

Definiton of “distortion”

Definition 01 (Visible)

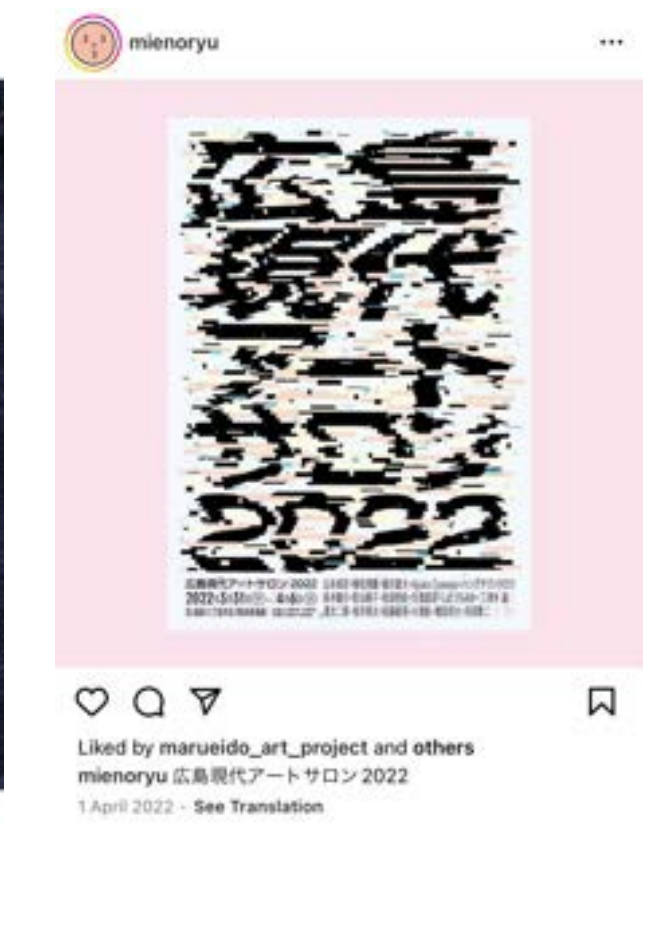
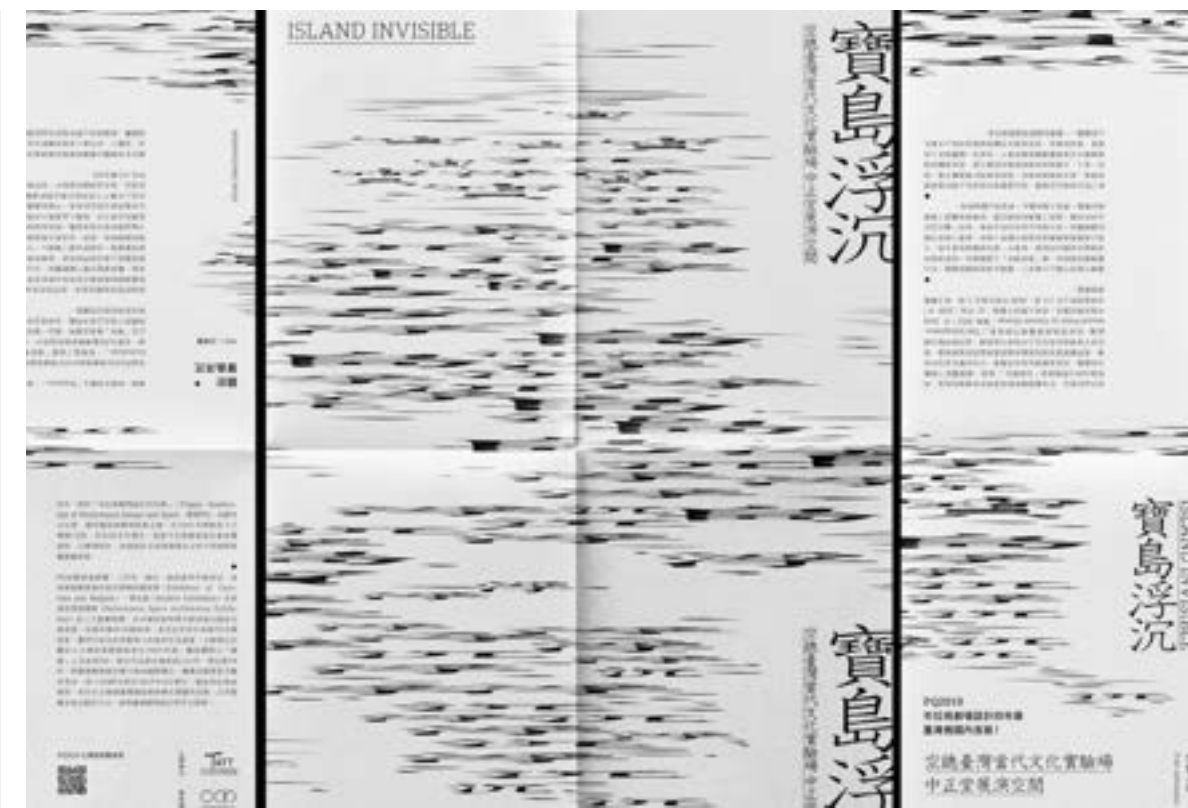
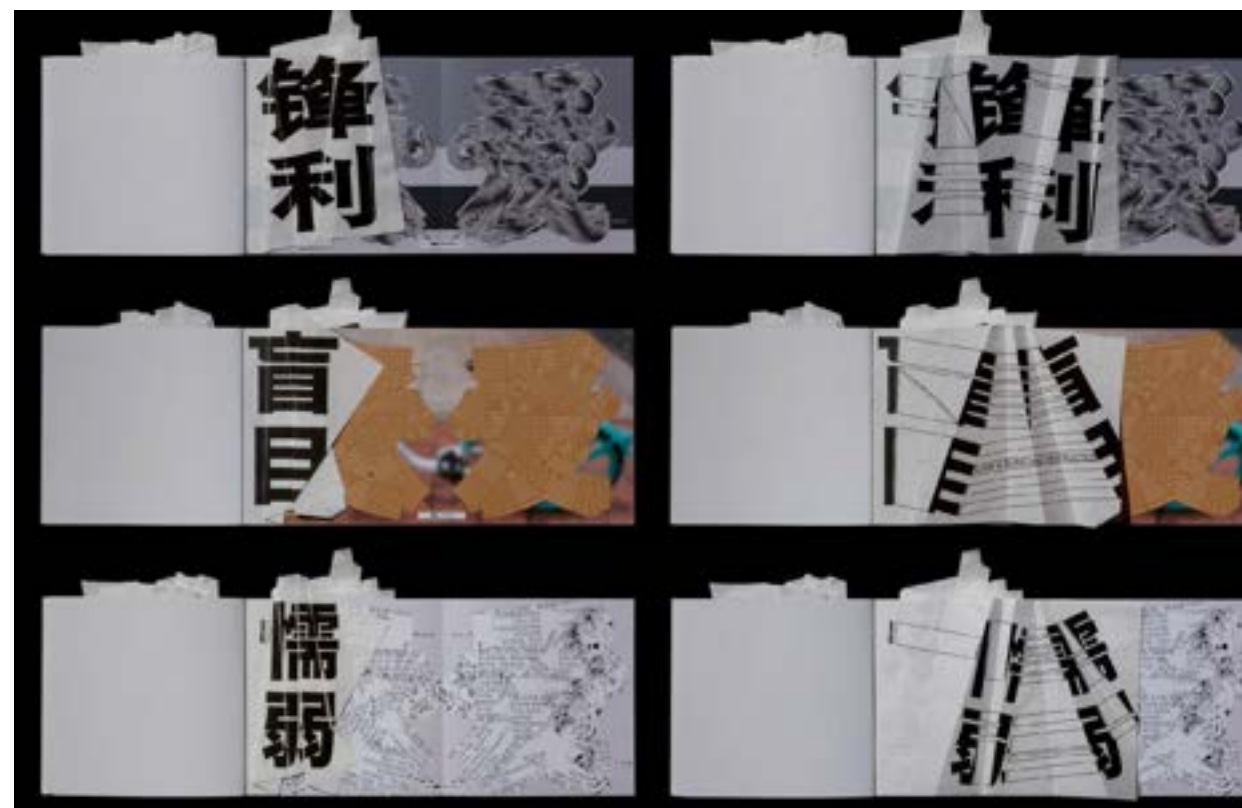
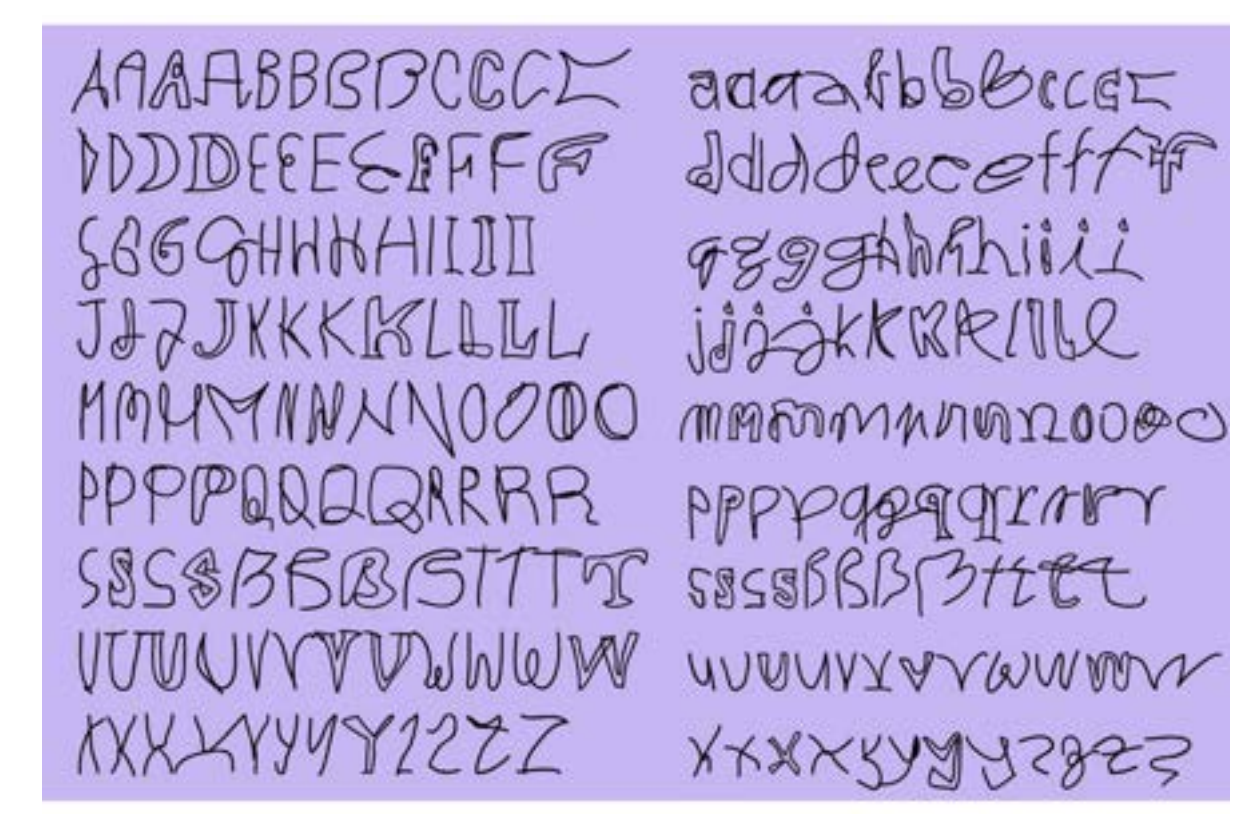
a change to the original or natural shape



