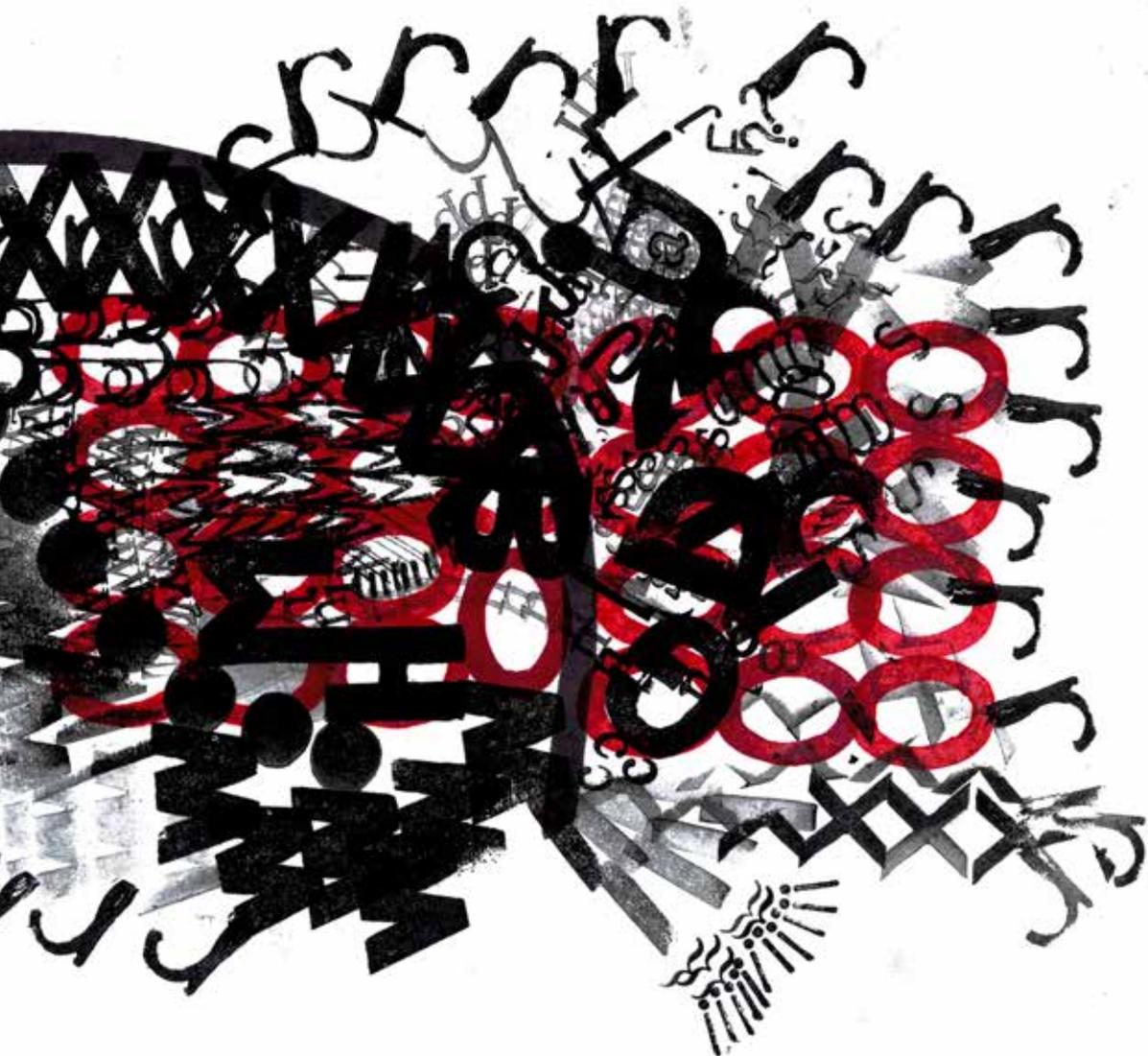
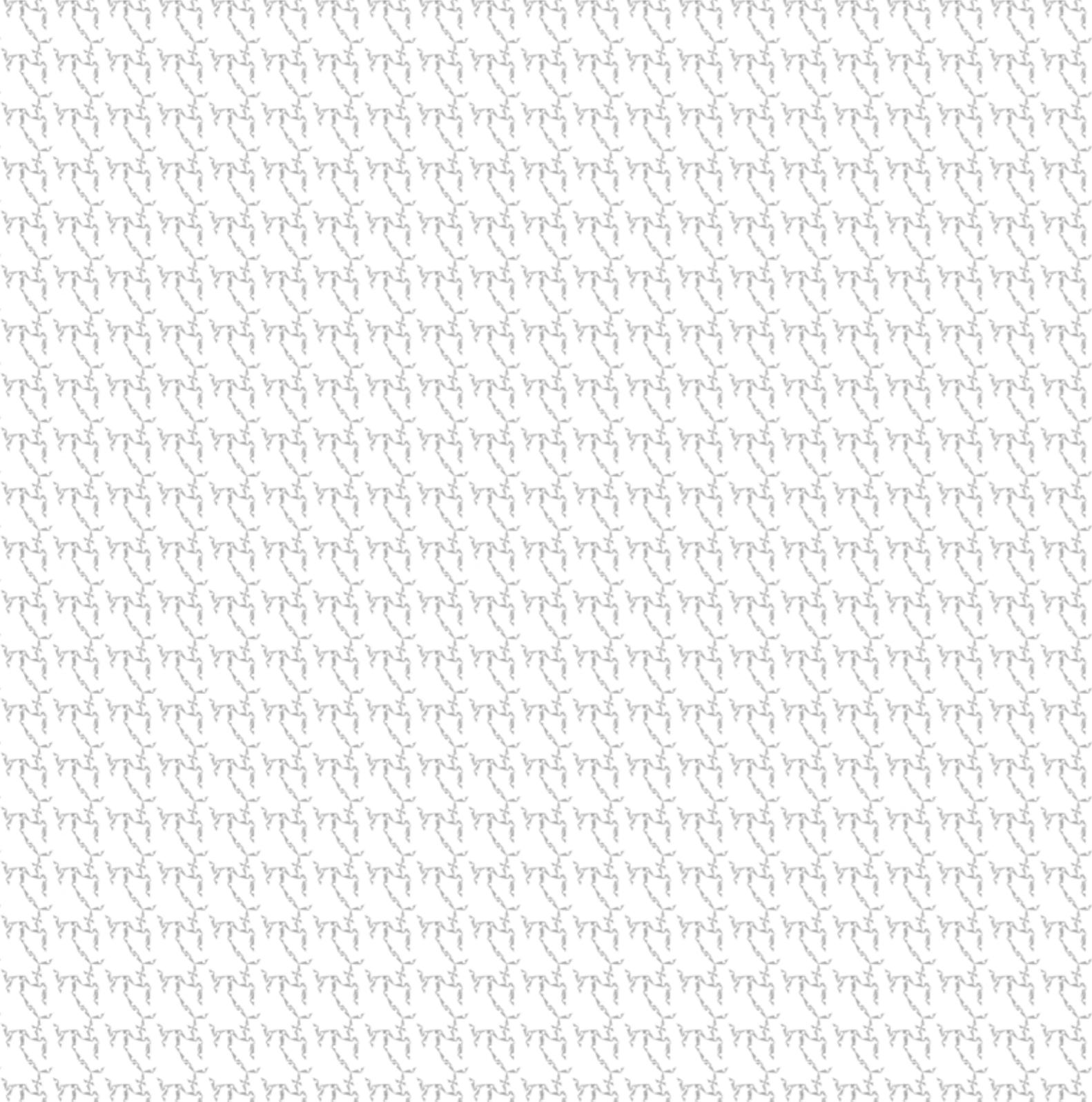


