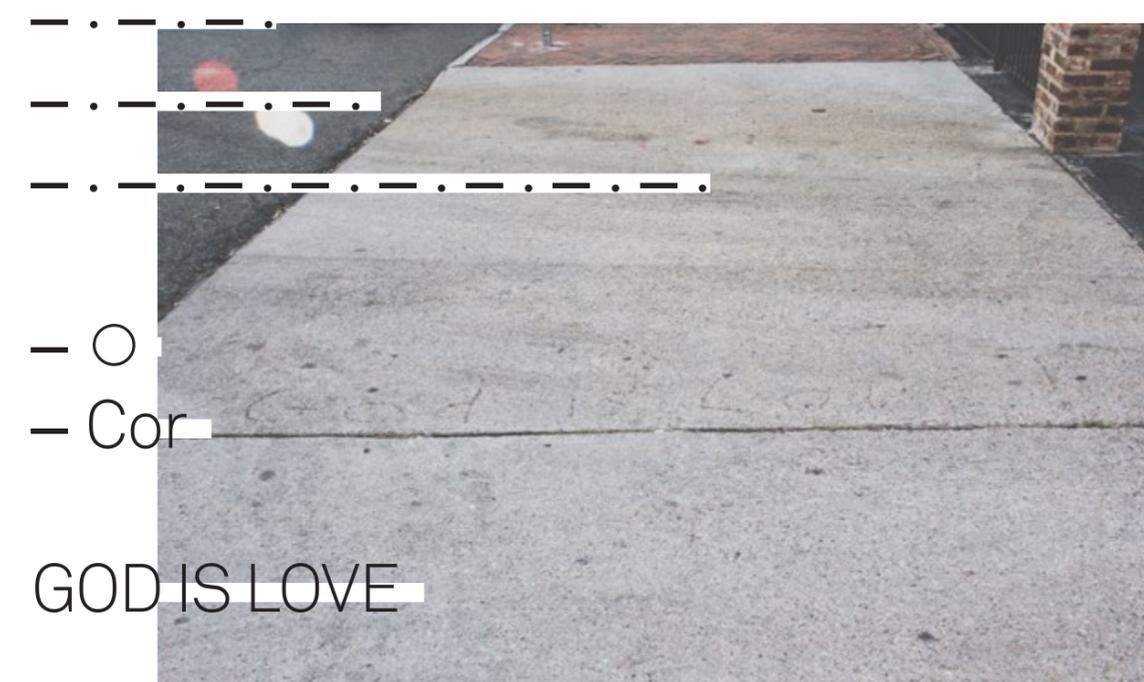
— Cor

GOD IS LOVE

— X

Poster
From E. Franklin St.
and 17th St.
to E. Franklin St.
and 19th St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

Process

PIVATE
WALLY

Tooth for tooth & Lynch RT 23 CIFE 77 HH ZAYO ESCEO: ETS + ATT/T O DOM 957 RT9 576 L

DOM

Poster
From E. Grace St.
and 1st Ave. to
E. Grace St.
and 4th Ave.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

292 ←
===
===
MOAW
– 3+73
– MOE
– 8/16/88
– 0+21

Poster
From E. Grace St.
and Foushee St.
to W. Franklin St.
and Foushee St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

– 3411

In·effa·ble
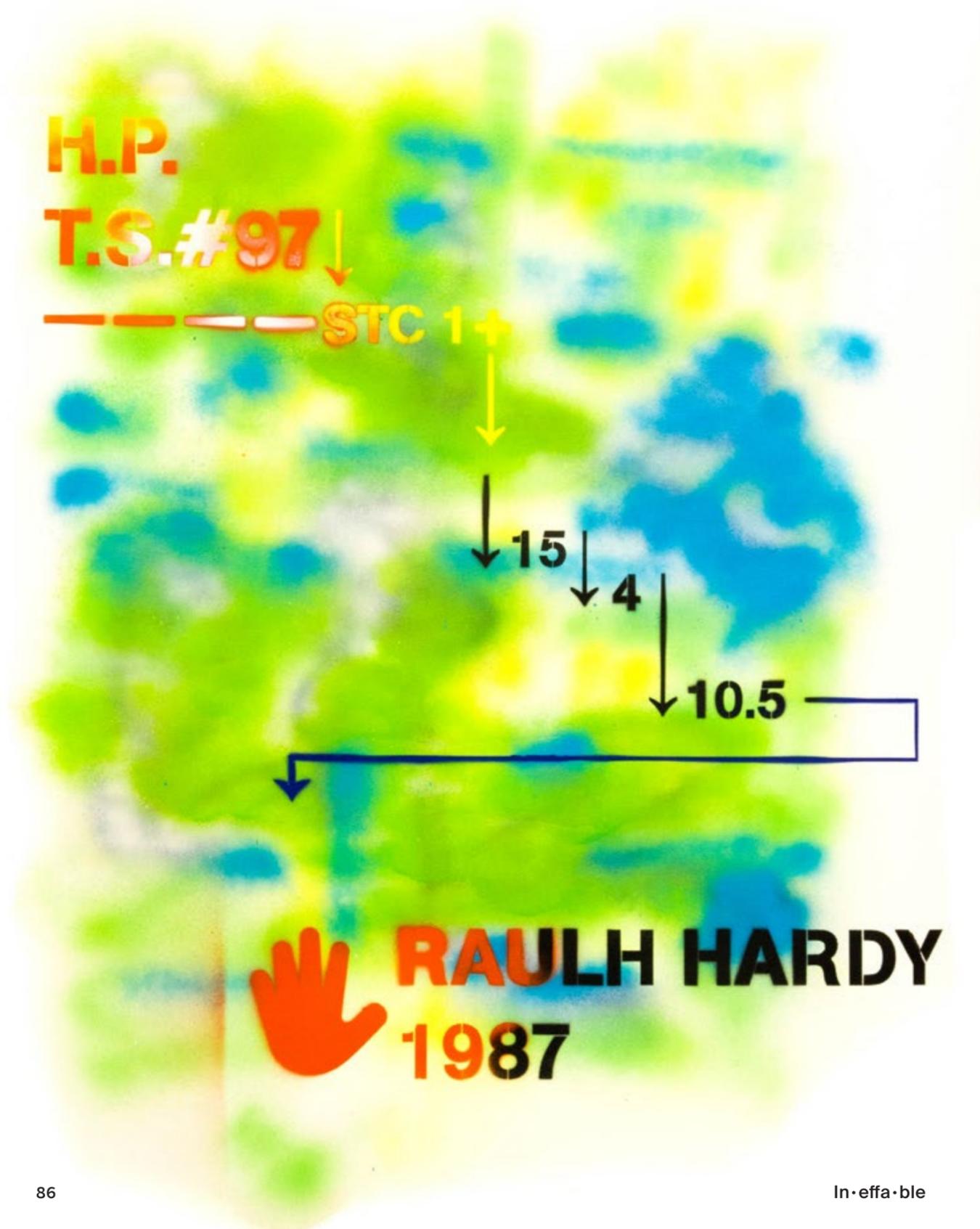
H.P.
— T.S.#97

↓

— STC 1+

— ↓ 15
— ↓ 4
— ↓ 10.5

Poster
From Summit Ave. and
Rockbridge St.
to W. Clay St.
and Summit Ave.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

— 🖐 RAULH
HARDY 1987

HEN 13 R L →

JACKY ROCKS
DECCA MADY
JR turn → → →

KERKLIN

→ MEGG3

→ MUCK
MAN!