How can ‘distortion’ in visual meaning be expressed by typography (typefaces)?

Definition 02 (Invisible)

a change to the intended or true meaning

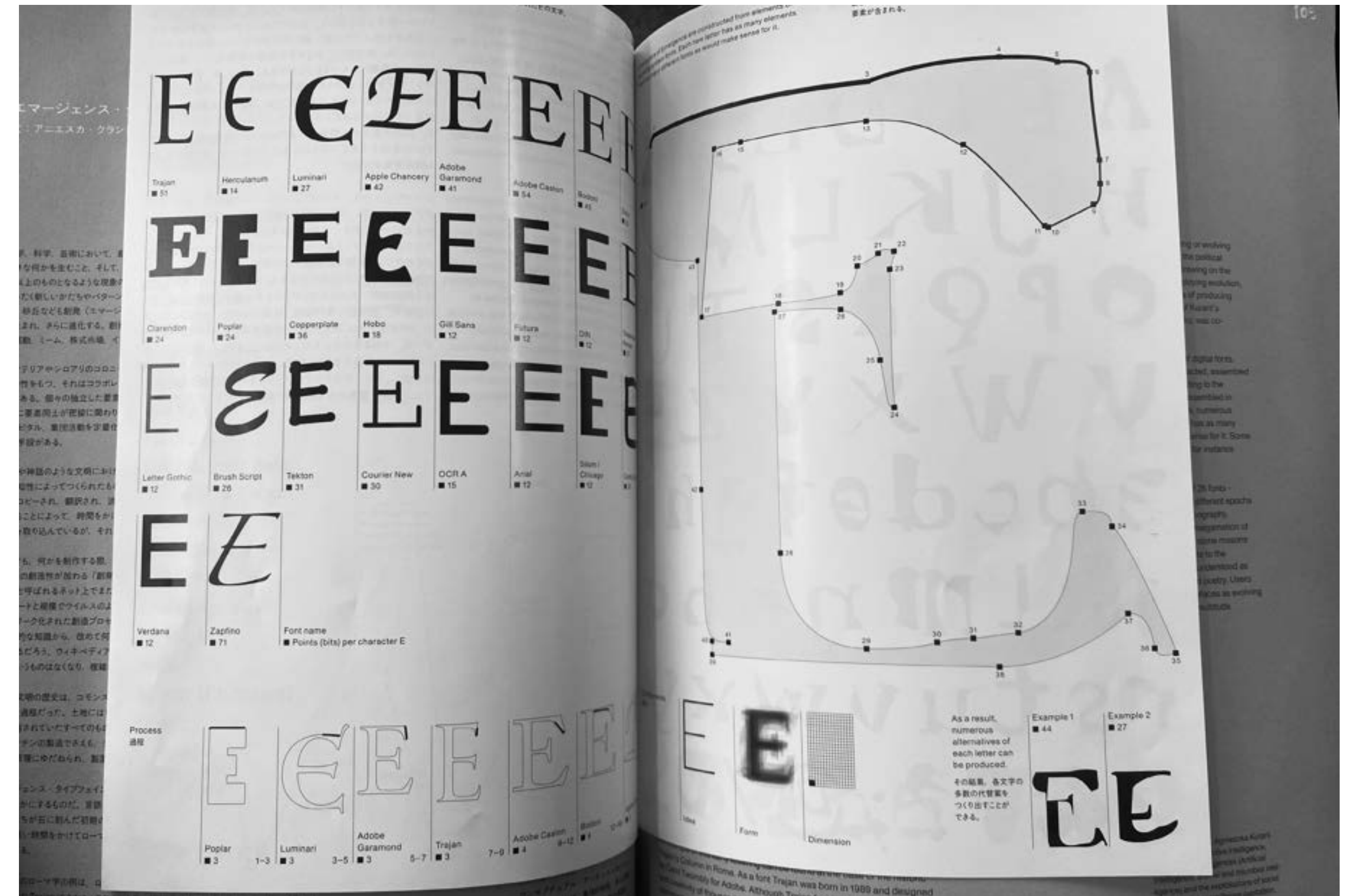


Visual reference 01

EMERGENCE Typeface

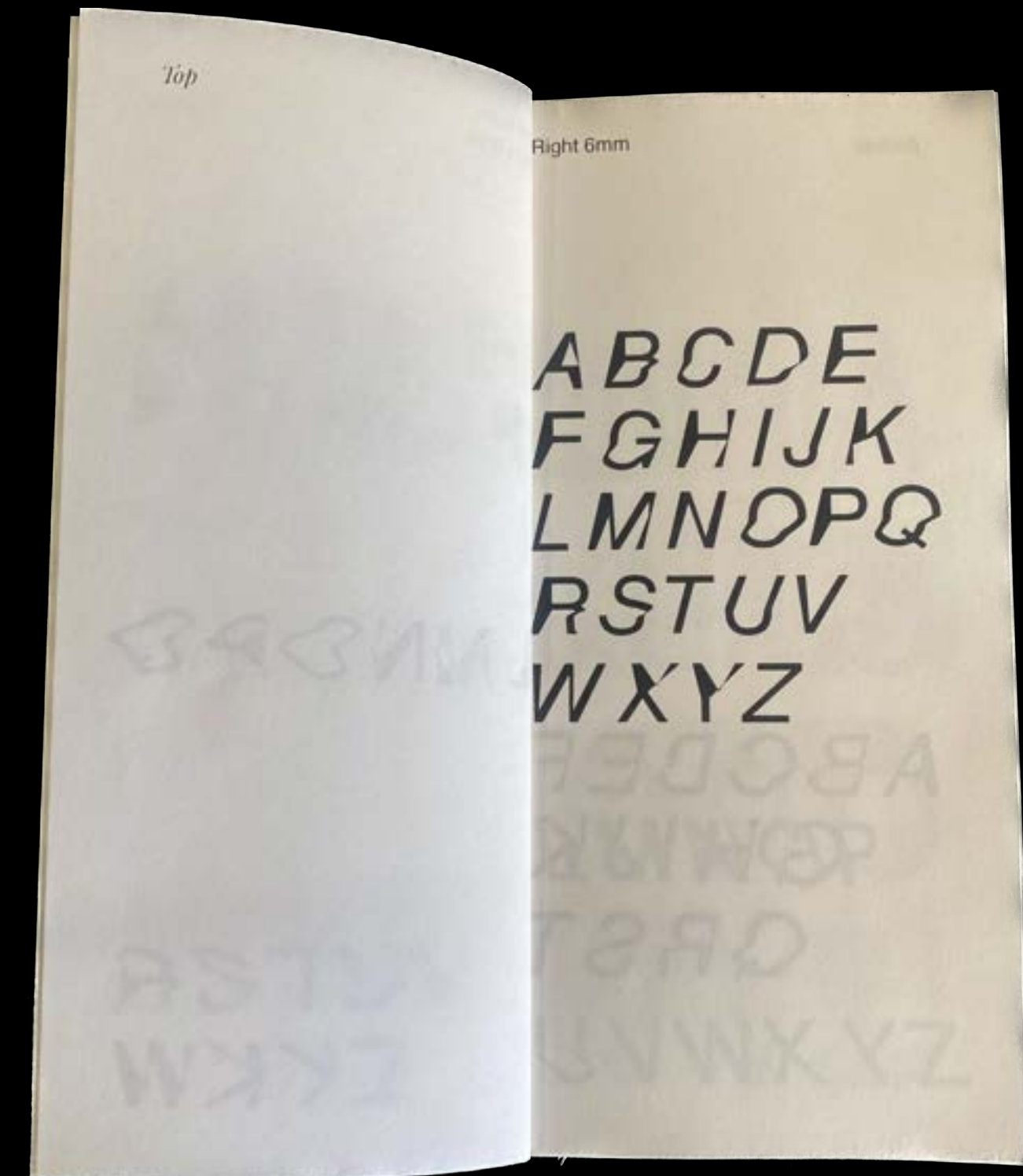
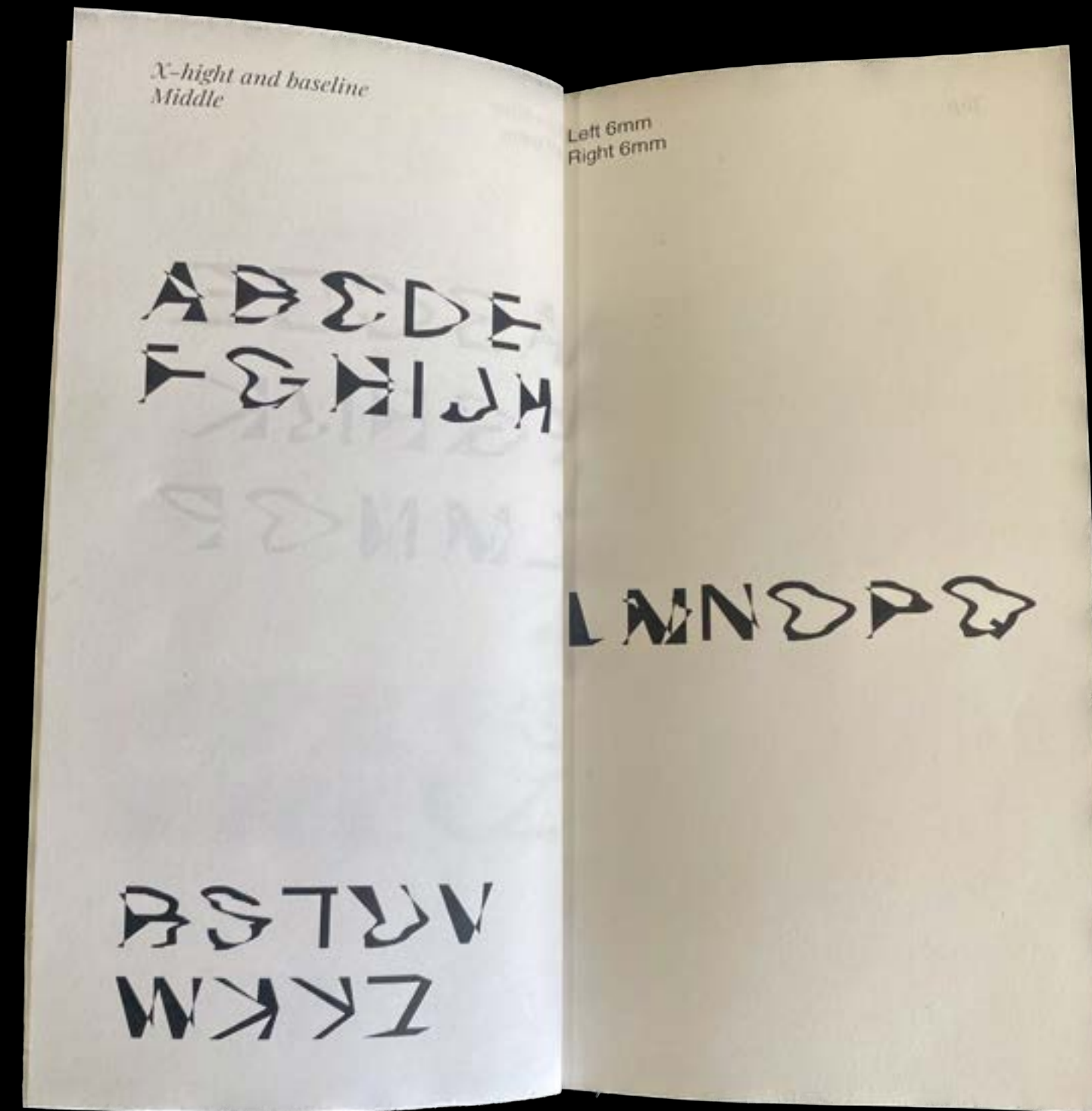
Kurant, A., & Pesko, R. (2020). Emergence Typeface.