# MOTHER'S MILK

Sacha Archer





## MOTHER'S MILK



Sacha Archer

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## Mother's Milk

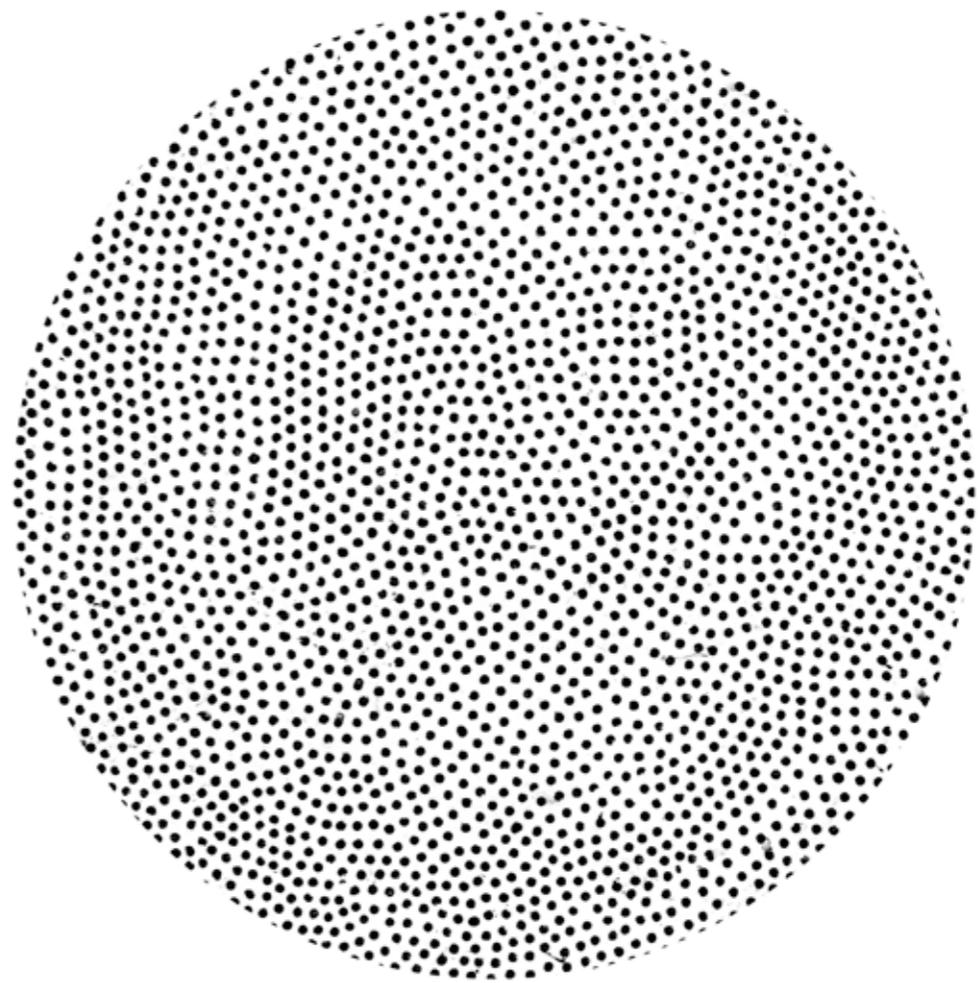
*For Alexie and Simone who grew strong on it.*