☮
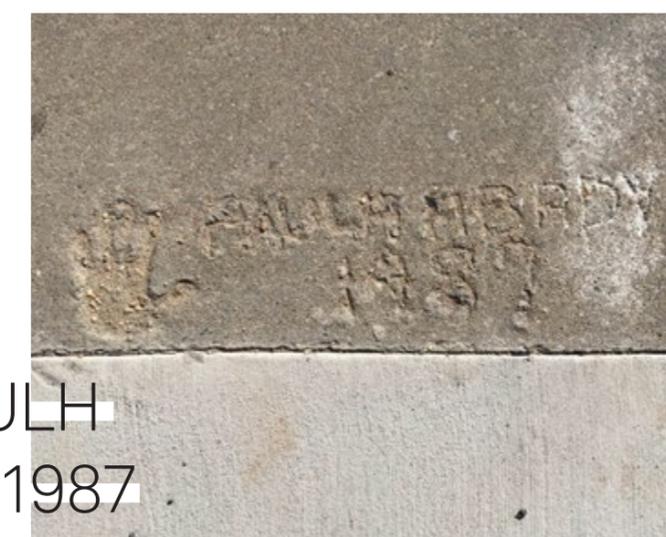
STOP ☀
BE
VIOLENCE

— — — — — Con —
ELANEY ♡ MHOT

HEN 13 R L →

— JACKY ROCKS
— DECCA MADY
— JR turn
— KERKLIN —

MEGG3 —
MUCKMAN! —

⊛ STOP BE
VIOLENCE ☀
— Cor
— ELANEY
♥ MHOT
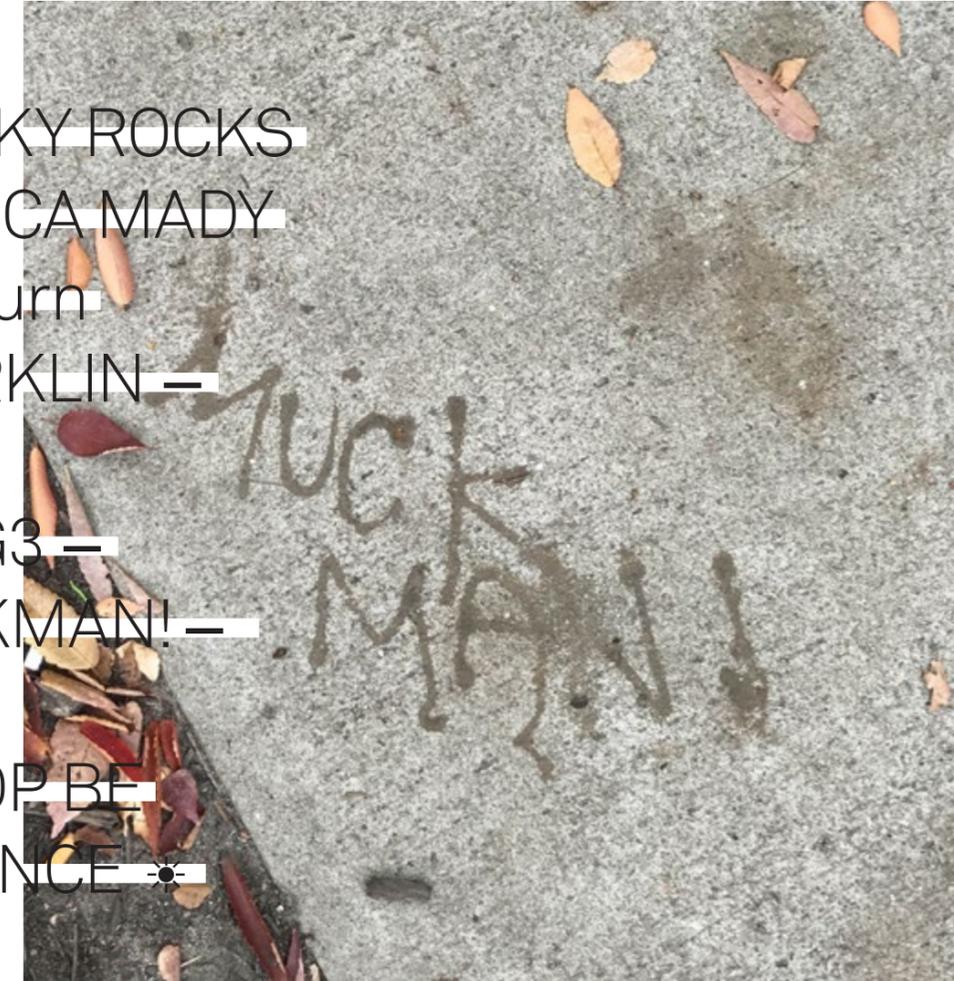
Poster
From W. Franklin St.
and N. Harrison St.
to W. Franklin St.
and N. Laurel St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"
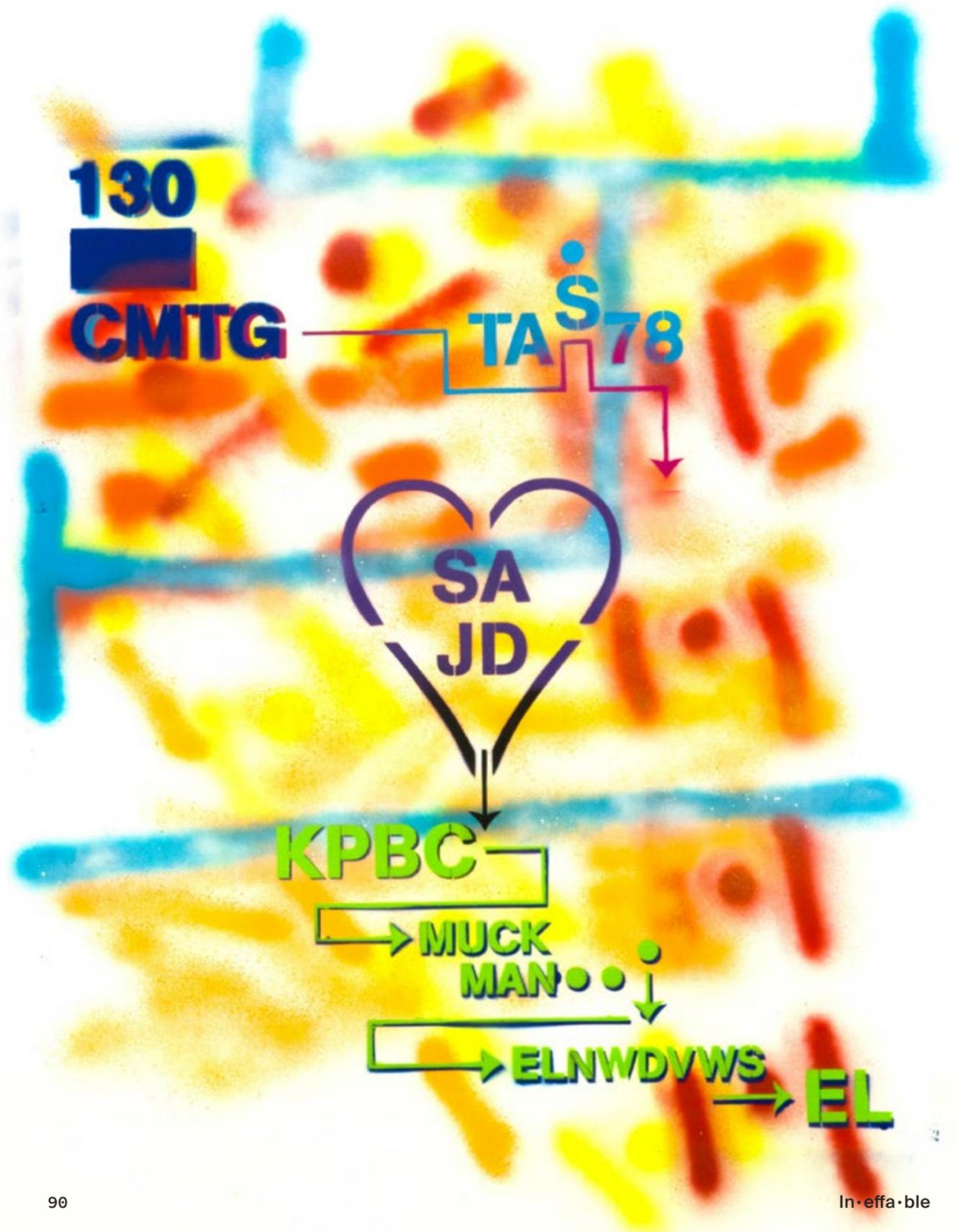
130

■

— CMTG
— TAS78 ·
— SAJD ♡

— ↑

— KPBC
— MUCK MAN ···

⟶

— ELNWDVWS
— EL

Poster
From Summit Ave. and
Rockbridge St.
to W. Clay St. and
Summit Ave.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