‘Emergence typeface plays with existing forms and shapes of digital fonts. Different parts of various existing digital typefaces were extracted, assembled and arranged together into emergent new letter forms according to the basic shape of each letter.’



Visual experiments

How can 'distortion' in visual meaning be expressed by typography (typefaces)?



Feedback

It would be better to do physical design as well, because with digital design you can often imagine the outcome

*What can we use 'distortion' in a different way?
How about 'cultural distortion'?*

Visual reference 03: Tina Touli

“Anything around us can stimulate our senses and can be inspirational and an “object” for investigation once we reimagine it. Creativity can be everywhere.” (Tina Touli, 2023)

Tina Touli continues to be a major influence on my design. Her projects are characterised by the use of everyday objects (glass, petrol, foam) and combining them with digital to create experimental visual types. I decided to take her method and create typefaces using glass and clay.



Visual Experiments: Glass



Visual Experiments



A B C D E F G

H I J K L M N

O P Q R S T

U V W X Y Z

Visual Experiments



A B C D E F G

H I J K L M N

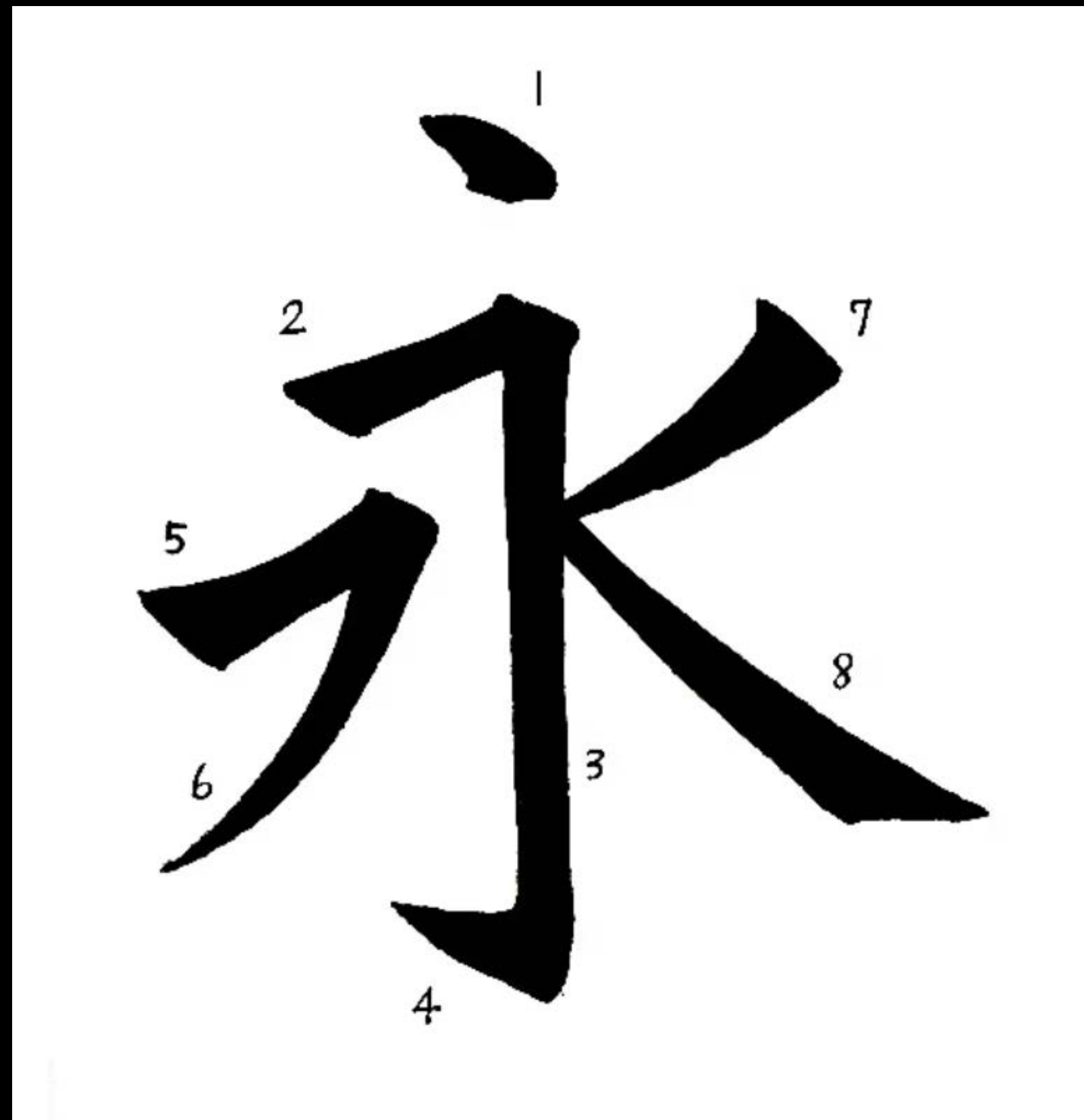
O P Q R S T

U V W X Y Z