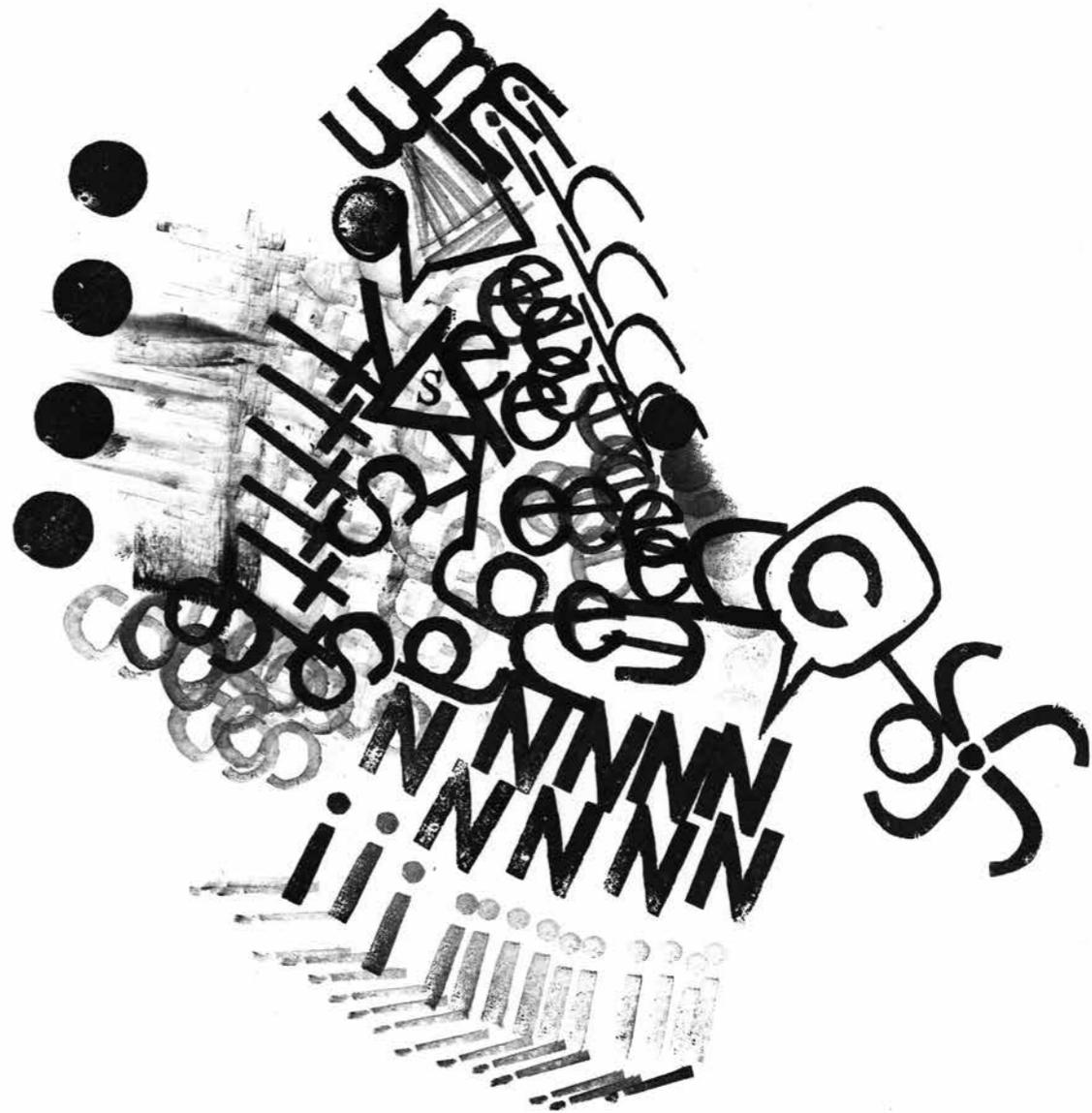
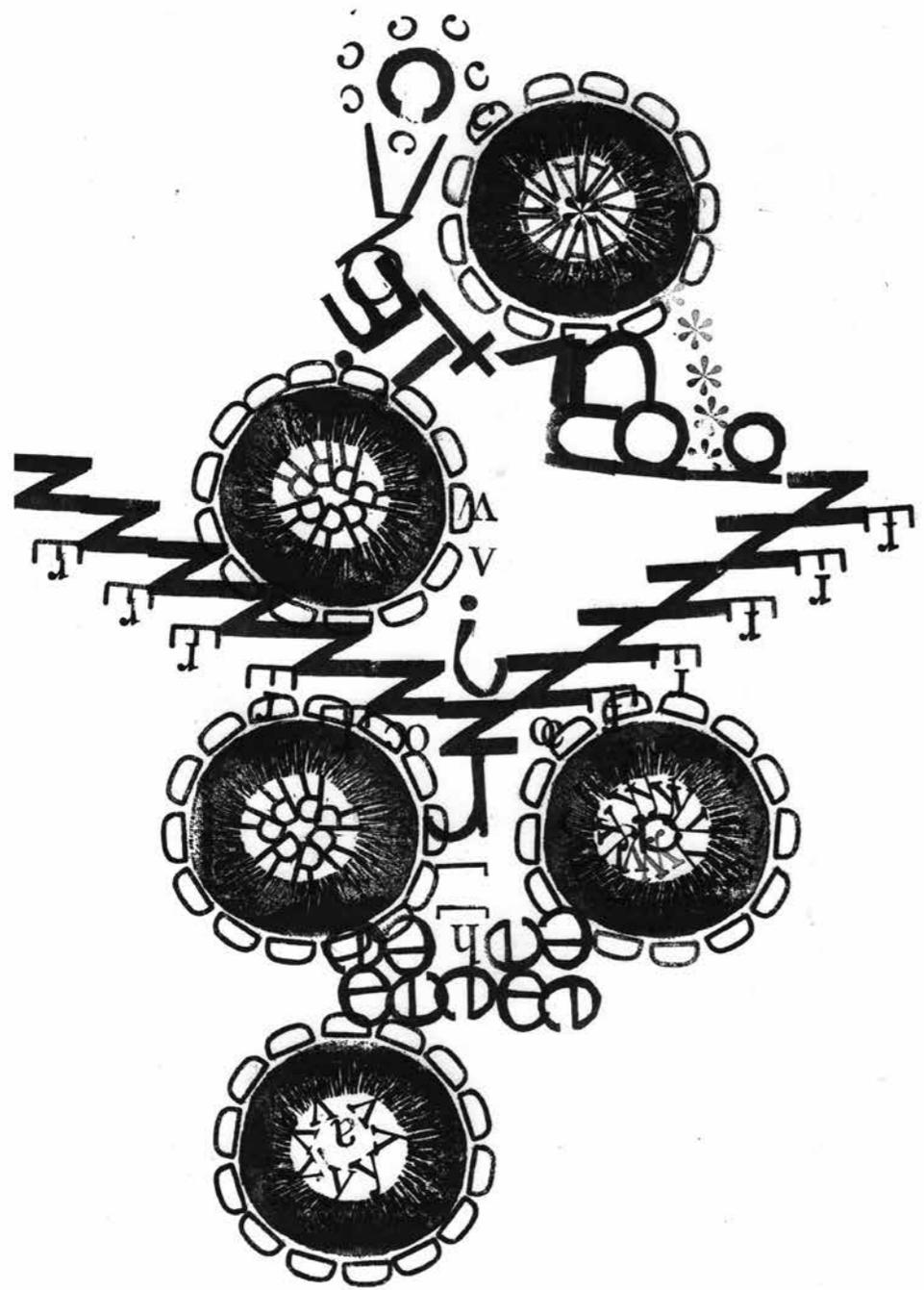
At first, the fear that there isn't going to be enough. The baby, borne on a river of blood, her only belonging with which she enters the world the placenta that, sliding out behind her, splashes the walls with its muted percussion—and this is discarded. The baby, already in the mother's arms, takes to the breast. But what is this? Nothing significant is given. At first, the fear that there isn't going to be enough. Days pass and still so little. The assurances of doctors and nurses come to nothing in the distance between the baby's mouth and the mother's breast. The baby, having gained some weight, loses it, returns to that weight the world felt when she first entered it. But it isn't so long before the milk starts flowing. And then it can't be stopped. The baby's getting fatter every day, milk dripping down her cheek, her eyes closing, drunk on the stuff. Shirt after shirt