In·effa·ble
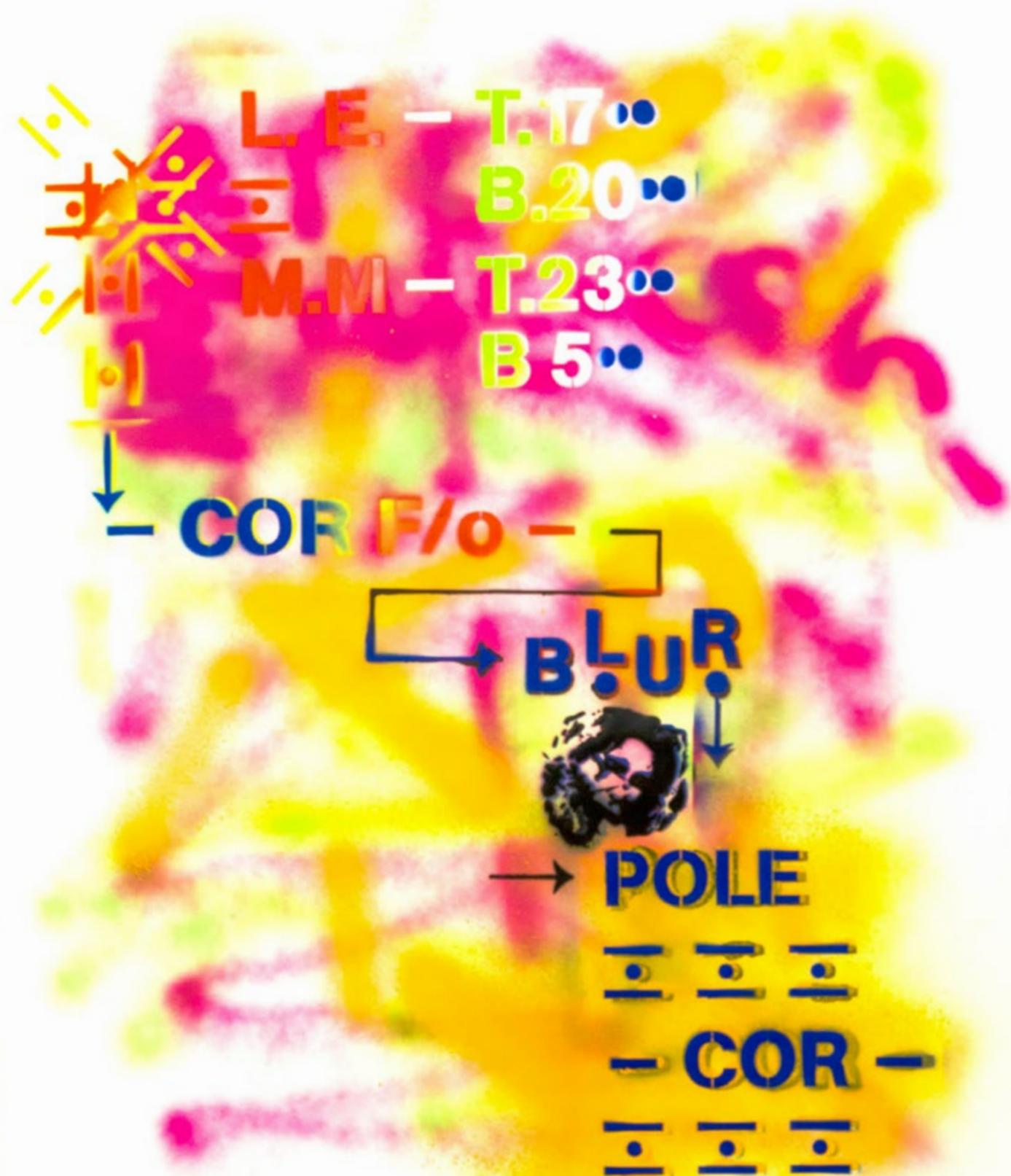
L.E ——
T.17••
B.20•• —— M.M ——
T.23••
B.5•• —— COR
F/o ——BLUR
—→ ☺——
—— POLE
—— · — · — · — ·
—— COR —— 1.2••
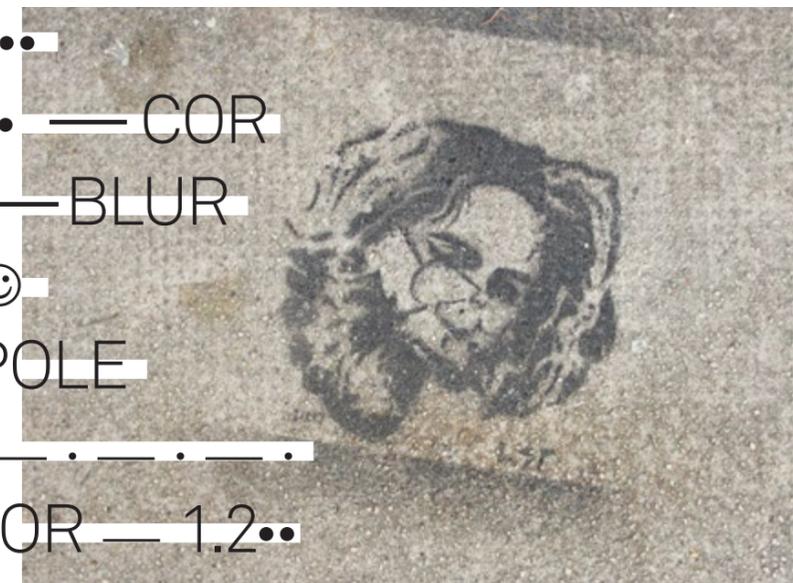
Poster
From Ryland St.
and W. Broad St.
to Ryland St. and
W. Grace St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