Visual Experiments: Clay



Visual Experiments: Calligraphy



Visual Experiments: Scanner

A B C D E F G

H I J K L M N

H I J K L M N

O P Q R S T

O P Q R S T

U V W X Y Z

U V W X Y Z

I experimented using a scanner to create an distorted typefaces

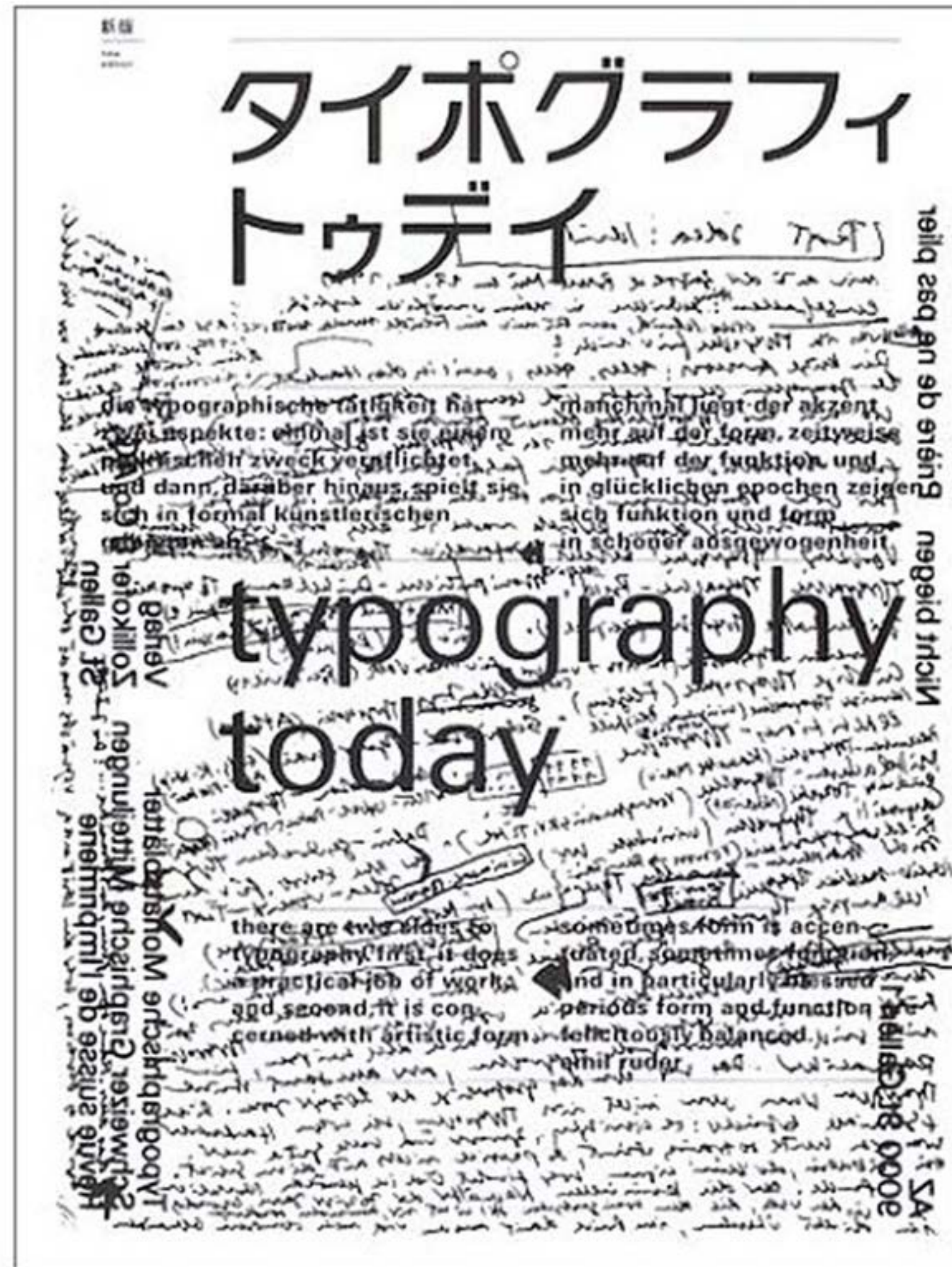


What is 'distortion' typeface in my context?

It is possible to create distorted typefaces using familiar objects, but the possibilities are endless. It was unclear why this tool and why this object.

Cultural distortion?

Reference 04



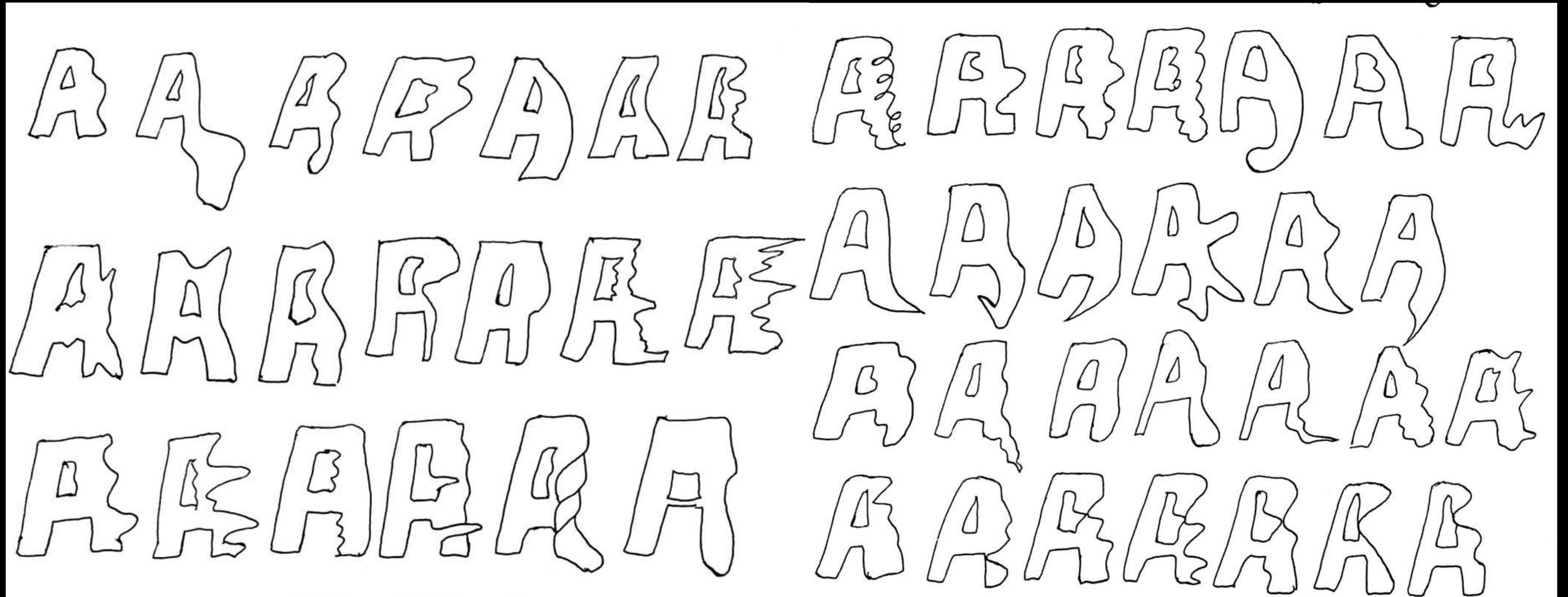
The art of the extreme Orient has purposely avoided the symmetrical as expressing not only completion, but repetition.

Helmut Schmid, 2003

I became interested in the differences between Western and Japanese attitudes to aesthetic values. Schumit referred to 'The Book of Tea' by Kakuzo Okakura who was a founder of Tokyo Art Univerisity, and noted that Japan found beauty in asymmetry, i.e. imperfect form and layout.

Visual experiments

What if I designed an asymmetrically distorted typeface based on the Japanese tea culture, which places great importance on imperfect beauty, especially asymmetry?



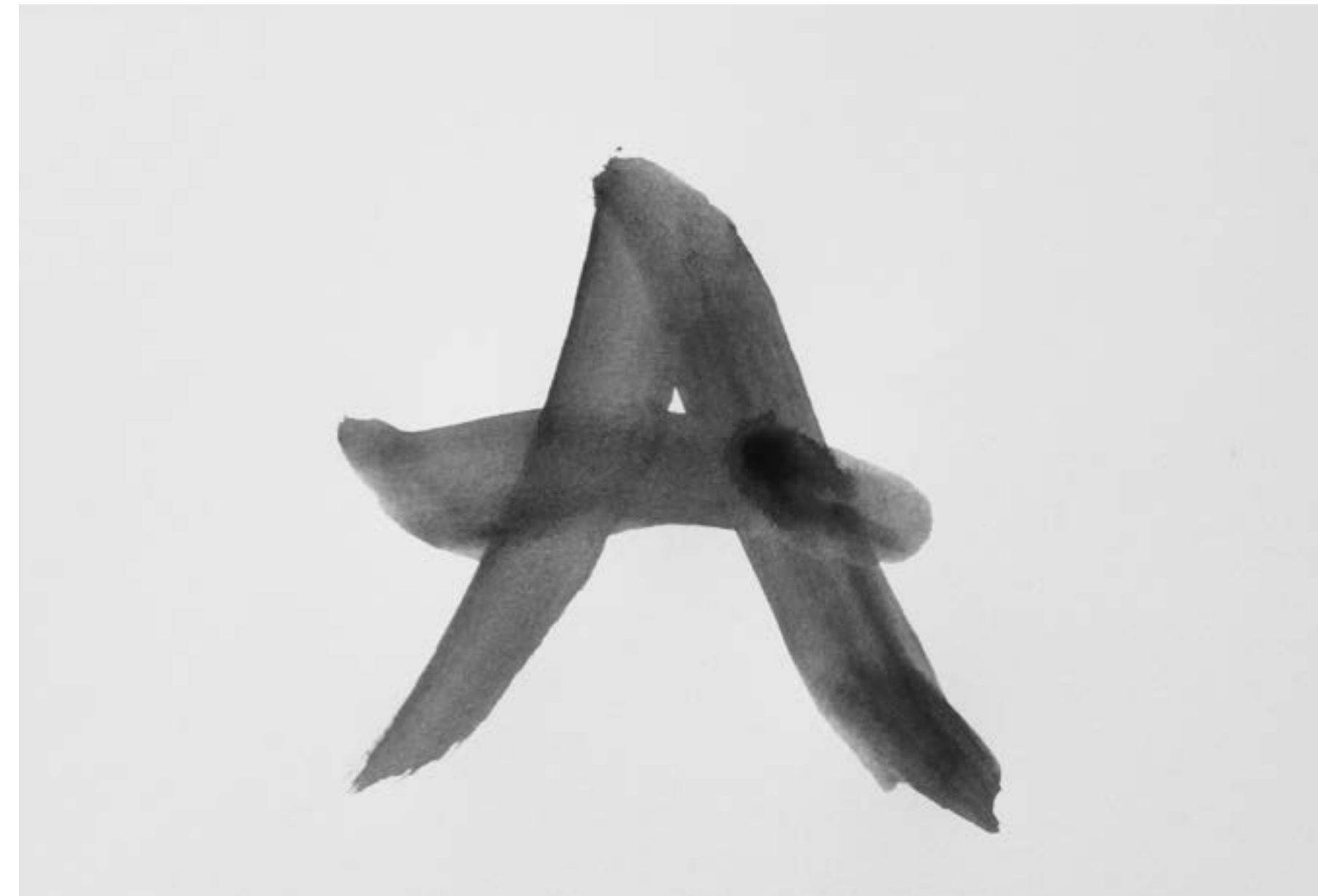
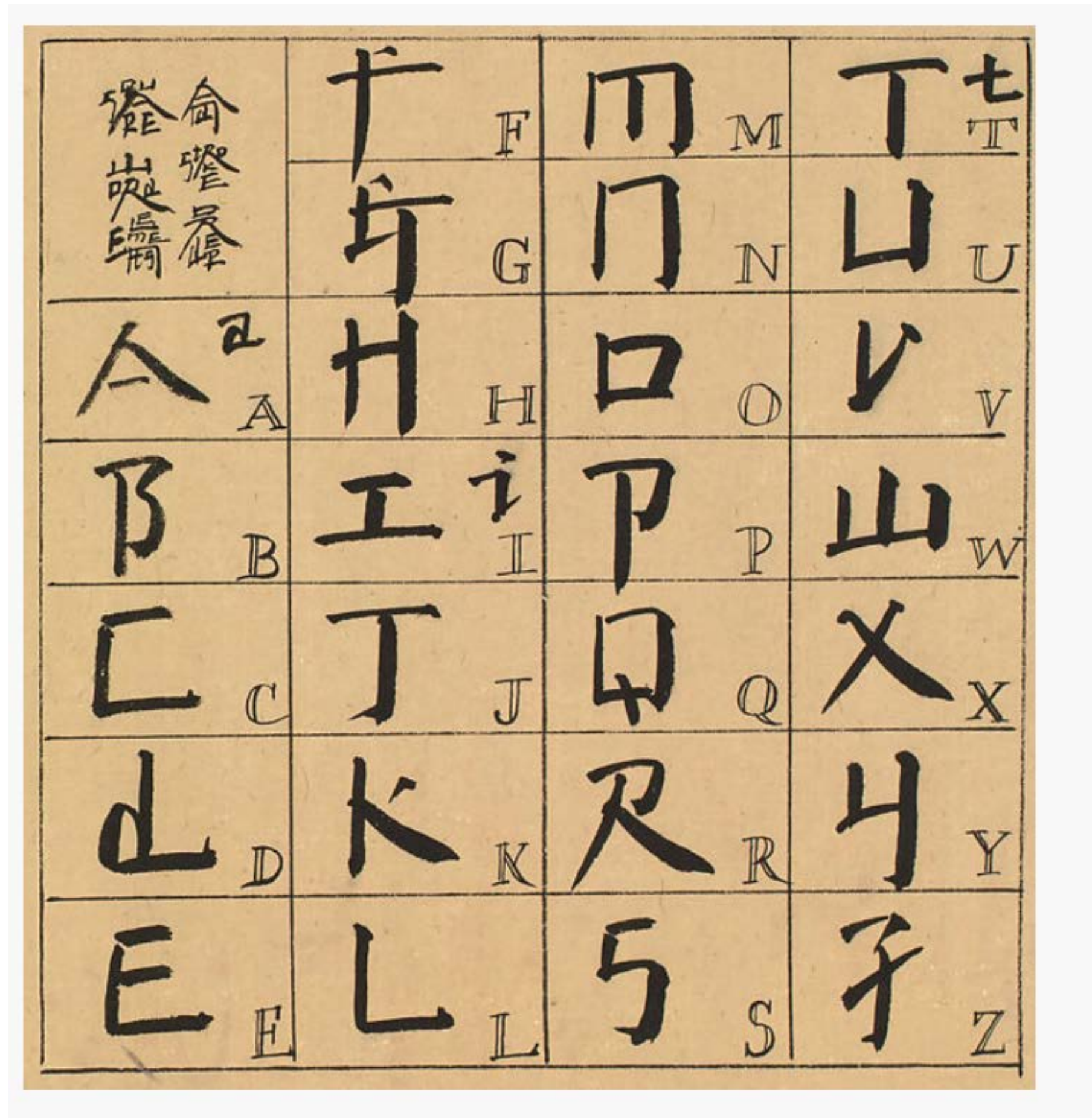
Visual reference 05