becomes saturated with the liquid. The mother, at regular intervals, sits with a pump on each breast, an electric, pulsing hum filling the house with the expelling of the liquid. But what to do with it? If you open the freezer door you find a few small, sealed, transparent bags that contain a generous amount of a frozen, yellowish substance. Open it again in a week and there are a number more. At three months it is best to avoid the freezer altogether. There's nothing inside it anymore but these little bags stacked and arranged into every last available space so that the freezer has been transformed into one solid block of milk. There is no reason to confront it. If you open the door, the force of the pull dislodges one bag and the noise of the collapsing architectural feat colliding with your body and the floor

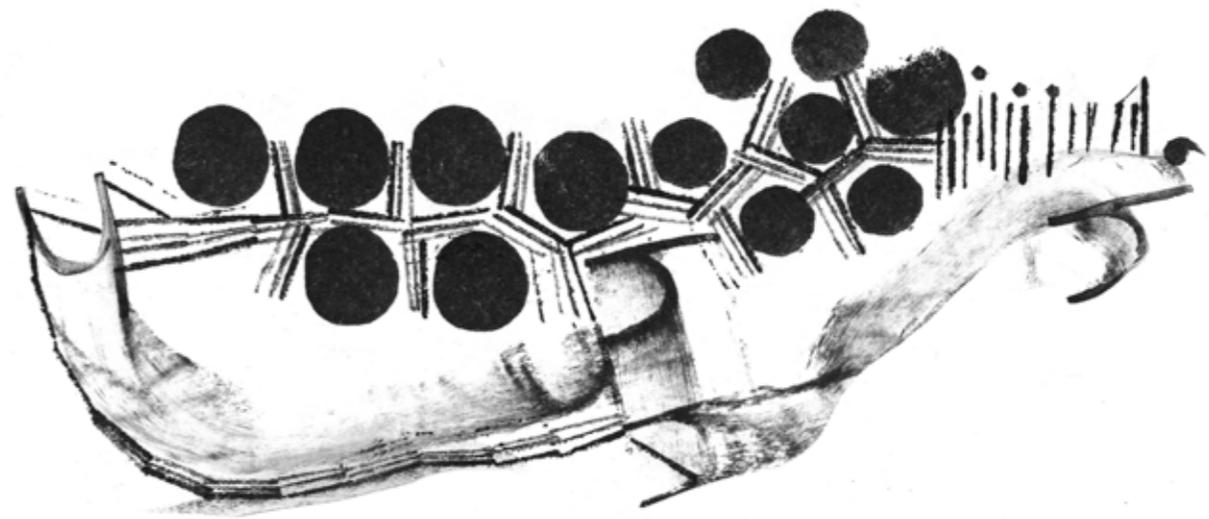
has you, in the Pavlovian mode, scrambling to catch what you can in an idiot dance of the futile.