Process

RB
+
OG
▲
103 104

ATT/7

ZAYO

Pagan's
MC

In·effa·ble

RB+OG

— ▲103
— ▲104

— ATT/7

— · — · — · — · —

— ZAYO

— · — · — · — · —

— Pauan's MC
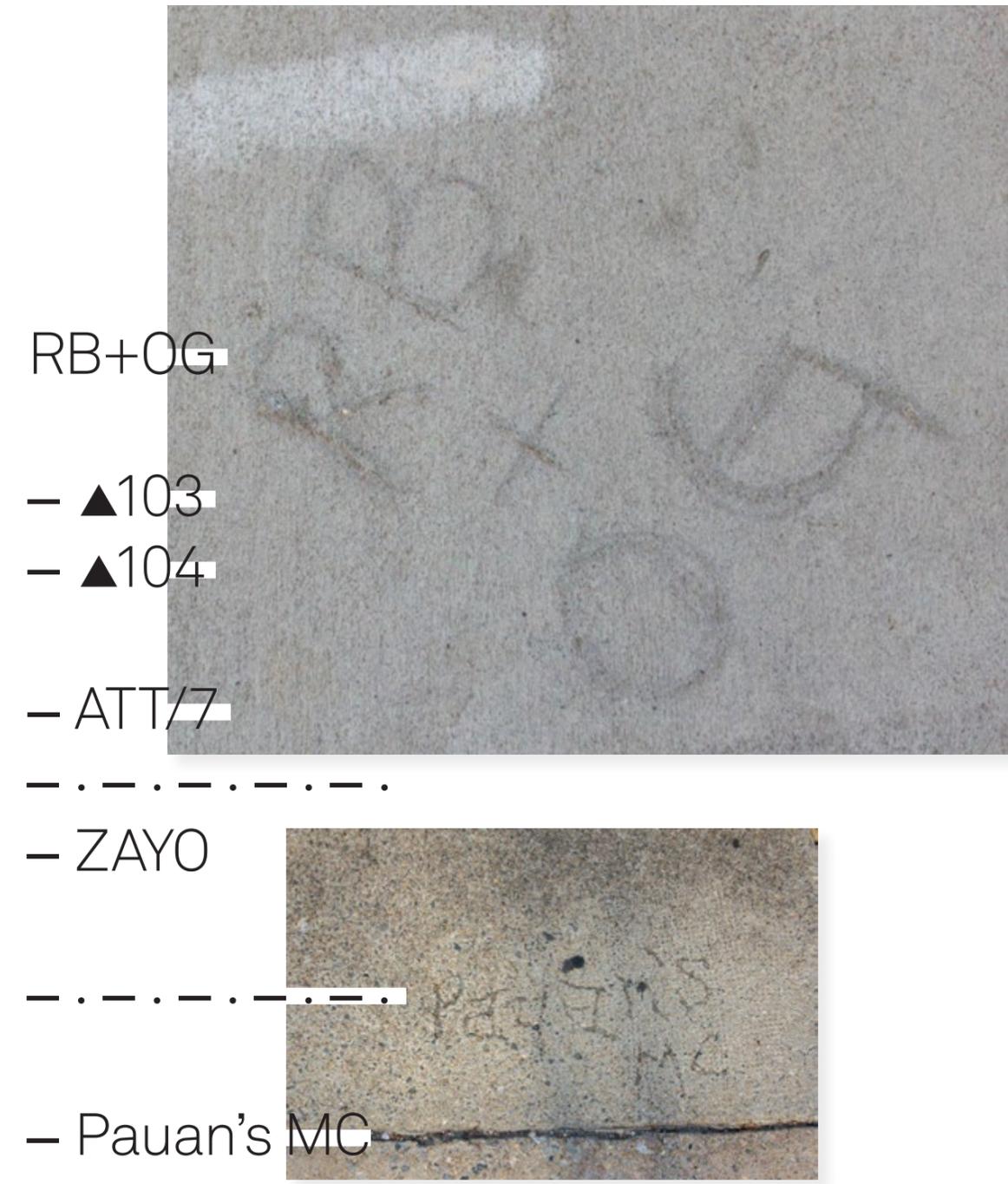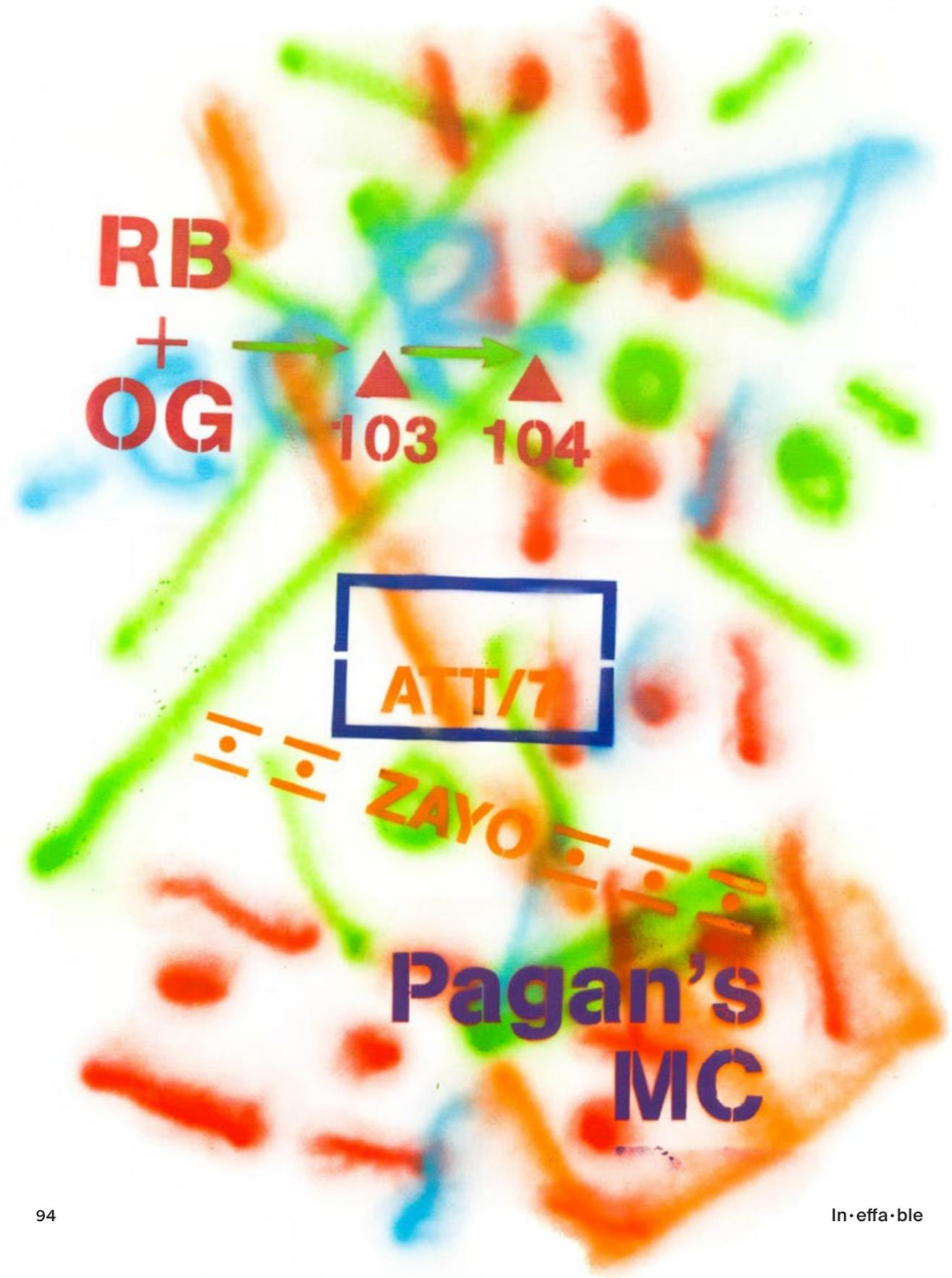
Poster
From W. Grace St.
and N. Pine St.
to W. Grace St.
and N. Belvidere St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