Anna Mills

Anna Milles' work is a unique, playful and curvilinear typeface, bringing an image close to my image of a distorted typeface. The typeface used in this work in particular is close to the concept of duality I wanted to bring. From this typeface it can be seen that she uses different colours and styles for the top and bottom of the typeface. I attempted to take this style and incorporate it into my own typeface about the duality of Western and Japanese distortion. On the one hand, she takes a horizontal approach, whereas in my case I am considering a vertical approach. This is because I wanted to compare the positions of right and left to the physical positions of Japan and the West.

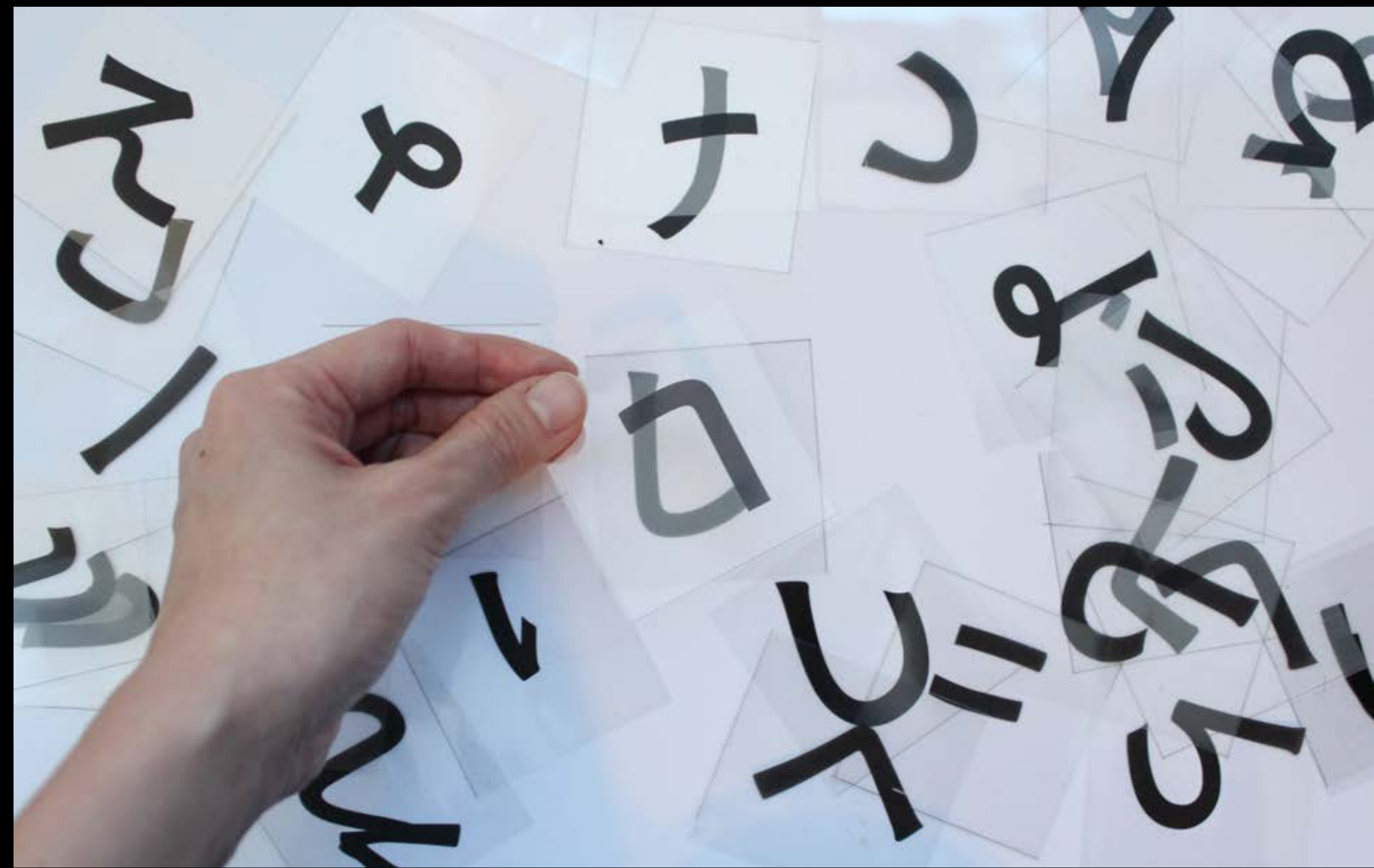
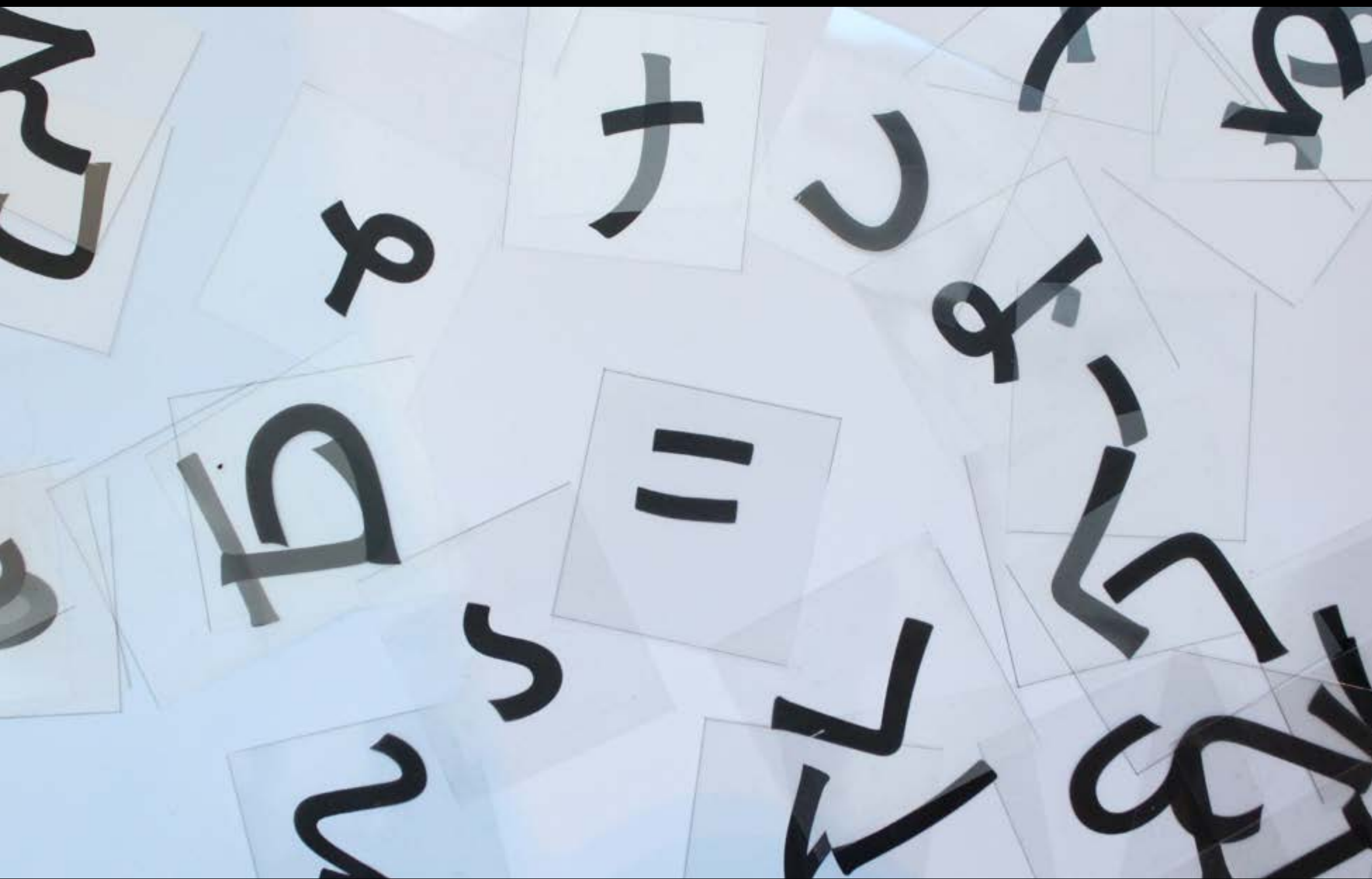
Visual reference 06



In the feedback, I was given the idea that it might be possible to use brush strokes to create an alphabet, but there was already a completed work by Chinese artist Xu Bing. So I decided to challenge myself to see if I could create an alphabet using strokes of hiragana and katakana, which are characters unique to Japan, instead of kanji.