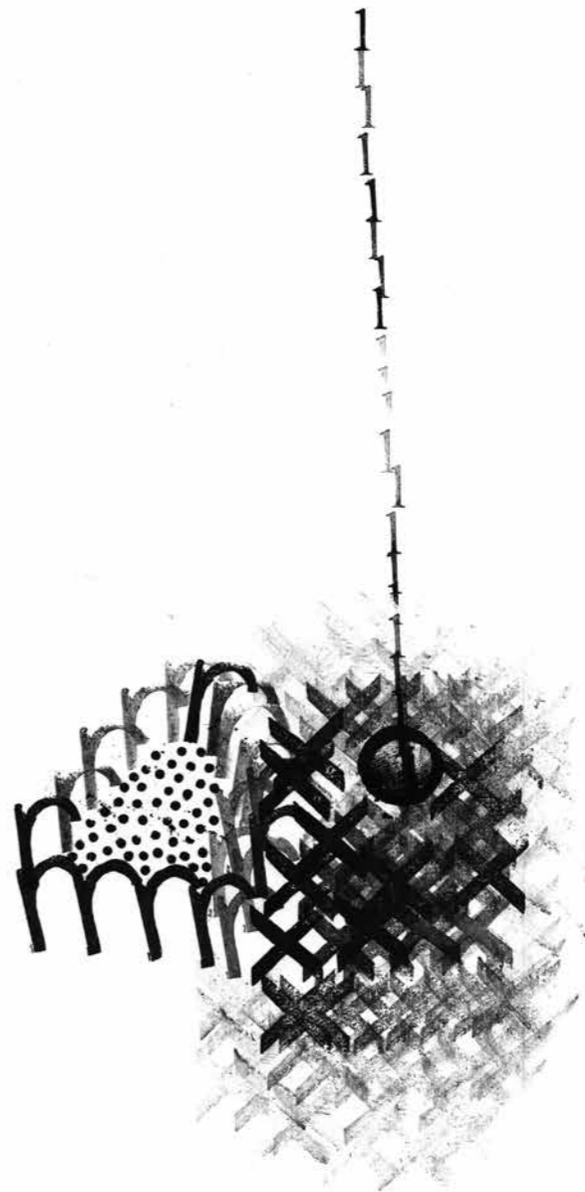
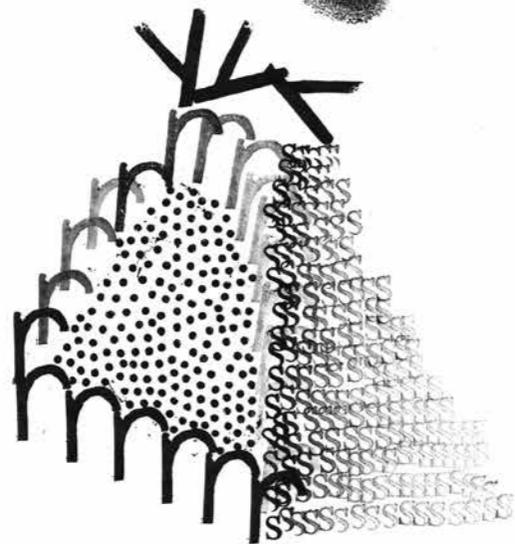
Christmas is approaching. The house is already filled with everything a parent could desire for their child—and more besides. Despite the fact that those in the family to whom new parents would turn for support, that is, their own parents and grandparents, are already soaking in the soil, long prepared for new grass and flowers, roots surely already sucking at them, despite this, somehow and constantly the things of modern parenting find their way into the house, take over the space, and the hands which only want to unload their own unmanageable excess continue to grace the family with their charity. Surely no gifts are necessary under the tree with so much already clogging the rooms. But in the spirit of tradition... An asinine spirit. Nonetheless, like a bullied Scrooge, the ghost of Christmas present fingering his ass, the mind is at work for some kind of possible gift, a token tribute. All these years together, it isn't so romantic. There is one thing she wants, and it will not be purchased. Be it chest or upright, a modest freezer.

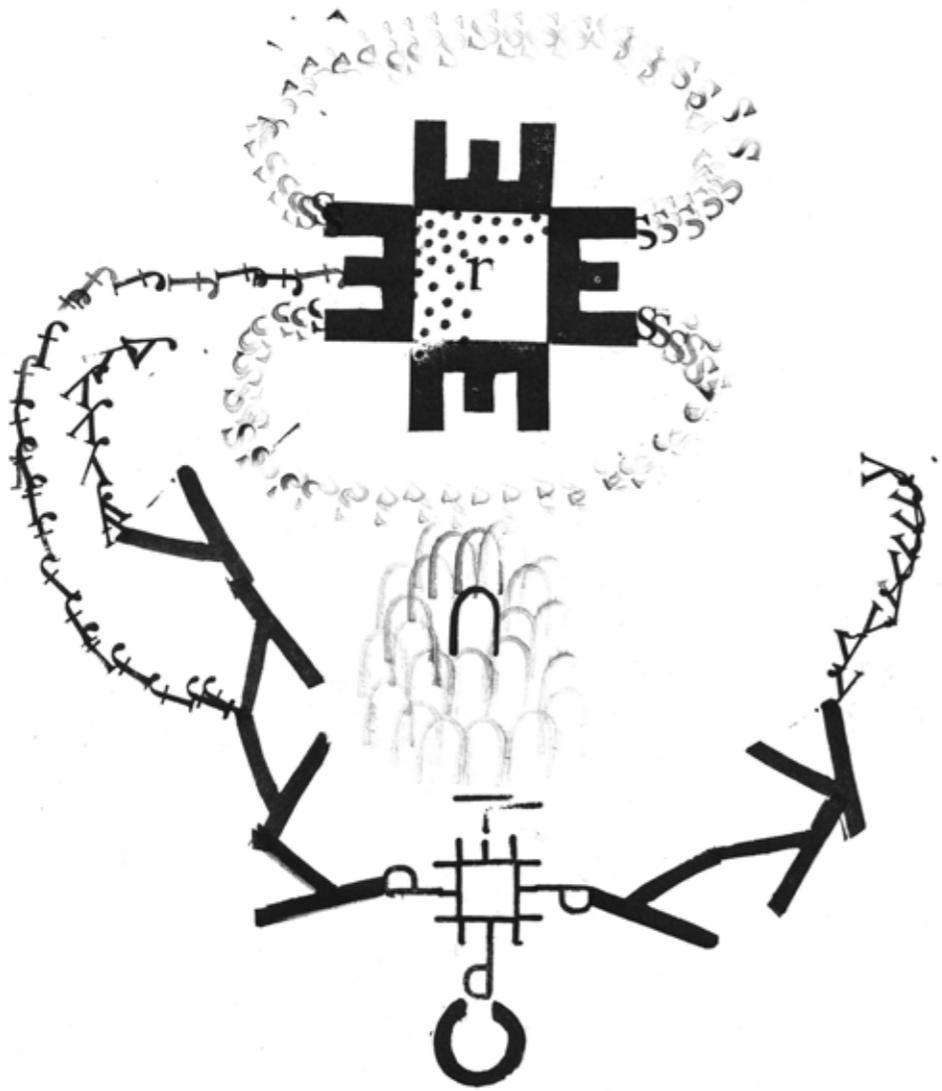
Accumulation... spurt by spurt... a lake of milk for which there is little use. Institutions don't want it—storage does not meet their rigorous standards. A few bags are given to a mother whose supply is drying up... And still, the coniferous green gone brown, the tree tossed on the curb... the hum, regularly, from the sofa... the occasional mention of a freezer...