Process
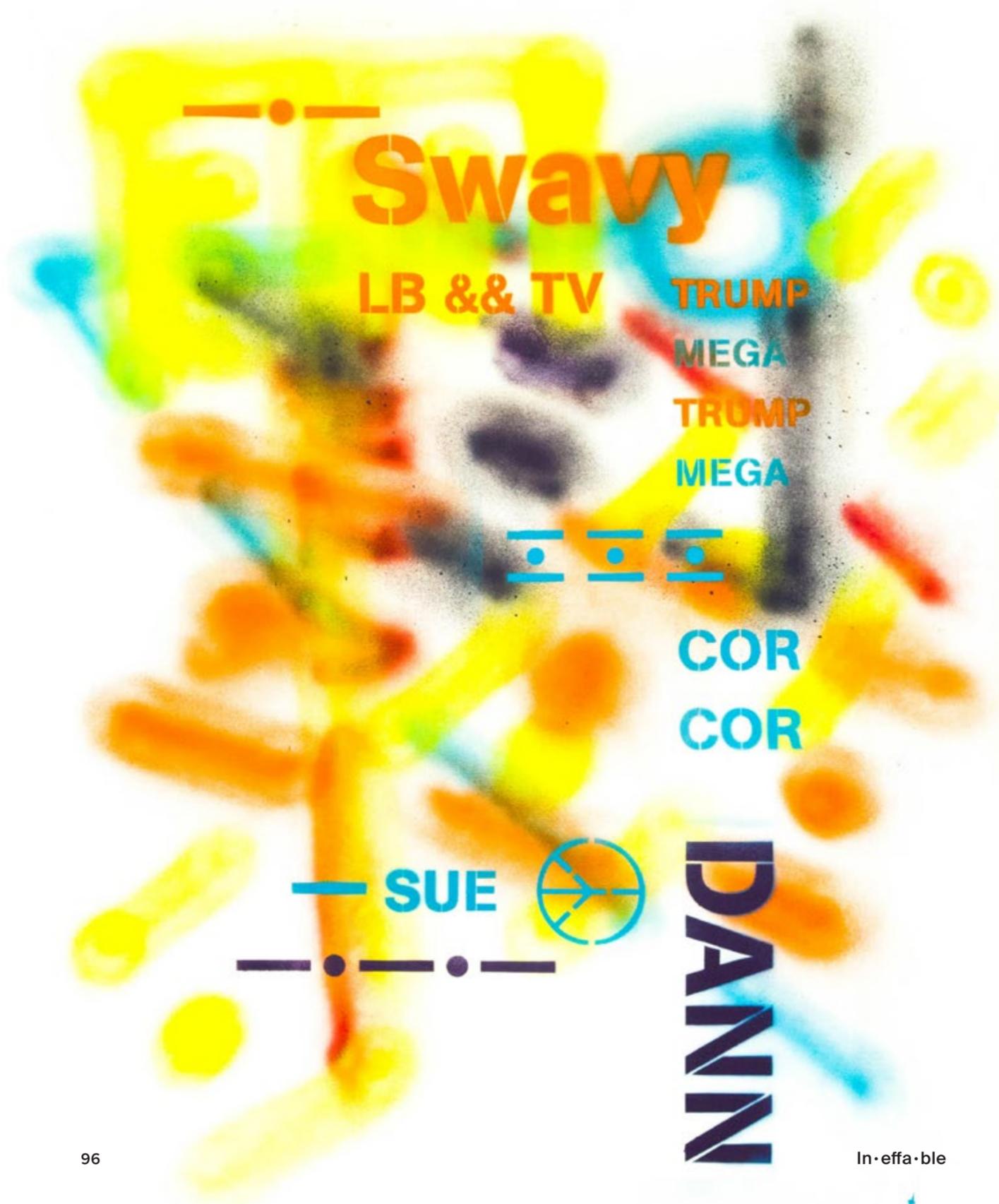
SWAVY

— LB && TV

— TRUMP
— MEGA
— TRUMP
— MEGA

— COR
— COR
— DANNY

— SUE ⊗

— .
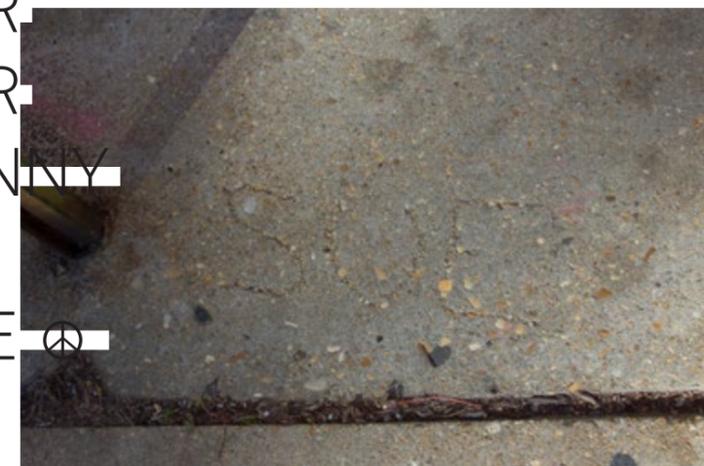
Poster
From Grove Ave. and
N. Linden St. to Floyd Ave.
and N. Linden St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

In·effa·ble

Circle
The circle denotes
how many cable ducts
leave the chamber.

→ Hungry ▬▬

··· ●

▬ COR

▬ A

—·—·—·—·—

—·—·—·—·—·—

—·—·—·—·—

→
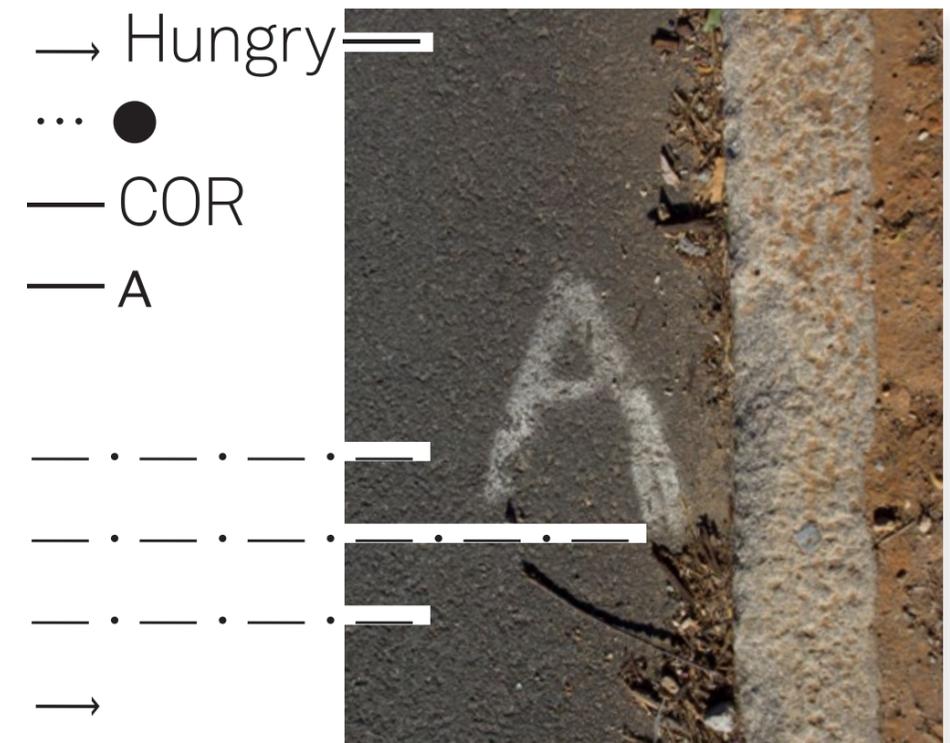
Poster
From Grove Ave.
and N. Morris St.
to Grove Ave.
and N. Harrison St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"

ISoooym
CROCKY
ROCK
AGAINST
RICHMOND
Phibe
SMASH IT
DON
was
Here

—.
—ISoooym
—CROCKY

—B·
—Phibe
—ROCK AGAINST RICHMOND
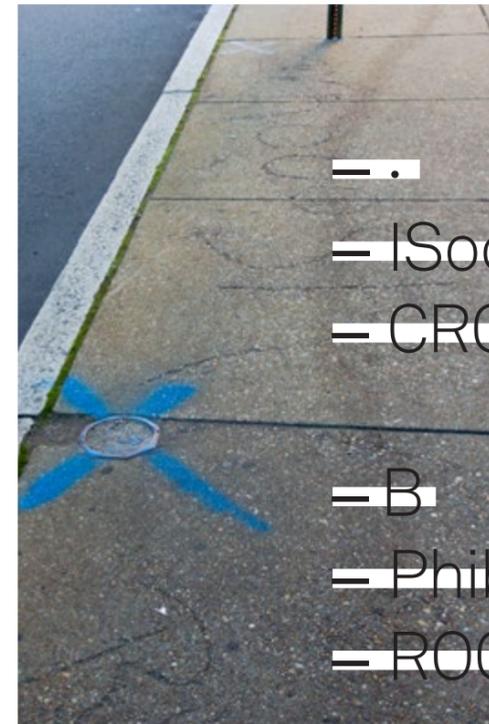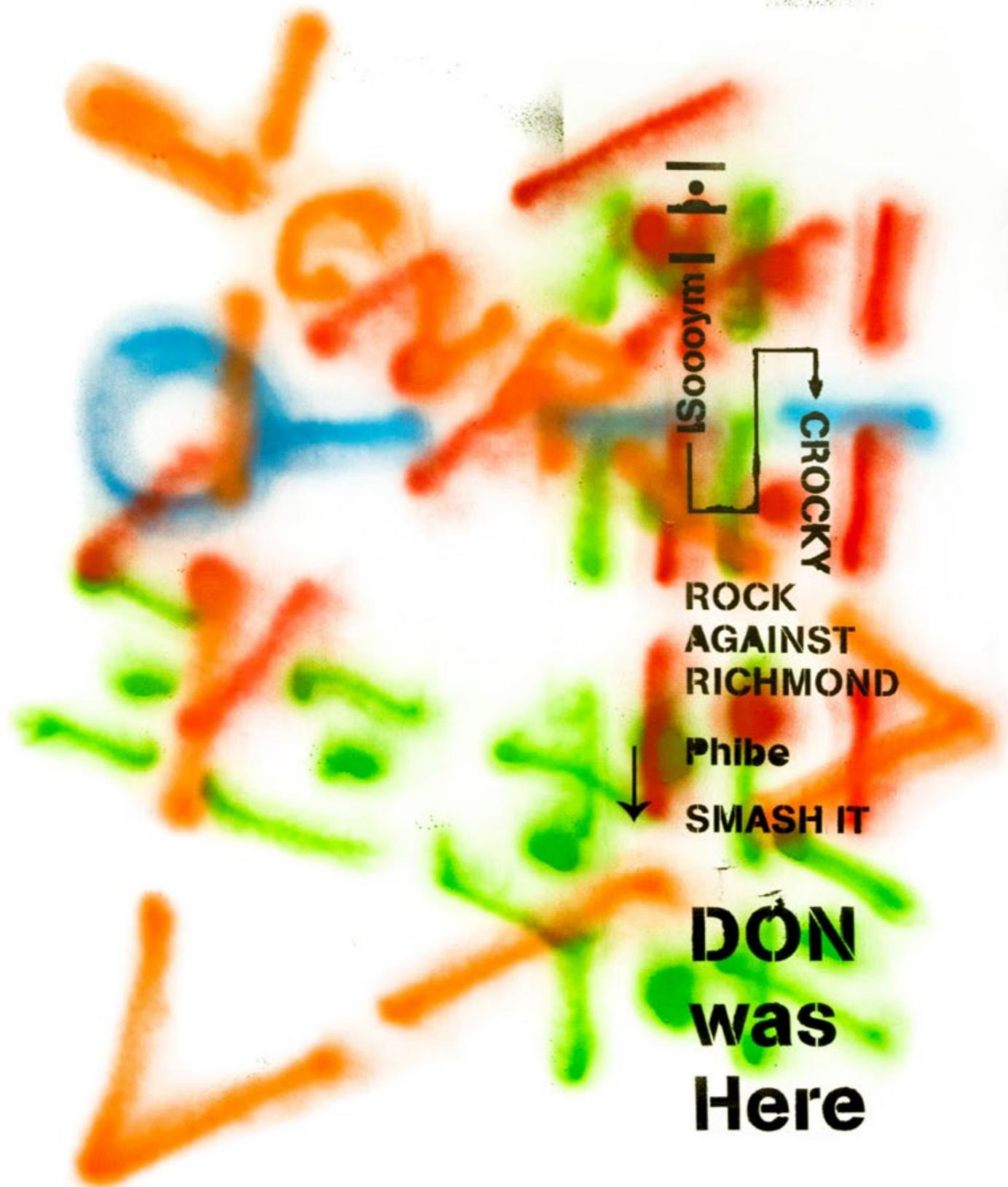
— SMASH IT