Visual experiments

What if I created an alphabet using Hiragana, a unique Japanese character?



Visual experiment

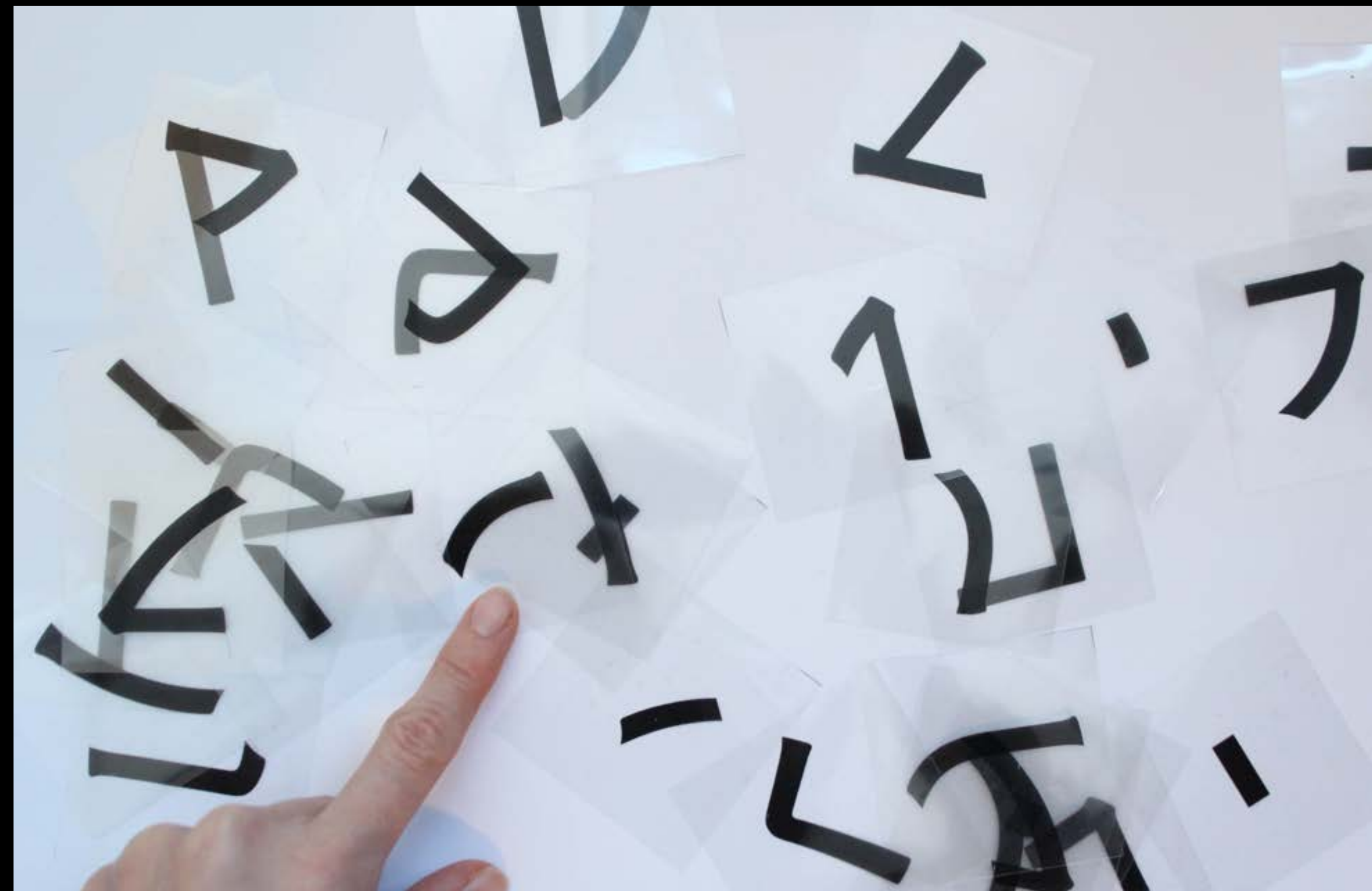
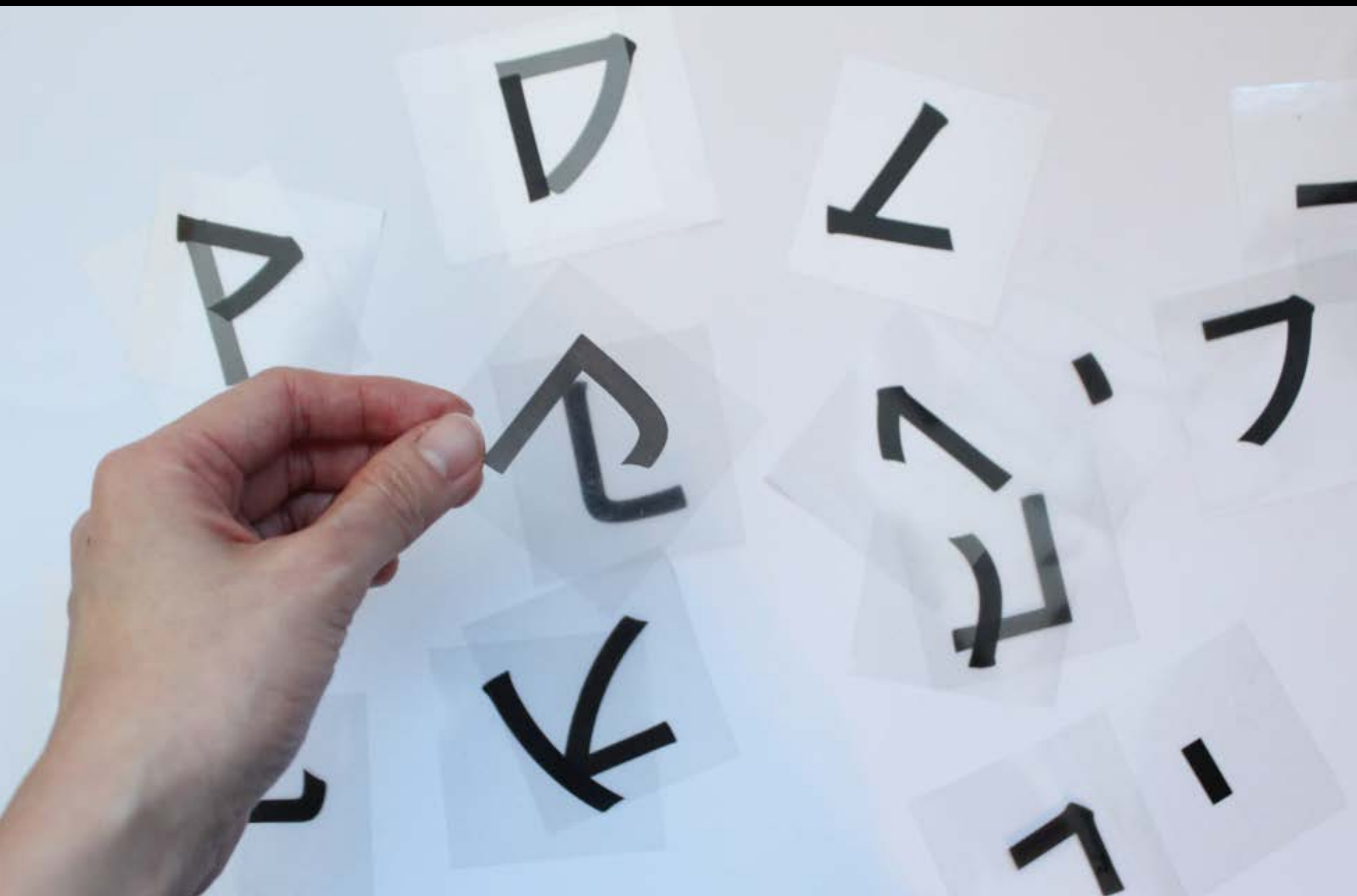
あいうえおかきくけこさしすせそたちつてとなにぬねの
はひふへほまみむめもやゆよらりるれろわをん

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Visual experiments

What if I created an alphabet using Katakana, a unique Japanese character?