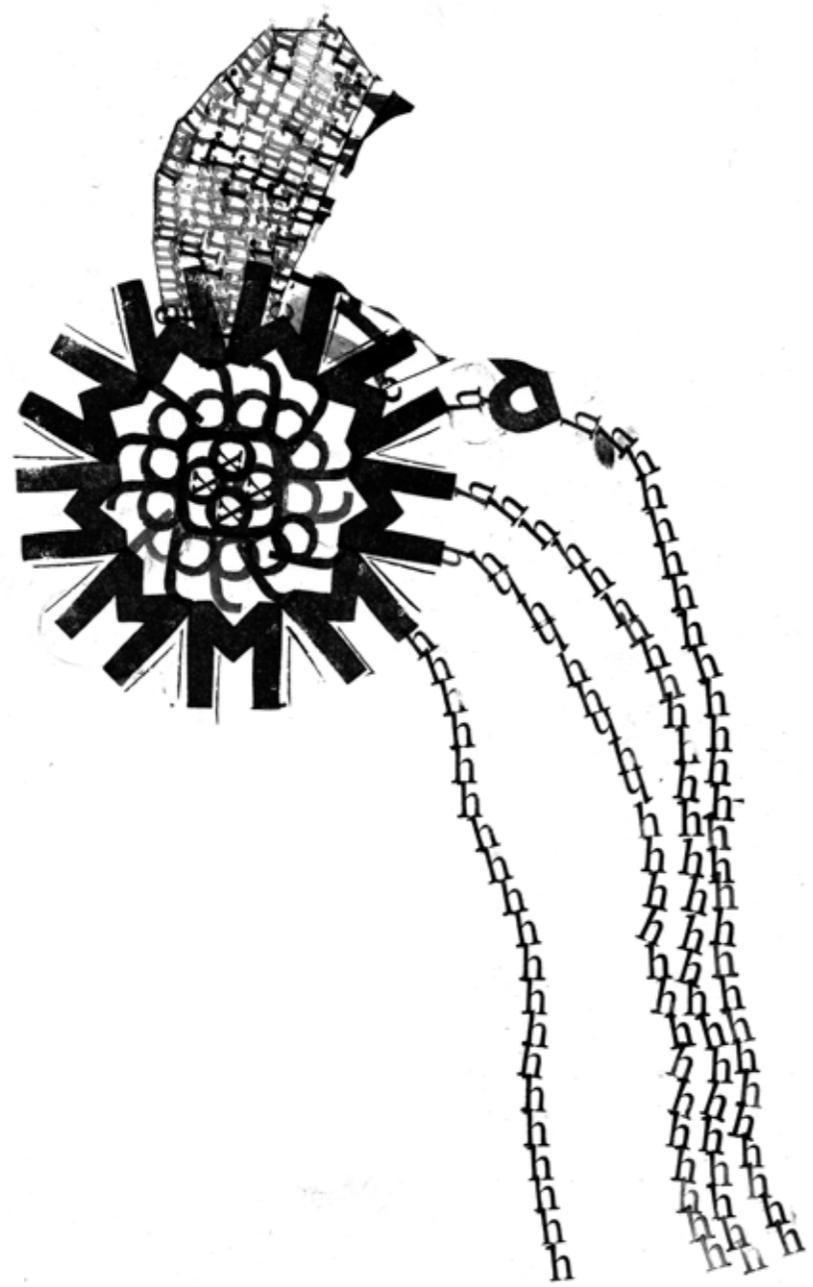


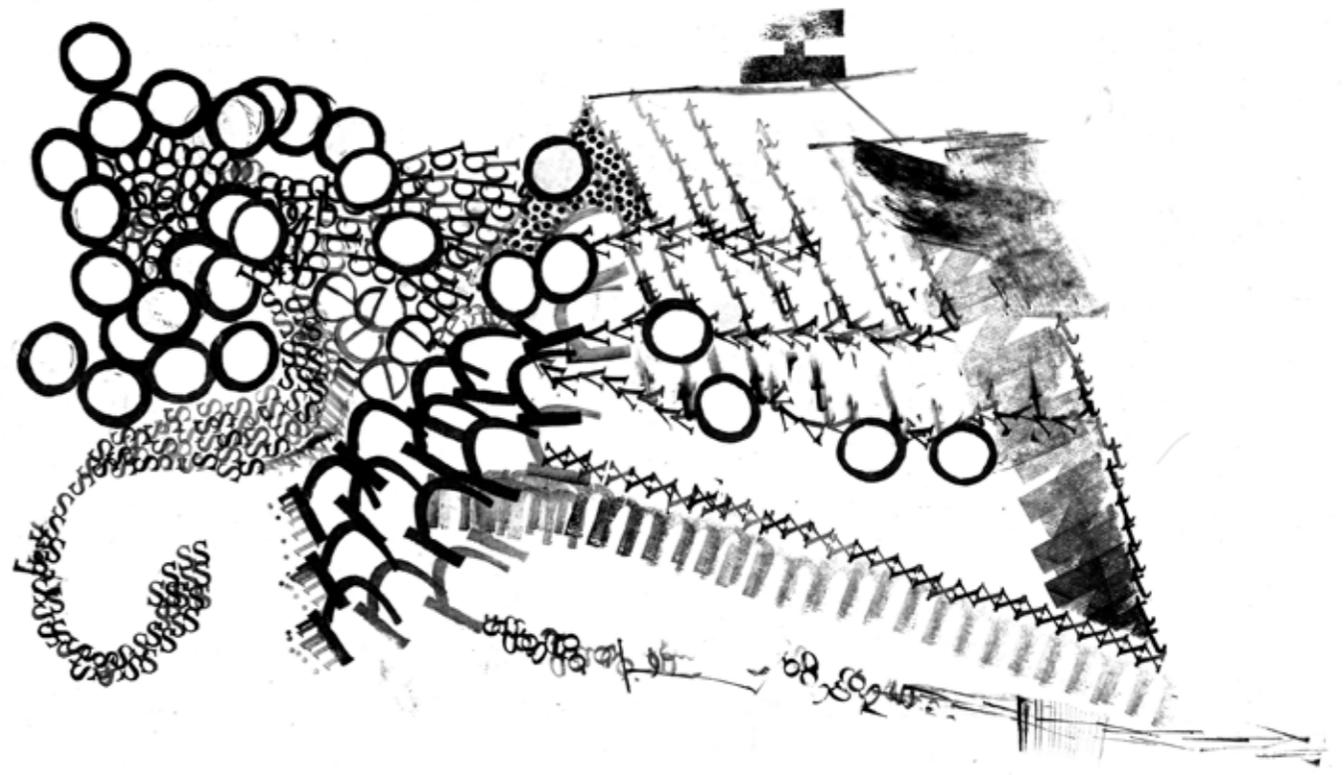
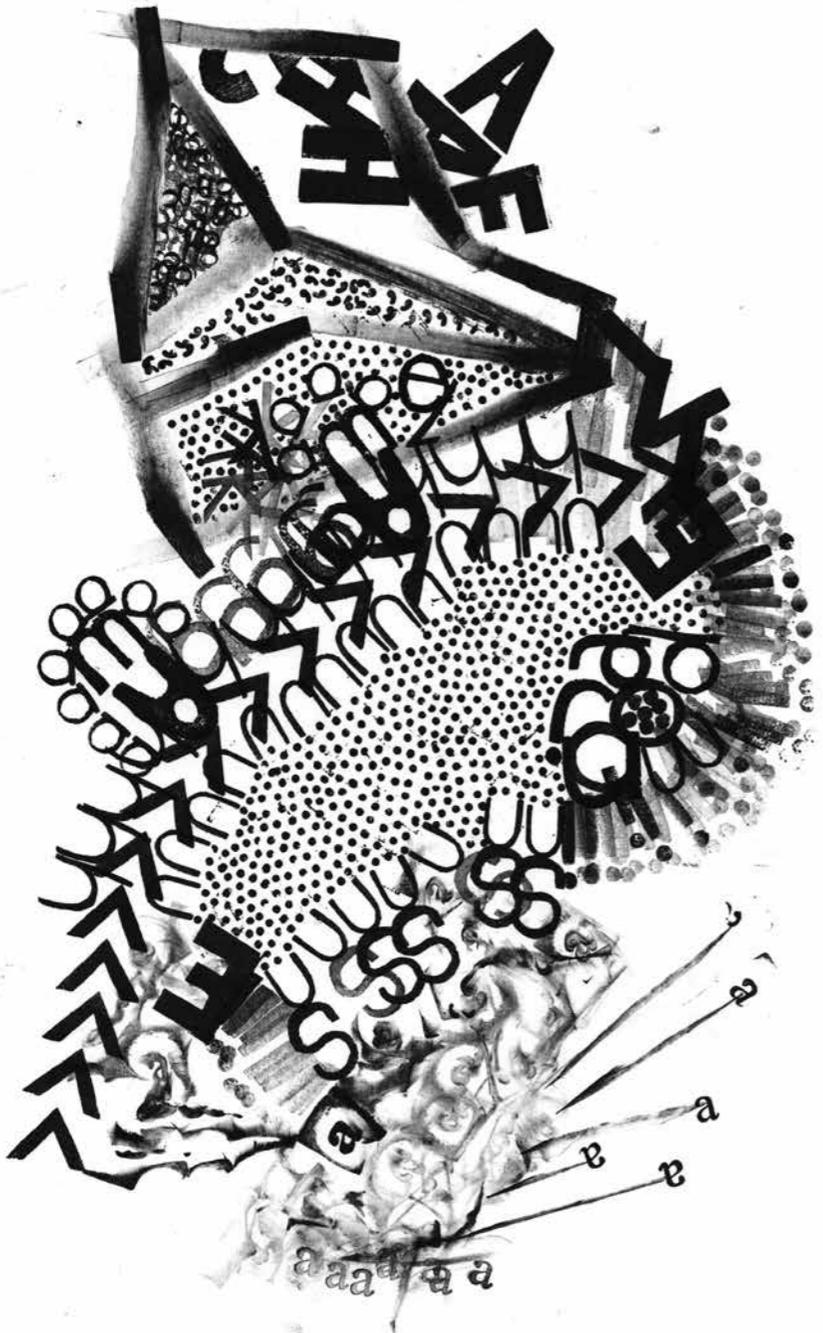