— DON was Here
— COR/oD;

— +B
— VZN
— COR 6" Pe

Poster
From W. Franklin St.
and N. Harrison St.
to Park Ave.
and N. Harrison St.
Richmond, Virginia

Spray paint
Stencil on paper
36 x 48"
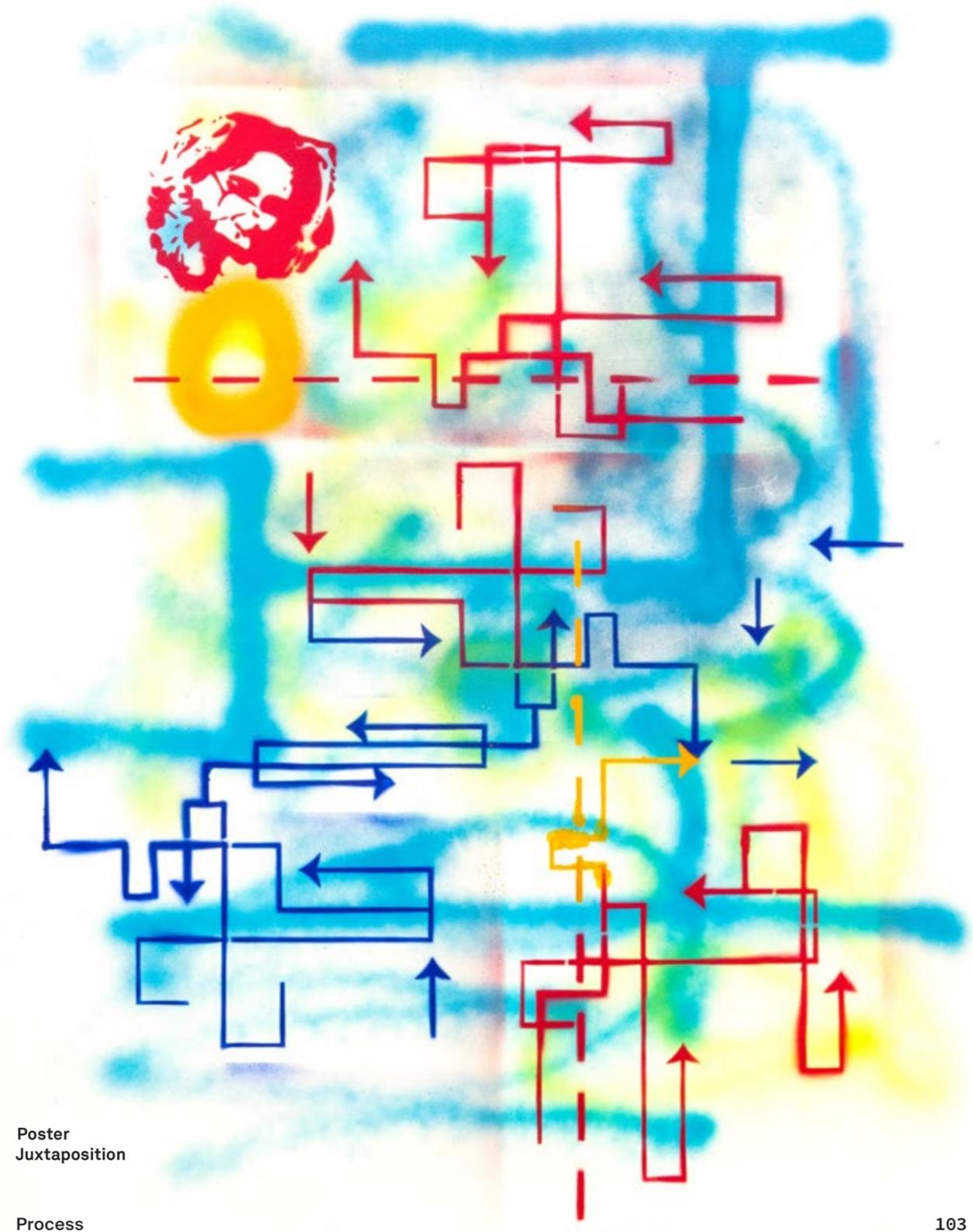
Process

I followed specific steps of to turn my research of the sidewalks into visual narratives. I set up a system to visualize my gathered images and sources by laying out each word and symbol in a cardinal direction by using a sequence in which I encountered the obscure codes and marks, and using a color palette adopted from the Virginia Utility Marking Standard. In the utilitarian code marking system, each color implies a different meaning. For example, orange paint connotes the usage of electricity; blue color means the water system, etc. By removing these colors from their original context, the meanings transcend and cultivate a new narrative while still showing their origins.