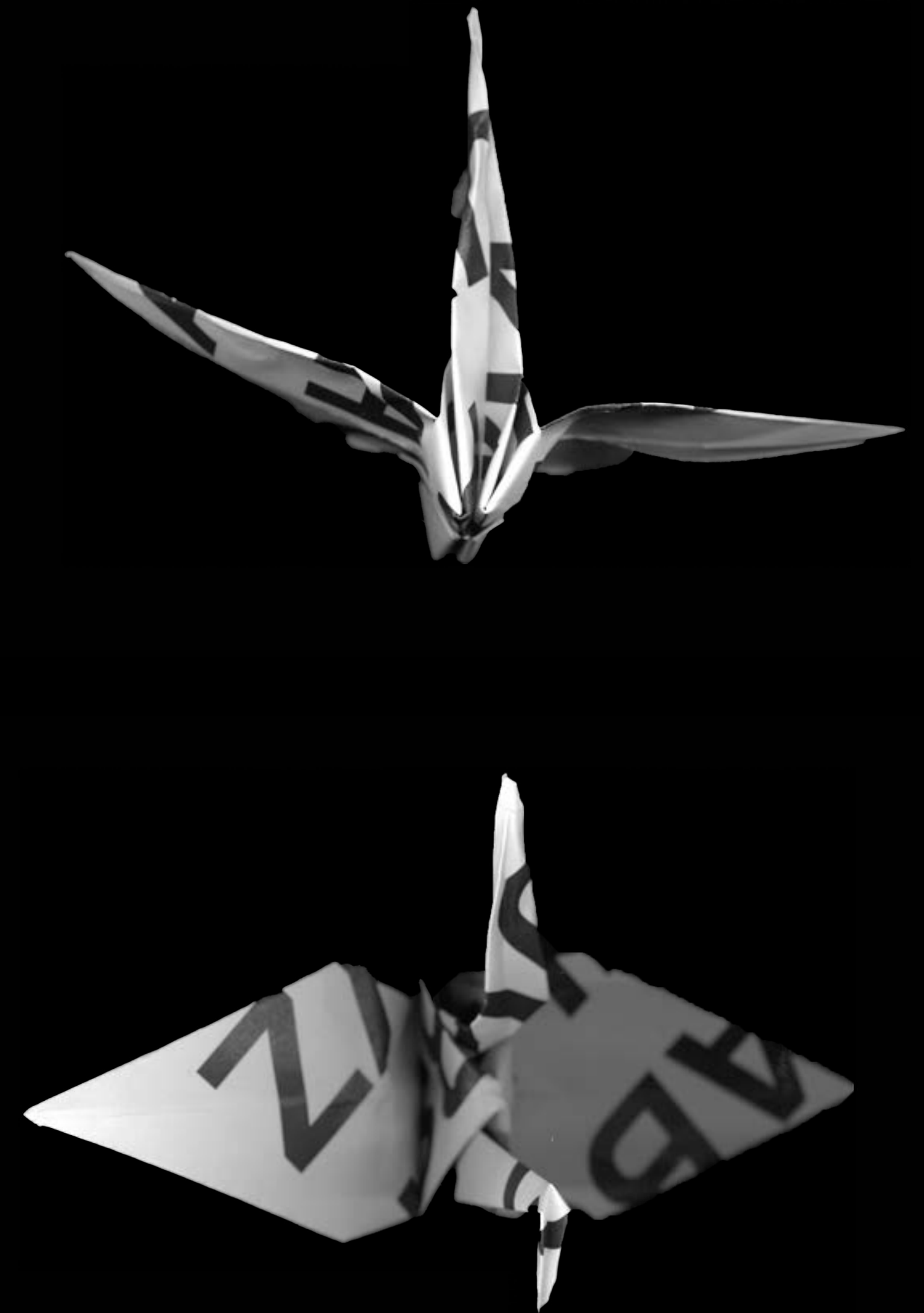
Visual experiment

アイウエオカキクケコサシスセソタチツテトナニヌ
ネノハヒフヘホマミムメモヤユヨラリルレロワヲン

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P R S T U V W X Y Z

Visual experiments: Origami

What happens if I distort the letters by origami?



Cultural distortion

I was also interested in the distortion of Western words brought to Japan, so I made posters that juxtaposed those words with English and Japanese using distorted typefaces.

Happy Birthday

ハピバ

(**HAPIBA**)

Smartphone

スマホ

(**SUMAHO**)

United Kingdom

イギリス

(**IGILISU**)

McDonald's

マック

(**MAKKU**)

KFC

ケンタ

(**KENTA**)

Afternoon tea

ヌン活

(**NOONKATSU**)

Party animals

パリピ

(**PARIPI**)

Cost performance

コスパ

(**KOSUPA**)

Negative campaign

ネガキャン

(**NEGAKYAN**)

Visual experiments

What if I were to describe Western words that have been distorted in Japanese culture using distorted typefaces?



Visual Reference 07: Paula Scher

Paula Scher (1996) Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk.

Paula Scher is a partner at Pentagram and this New York musical poster she designed represents her strong typographic background. The bold, high-impact layout and graphics give the viewer a sense of commonality with postmodernists, while according to D5MEDIA she designs based on the grid system advocated by Joseph Müller-Brockman. However, her attitude overlaps with mine in that she rejects the corporate visuals with their heavy use of Helvetica and supports the postmodernists' attitude.



What is 'distortion' typeface in my context?

I have noticed that the branches and leaves of various projects are currently spreading without clarity on whether the direction is from the West to Japan, Japan to the West, or whether there are critical issues to be addressed.

Reference 09: In Praise of Shadows

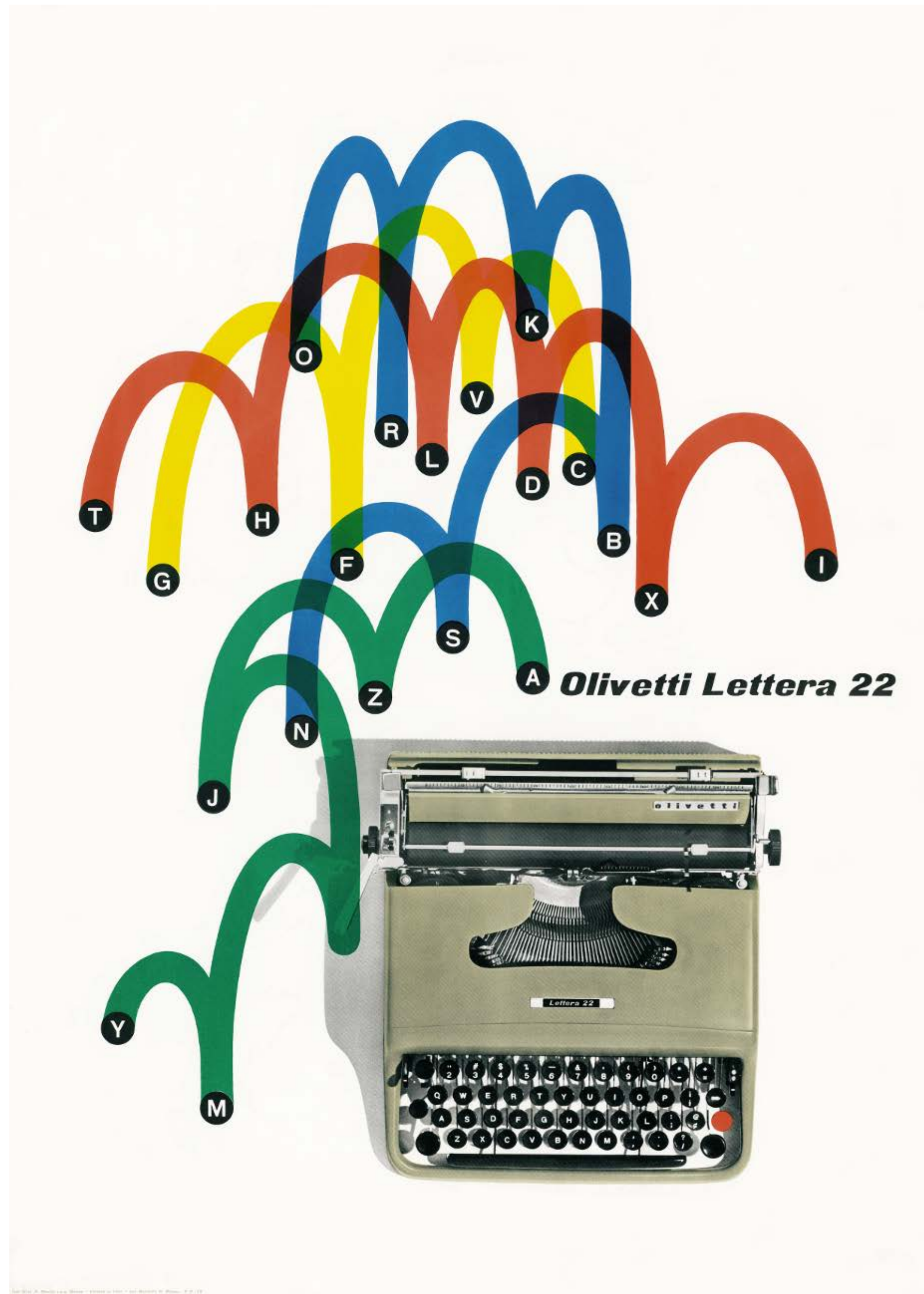


'We will immerse ourselves in the darkness and there discover its own particular beauty'

The book is talking about the Japanese aesthetic in comparison with the West, and influenced not only the architect Tadao Ando and the photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, but also the philosopher Michel Foucault. Tanizaki focuses on the concept of shading that exists in traditional Japanese houses and pursues a uniquely Japanese aesthetic through comparisons with Western culture. When I read Tanizaki's book a long time ago, I had the impression that he had gone too far in his arguments, which I could understand but not sympathise with. This may have been because I had been brought up in an environment that was too westernised. However, it was in placing myself in the Western environment of the UK that I finally began to see what Tanizaki was trying to say, and at the same time it gave me the opportunity to broaden my horizons. I realised that I myself, like the old Tanizaki, had too strong a yearning for the West and had underestimated the aesthetic value of Japan. However, after re-reading this book after leaving Japan, I was able to realise the beauty of Japan, which I did not value. I recognised that this is an important perspective that is almost lost in Japan today.

In Praise of Shadows

I was strongly influenced by Tanizaki's attempt to reclaim the value of traditional Japanese beauty, and further by his attitude, like that of Rei Kawakubo, to question 'perfect' beauty.



This is because I myself have always been attracted to westernised beauty and have tried to pursue perfection. I was particularly attracted to the colourful, bold Italian graphic design represented by Bruno Munari and Giovanni Pintori, which led me to pursue a career in graphic design. At the early stage of my life, I saw no value in the minimalistic and humble Japanese style of design.

Olivetti Lettera 22, poster by Giovanni Pintori (1954). Courtesy Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti, Ivrea – Italy

Reference 09



Shino chawan, Tokyo National Museum

However, when I read Okakura's 'The Book of Tea', I realised that in the past Japan had an attitude of finding beauty in imperfection, which liberated my mind. Because I was constantly under pressure to be "perfect", to always go to a good school and work for a good employer, influenced by Japanese society's demand for perfection. In Japan today, there are people who place more emphasis on Western aesthetic values and seek perfect social success. Through this project, I want to offer them a new value of 'distortion' and question the society's demand for perfection.