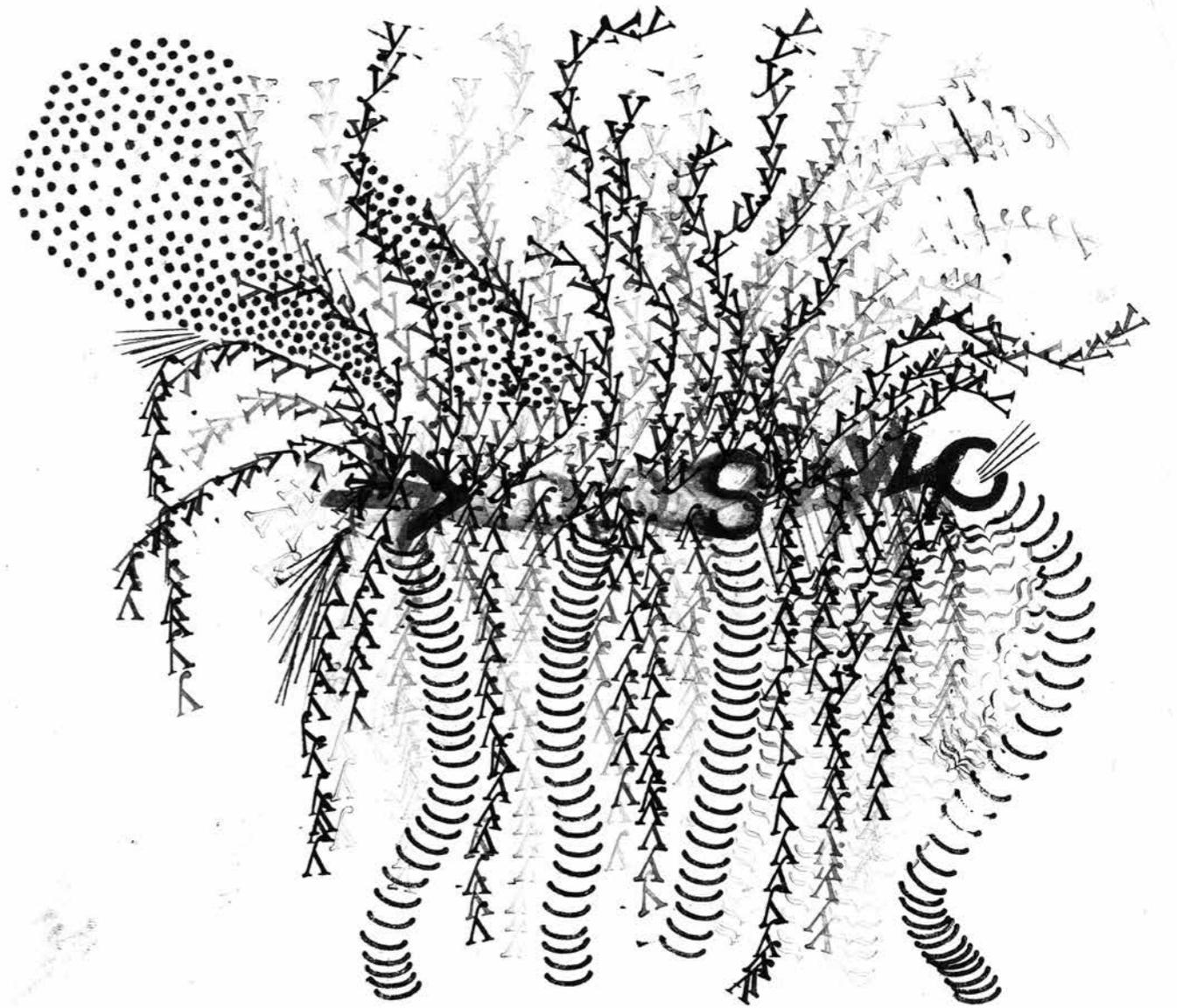
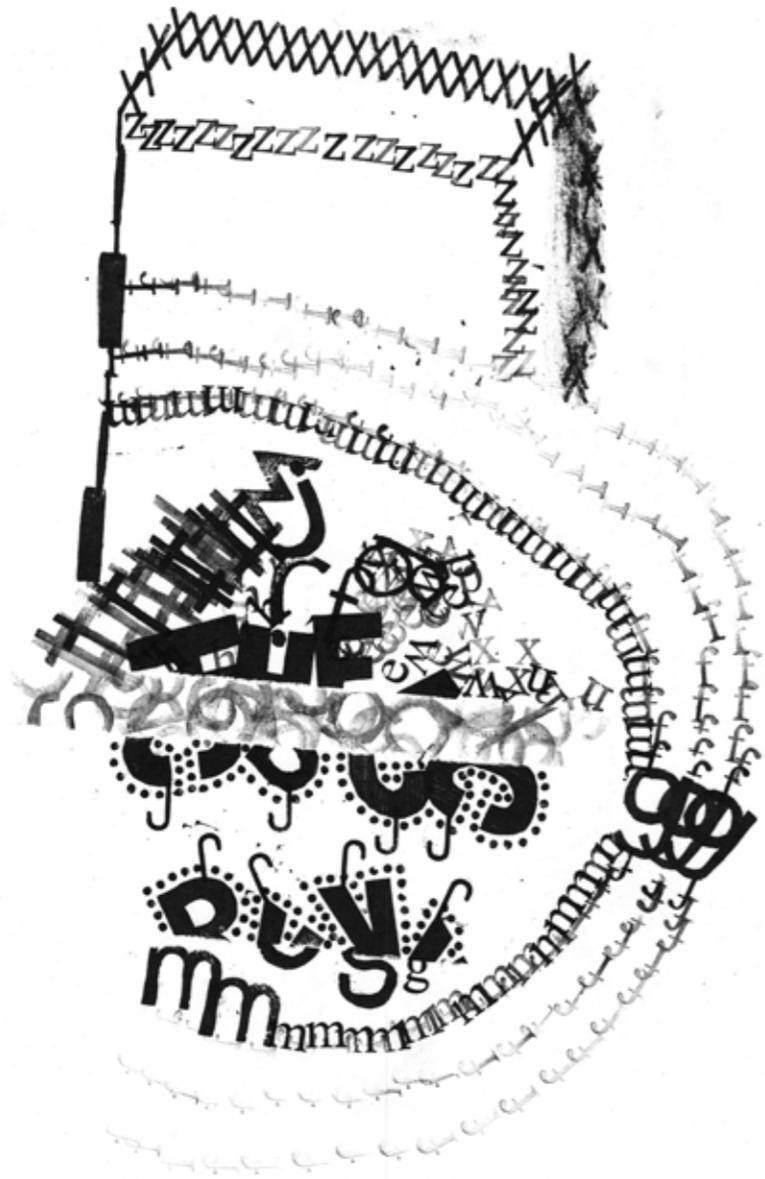