With each pathway I investigated, I collected fragments of texts and adjacent incidental marks on the surfaces and converted them into a script. My "visual poems" give voice to these inscriptions by presenting visual data from the streets, the ground, and the sidewalks and fusing them into an integrated text. The scripting process provides a comprehensive narrative while containing the unfiltered information of the secret glyphs.
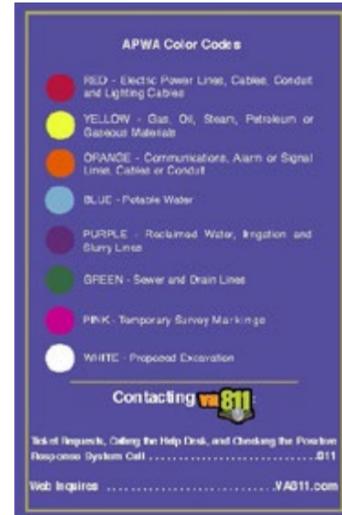
Document
APWA Color Codees
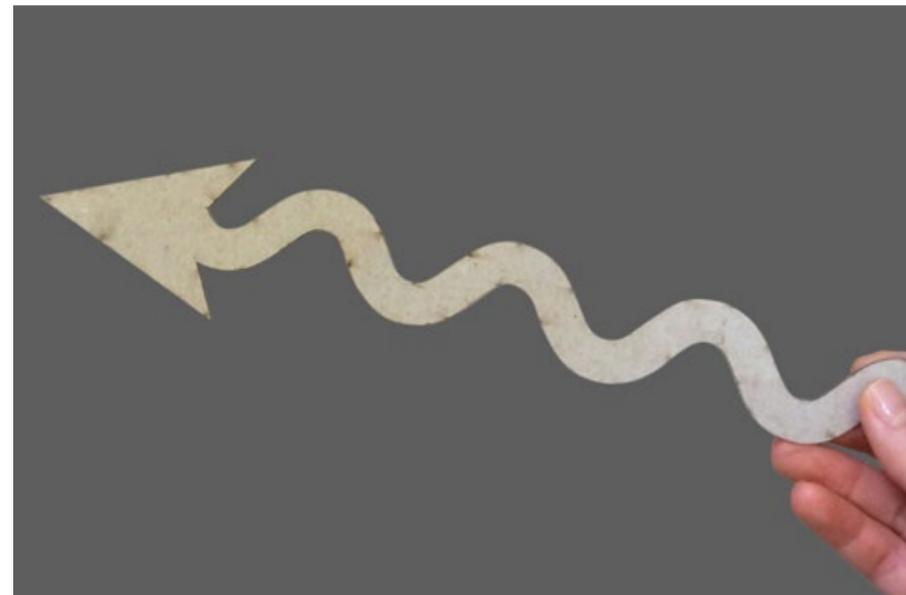
Laser cut test
Process image
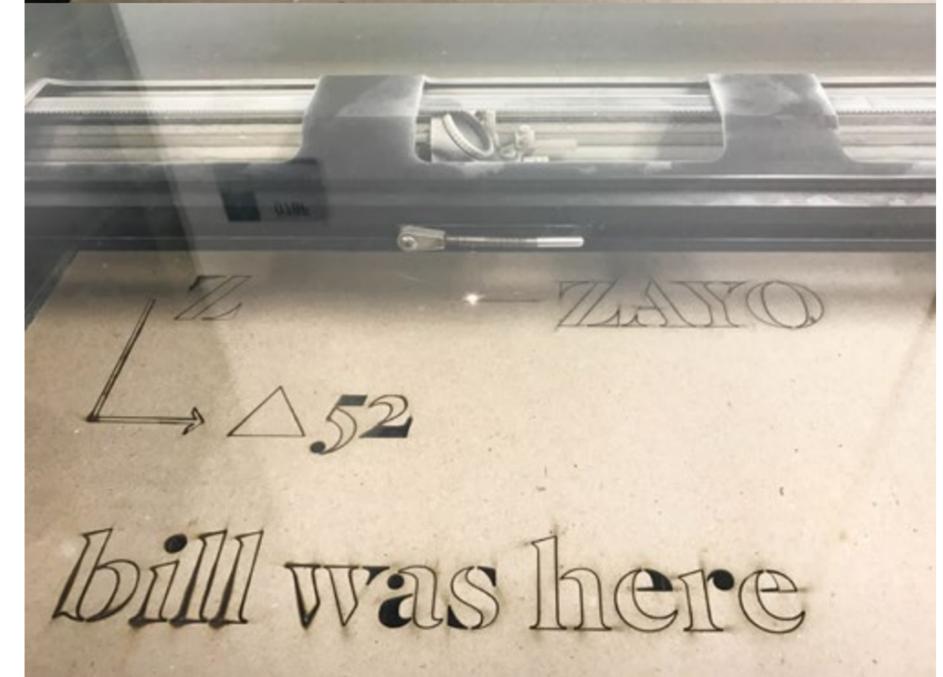
Laser Cutting
Stencil
Process image

The spray painted phrases and indicators used in this process last for only a couple of weeks, suggesting a temporal, fleeting meaning.

Application

The medium of using spray paints conveys the raw atmosphere of the original utilitarian sites. When they're made, all marks are handwritten by utility workers who have been educated in the use of the marking system. I instead used stencils to 'translate' their language to the form of a poster so that each 'poem of the sidewalk' could be read as a whole piece—consolidating its visual aspect by appealing the original medium of the language as well as juxtaposing each word, glyph, and symbol with spray paints.

The poems that I created are highly discursive and allowed me to interpret them in another way, as sound poetry. Inspired by the oral poetry of Dada artists, I explored how these abstract poetic structures could be interpreted sonically—how they might be "recited," and transformed into speech. In a related set of studies, I experimented the realm of recitation—composing a sound with partial, fragmented snippets used in my visual poems. I experimented with Python-XY to generate various sonic interpretations of the non-verbal components of my poster texts. The software dissects the X- and Y-components of the shape and its pixel information in randomly sized segments. The sounds of the shapes that I found on the streets and needed to resonate with the synthetic voice that reciting the poems.

In·effa·ble

Evalutation

In·effa·ble:
Poems·of·the·Sidewalk

Richmond, VA

In·eﬀa·ble   Evalutation

↑36

– ZAYO – – ZAYO – – ZAYO –

→ ▲52

bill was here

997 ▲ 1288 →

↓1

– HLL⌐

Scott's Addition
From W. Clay St. and N. Sheppard St.
to W. Marshall St. and Highpoint Ave.

└→ cody 2011 +/7

– Cor

– ccs 2003

↓ 3·3

I + 00

K + J

We as humans accumulate our perceptions by seeing, reading, hearing and remembering. My exhibition attempted to establish communication with the people who walk the streets of the city and who hopefully will recognize and recall the information that have encountered there. When something is hidden and encoded, how do we define its meaning? This exhibition argues there is a connection between the arbitrary nature of meaning from signs in our environment and the audience. The audience obtains an authority to create their own embedded narrative in the exhibition. This exhibition opens the possibility of other "hidden" languages embedded in our environment and it allows viewers to decipher the ineffable secret glyphs and numbers on the streets and sidewalks.

Just as written languages are not independent from their context, symbolic languages that are found in our surroundings need to have an access point to be 'read.' The purpose of this installation is to cultivate a visible environment that allows marginalized snippets to become dominant, to become centered language, and to explore how they communicate through their inherent formats. The installation space was 38.5 feet wide and 14 feet tall. In order to maximize the immersion in the given space I covered the entire wall with visuals, encouraging spontaneous perceptual processes within the human eyes of exhibition visitors.

I spray painted directly on the wall with seemingly obscure background graffiti work that was predominantly extracted from actual sidewalks. The background graphics contain utility marks that signify the specifications of urban utilities such as pipes, electricity lines, and conduits. I adopted these drawings from the original utility marking system that is currently used in Virginia, and repurposed it by spray painting on the wall. I intended to shift its visual hierarchy by altering the perspective from the ground to the wall, and making it visible at eye level. Afterwards, I formed the units of drawn marks into the same number of poems in accordance with the texts.

MEGG3 –
MUCKMAN!

In·effa·ble:
Poems · of · the · Sidewalk

T · 97 B · 12·

B · 105 ··

T·14·· B· 18 ·· 57²   Fan Area

TS + .ATT/T

In·effa·ble

Evalutation

WALLY

→ **Tooth for tooth & Lynch**

RT 23   **CIFE 77**

HH

ZAYO

In·effa·ble

Coe 9' Pe

Cor

Cor

GOD IS LOVE!

Shockoe Bottom
From E. Franklin St. and 17th St. to E. Franklin St. and 19th St.

I prepared stencils that were applied directly on the wall space by using a laser cutting machine. The six selected poems each represent a different neighborhood area in Richmond, creating a comprehensive map across the entire single wall space. From Scott's Addition to Shockoe Bottom, each poem indicates a discriminative structure through its visual pragmatics. The type used in the stencils is set in Dala a stencil serif typeface that provides a nuance of texts seen in poetry, as all these marks were originally handwritten. Once the stencils were made, I used them to create poetic structures over the obscure signs that I already drew on the wall. The layered texts provide a distinction between what we can see from the streets and how it can be interpreted into a body of poems. These poems can be read individually, or can be read as a whole.