Line of enquiry:

To design a... (what is the format?)

typeface/ typography/ publication

About..... (what is the topic?)

the value of distortion

That... (who is the audience?)

People raised in a pressurised Japanese society that no longer allows for distortion in the pursuit of perfection.

*Can use to... (what will they know/
think/feel/do as a result?)*

Review the term 'distortion and accept that not being perfect is not a bad thing, but a positive aspect of individuality

In... (what context?)

the context of finding positive value for distortion.

'In the Praise of Distortion'

Visual reference 10: Comme des Garçons S/S97



The 1980's 'The shock of Black' is often cited as an example in relation to this *In Praise of Shadows*. The 'shock of Black' was created by Yohji Yamamoto and Comme des Garçons by Rei Kawakubo, who presented a black-on-black clothing line at the Paris Collections, shocking Western fashion, which at the time was dominated by bright, glittering designs. Rei Kawakubo, founder and designer of Comme des Garçons, does not pursue traditional Japanese beauty in the same way as Tanizaki, but I found a similar attitude in both her and Tanizaki. Kawakubo is known as one of Japan's leading fashion designers because of her questioning of aesthetic values, particularly Western ones in the fashion industry.

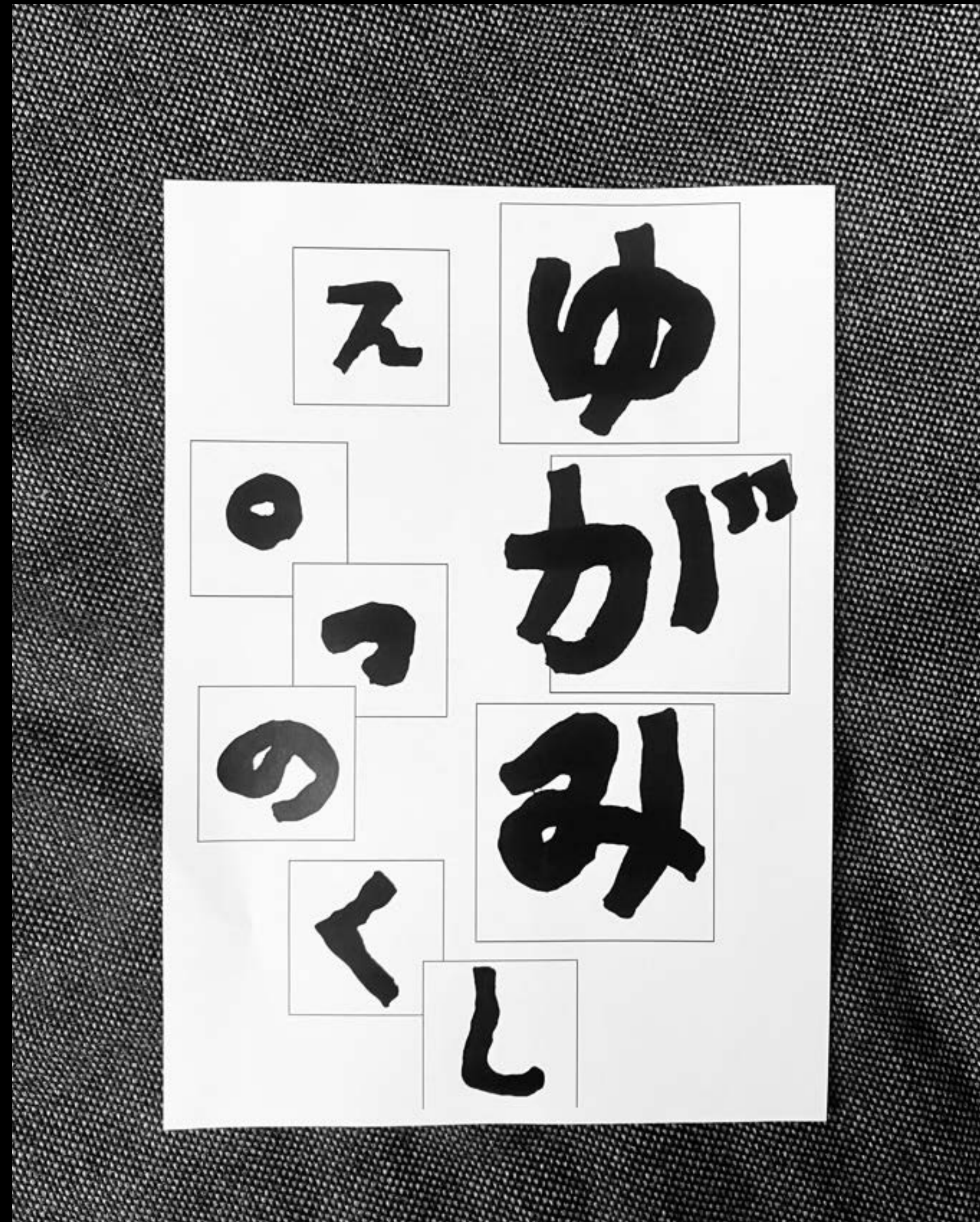
The clothes presented in the 1997 spring/summer collection 'Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body', commonly known as 'lumps and bumps', were designed to be worn in places on the human body where they should not exist. The collection caused controversy in the fashion industry, as the 'common' beautiful body shape was distorted by the novel design of padding and bulging in places on the human body where it should not exist. When considering this collection, these distorted-shape garments liberate the body from fashion's assumptions about the physical aspects of women's busts and hips, and raise questions for the viewer about the 'perfect' body beauty. I was inspired by Kawakubo's attitude and collection and wanted to express it through typefaces.

Visual experiments

Can I design a typeface with 'lumps and bumps' on it and express distortion?



Visual experiments



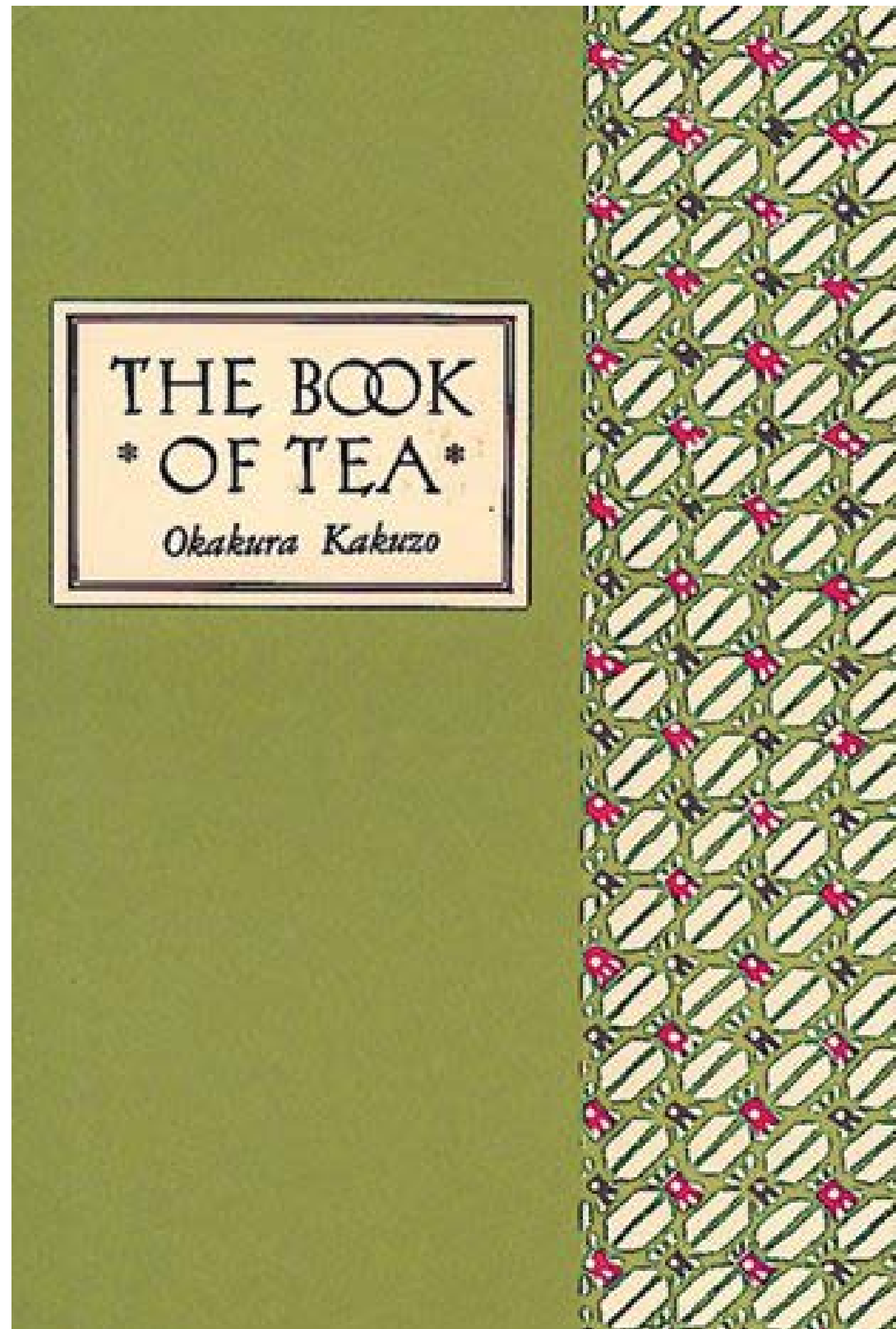
What to do next?

Complete the distorted typeface and create a type specimen

Try to turn them into digital typeface using Glyphs or DINAMO?
so that I can make a publication about 'distortion' in Japan.

Consider the content for my audience

Reference 08



*It (Teaism) is essentially a worship of the Imperfect...
Our home and habits, costume and cuisine, porcelain,
lacquer, painting,... Our very literature - all have been
subject to its influence.*



Shino chawan, Tokyo National Museum

Sueyoshi, S. (2020) 'Momoyama tea potteries : The beauty of imperfection', Journal of East Asian cultural interaction studies, 13, pp. 119–136.