Photograph
Poem from the
Shockoe Bottom
MFA Thesis Exhibition

Photograph
Poem from the
Scott's Addition
Detail

In addition to the visual poems, I also provided sound poetry, indicating how to read symbols and glyphs by using various onomatopoeia such as 'whir' as an arrow, and 'ching' as a dash.

Inspired by Kurt Schwitter's *The Ursonata,* which consists of evocative sounds and repetitions, I looked for a way to verbalize the varied mix of verbal and non-verbal signs in my poems. I composed the soundtracks with a voice generator, having an objective voice read the poem based on the text that I typed down. This synthesizer was only able to generate a voice for the 'readable' words. For instance, when I typed a triangle shape, it was silent. To make these obscure shapes readable and 'utterable,' I created onomato-poetic sounds to be inserted as needed.

Poems·of·the·Sidewalk MFA Thesis Show Opening

This person was attempting to listen to the auditory poem

In·effa·ble

Evalutation

T · 97 B · 12·
B · 105 · ·
T.14 · · B · 18 · · 572
I · ·

— cor — — cor — DEZISIR₅₅WS

STORNMAIN

K₇RD₇ST₇AAE
SEAYER-ROLLING
——————————————— Cor ———————
——————————————— Cor ———

— HOOSY
NEFDON
ABC!;

HEN-DOG ∿⟶ MEOW

—MWJT—W₃HV
—D₂

Fan Area
From N. Boulevard and Grace St.
to Park Ave and Boyd St.

Conclusion

Through my research in utility marks, symbols, and other 'secret' languages, I have explored how various materials and form-giving strategies can use these coded languages in new compositions and new articulations. In carrying out these explorations, I have come to understand that symbols and signs can not be separated from their verbal aspects. These theoretical aspects, including visual syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, originally came from linguistics, denoting a meaning with a picture in place of written words.

As a result, the visual language of my work is inevitably derived from the forms of linguistics and rhetorical expressions. Regardless of its disconnection from the verbal aspect on a surface level, the two cannot be divorced.

The exploration of a nonverbal, alternative communication through graphical images opens up the possibility of new investigations and examinations in nonverbal techniques. The perspective of seeing our environment in different ways allow audiences to experience the secret languages in a new way without revealing or exposing their original purpose. This perspective deepens the human experience while arguing their efficiency and effectiveness within traditional writing forms. Symbolic languages convey our emotions, culture, and individuality regardless of their inadequacy in verbal syntax.

In·effa·ble

Evalutation

Selected Bibliography

Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism. *The book of symbols: archetypal reflections in word and image.* Koln: Taschen, 2010.

An exploration of symbols and their meanings throughout history. *The Book of Symbols* combines original and incisive essays about particular symbols with representative images from all parts of the world and all eras of history.

Bean, Victoria, Chris McCabe, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Robert Montgomery. *The new concrete: visual poetry in the 21st century.* London: Hayward Publishing, 2015.

A book demonstrating the continuous visual poetry that is identified as concrete poetry in the digital age in which poets work at the intersection of visual art and literature.

Burke, Christopher, Eric Kindel, and Sue Walker. *Isotype: Design and Contexts 1925- 1971.* London: Hyphen Press, 2013.

This book contains the transitions of using pictograms in a way to deliver communicative information, by demonstrating models of pictograms and their contexts in creation.

Dondis, Donis A. *A Primer of Visual Literacy.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973.

The author describes how the notion of visual literacy can be different from the literal meaning of literacy, and what facts are included in creating a visual literacy.

Dunne, Anthony, and Fiona Raby. *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014.

A book about how to consider design as a unique mode of socio cultural production and how design can be considered an act that raises questions and answers.

Frutiger, Adrian. *Signs and Symbols: Their Design and Meaning.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1989.

In this book, the author presents how symbols were made and what affected the creation of symbols in a historical perspective.

Gerstner, Karl. *Compendium for Literates a System of Writing.* Translated by Dennis Q.Stephenson. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974.

A stylistic guide into a system of writing, arrangement of words, and various forms of writings in functional and esthetic points of view.

Lupton, Ellen and Abbott J Miller. *Design Writing Research: Essays on Graphic Design and Typography.* New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.

Lupton is acclaimed for her methodologies as a designer, a writer and a researcher. Her approach to critical writing is a tool in design practice.

Massironi, Manfredo, and Nicola Bruno. *The psychology of graphic images: seeing,drawing, communicating.* New York: Psychology Press, 2009.

A psychological explanation that examines how graphic images work physically on the level of cognitive science. This book inspired one of my candidacy projects, "Birds," which explore s the role of psychological phenomena into the graphic design practice.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding comics: the invisible art.* New York: HarperPerennial, 1994.

The author describes how images can be representational and become less figurative through interpretations. He also presents how images attain narrativity by showing linear motions in positions, scales, and transformations.

Mooney, Aoife. "Face Forward: Express Yourself." *Design Observer.* March 14, 2016. Accessed March 21, 2017. http://designobserver.com/feature/face-forward-express-yourself/39198/.

An article discussing current typographical trends with regard to using emojis in place of text to communicate in a contemporary environment.

Morris, Charles William. *Foundations of the theory of signs.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Morris discusses analytic approaches to explain signs with theories in semiotics, including Charles Sanders Pierce's definitions of sign and symbol.

Morris, Charles W. *Signification and significance: a study of the relations of signs and values.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976.

The author states the contribution of semiotics and axiology in esthetics.These theories are based on creative writing, which provides linguistic approaches to visual syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Munari, Bruno. *Bruno Munari: Square, Circle, Triangle.* New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015.

One of Munari's well-known publications that defines his practice with geometrically driven shapes; he explores the forms of the square, the circle, and the triangle and how they can develop into other forms through their repetitions.

Renkema, Jan. *Introduction to discourse studies.* Amsterdam: Jonh Benjamins, 2012.

This book helps to connect the use of signs and symbols, and their context. In addition, the author defines how symbols can recontextualize a meaning by giving a new perspective with the embedded narrative.

Tanchis, Aldo, and Munari, Bruno. *Bruno Munari : Design as Art.* 1st MIT Press English Language ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.

This book establishes the role of design in our everyday objects, and how that role expands beyond formal confines of traditional art.

Thomas, Donald W. (1987). "Semiotics: The Pattern which Connects." *American Journal of Semiotics_ 5* (2):291-302.

An article that examines the relationship of signs and perception and how signs are explicative by learning that relationship.

Thomas, Donald W. *Communication, codes & culture.* Lexington, MA: Ginn Custom Pub., 1982.

The author analyzes the inherent aspect of signs and symbols and their cultural influence in which they are formulated through the presentational and discursive forms and how they bridge the world we construct with the environment we perceive.

Virginia Underground Utility Marking Standards. Richmond, VA: Virginia State Corp. Commission, Division of Utility and Railroad Safety, 2004.

A guide document for the application of utilitarian codes following Virginia law. This document includes: proper color palette of spray paints categorized by application; rules in drawing; and practices.

Wood, Denis, Ira Glass, Blake Butler, Albert Mobilio, and Ander Monson. *Everything Sings: Maps for a Narrative Atlas.* Los Angeles: Siglio, 2010.

The author transforms the traditional notions of map making into a new way of seeing that emphasizes not only this particular place, but also the very nature of place itself in pursuit of a "poetics of cartography."

Xu, Bing, and Mathieu Borysevicz. *The book about Xu Bing's Book From the Ground.* North Adams, MA: Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014.

An analysis of Xu Bing's illegible and peculiarly written book "From the Ground." The companion book explores the meaning behind the use of emojis that the illegible book used as an equivalent tool of written languages.

A Note On The Type

The text of *Poems from the Sidewalk* scripts and captions are set in Akkurat, a sans-serif typeface designed by Swiss designer Laurenz Brunner and released in 2004 by the font foundry Lineto. The symbols in poems are set in Apple Symbols.

The title and the subtitles are set in Suisse Int'l, a neo-grotesque sans-serif typeface designed by Ian Party and re leased through Swiss Typefaces in 2011.

The body texts are set in Univers, a typeface designed by Adrian Frutiger in 1987.

Acknowledgement

In·effa·ble:
Latency in Symbolic Languages