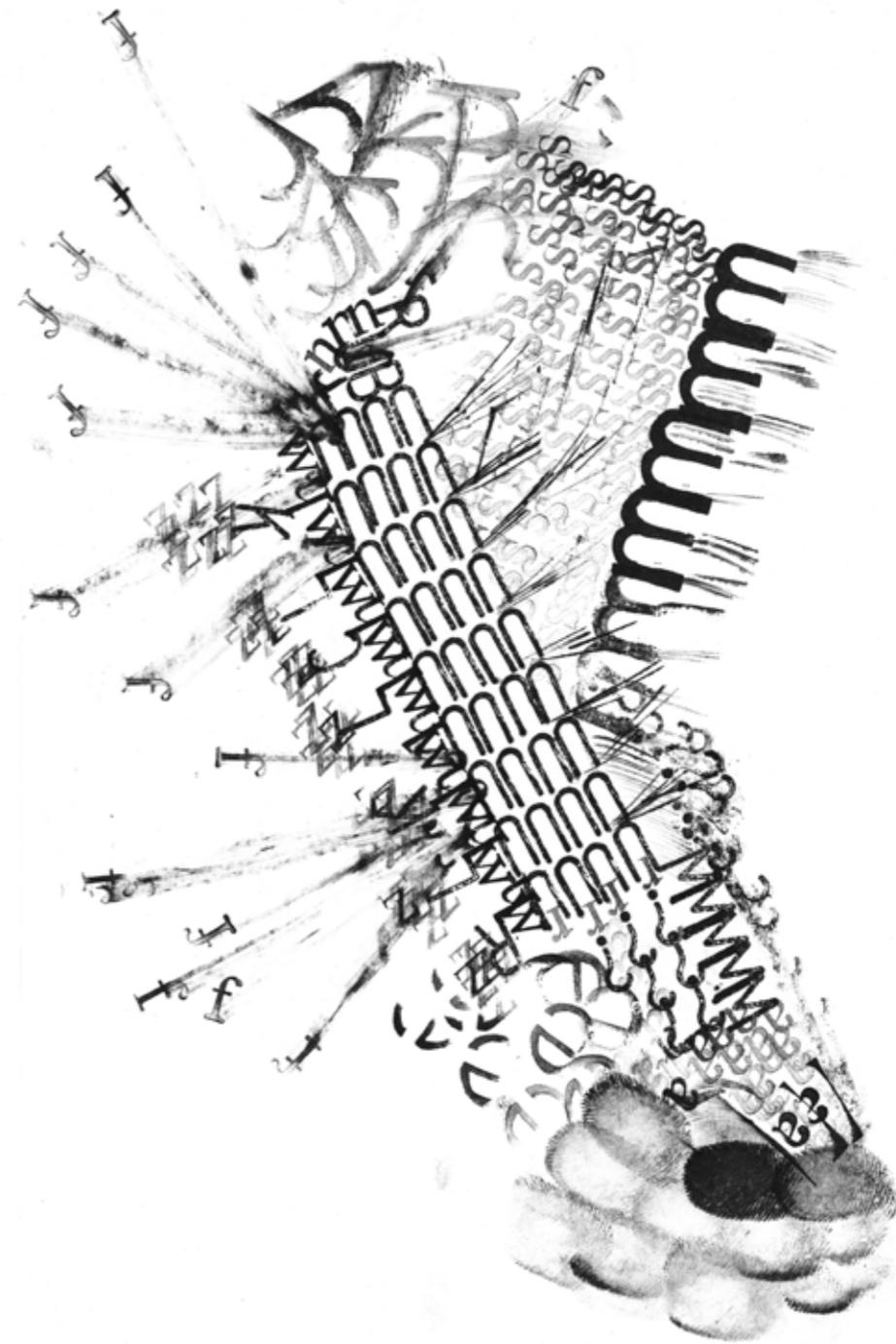


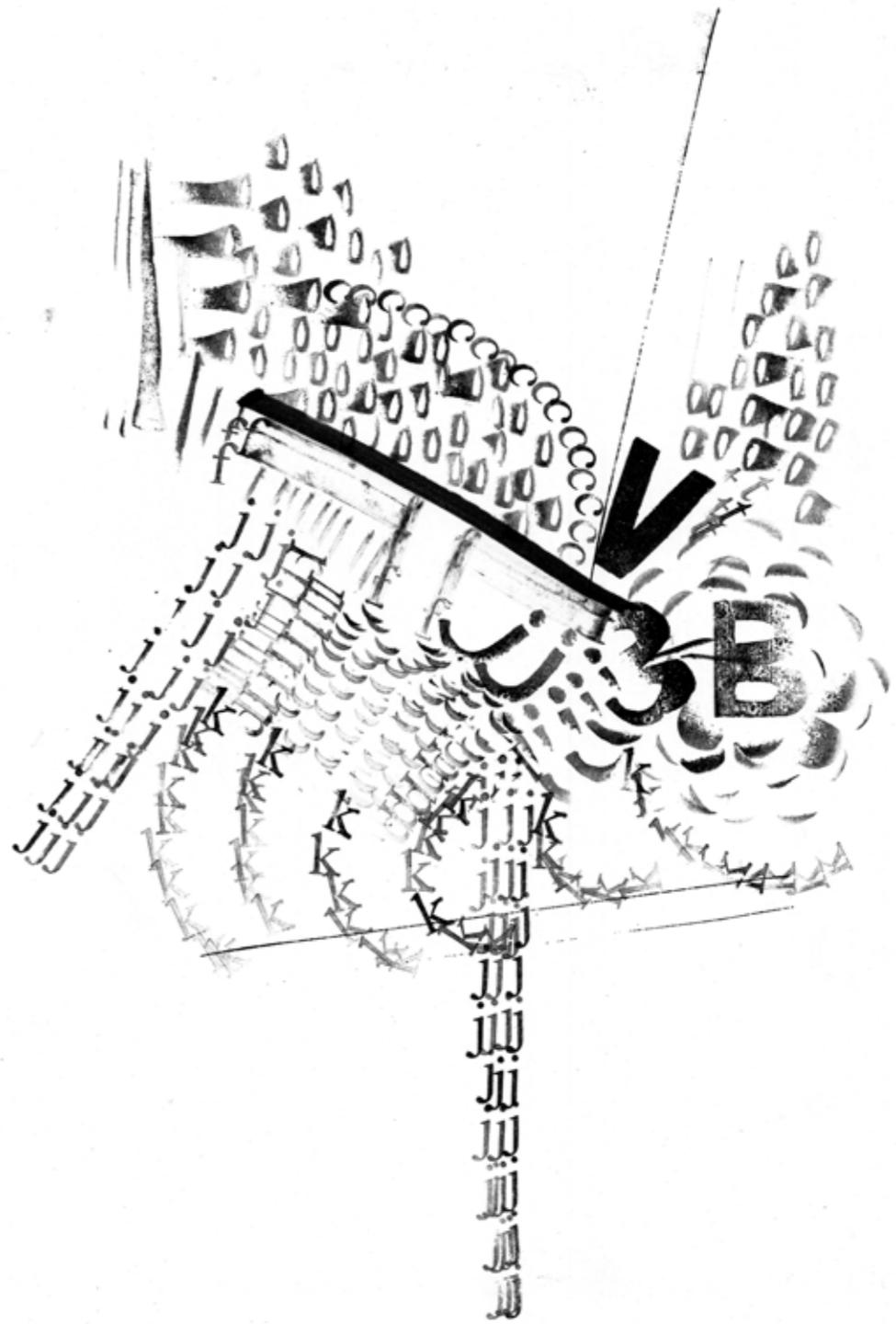
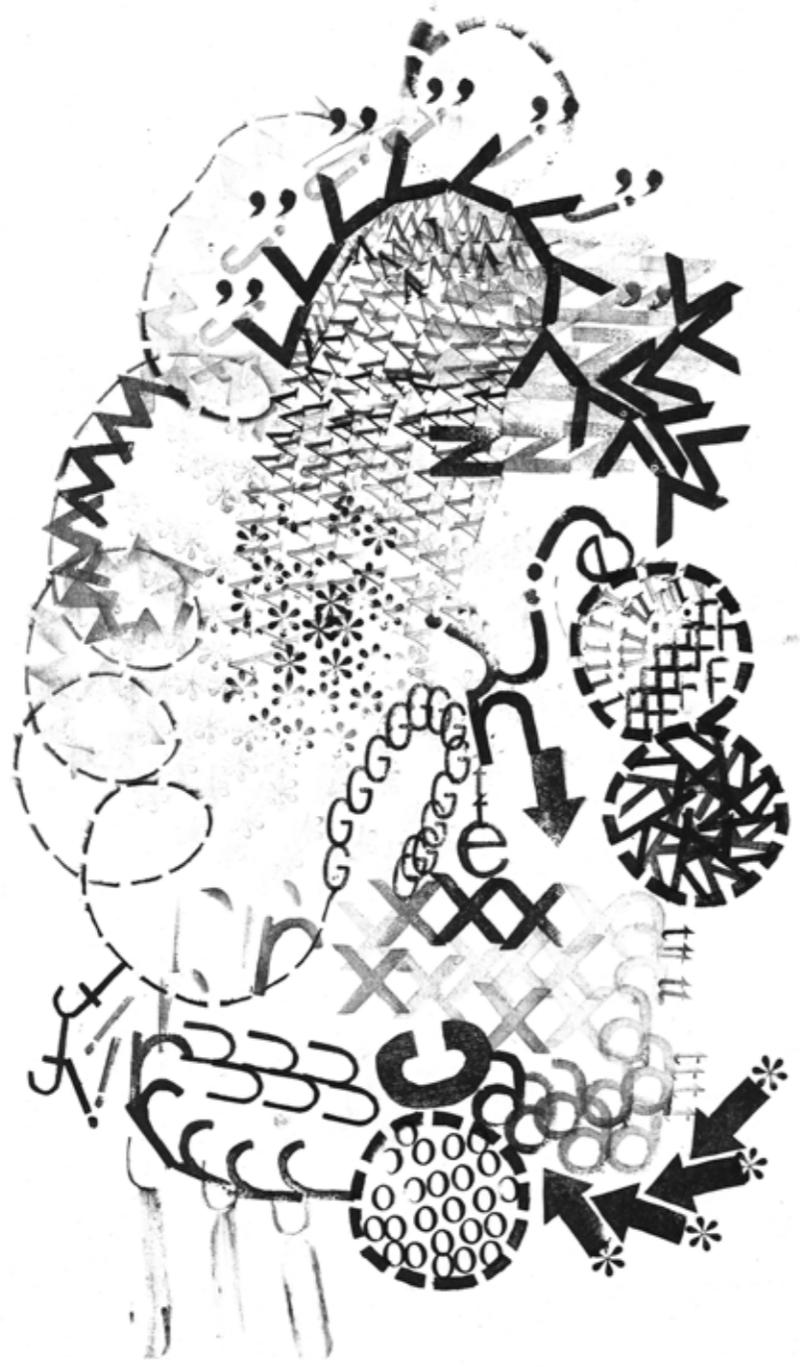


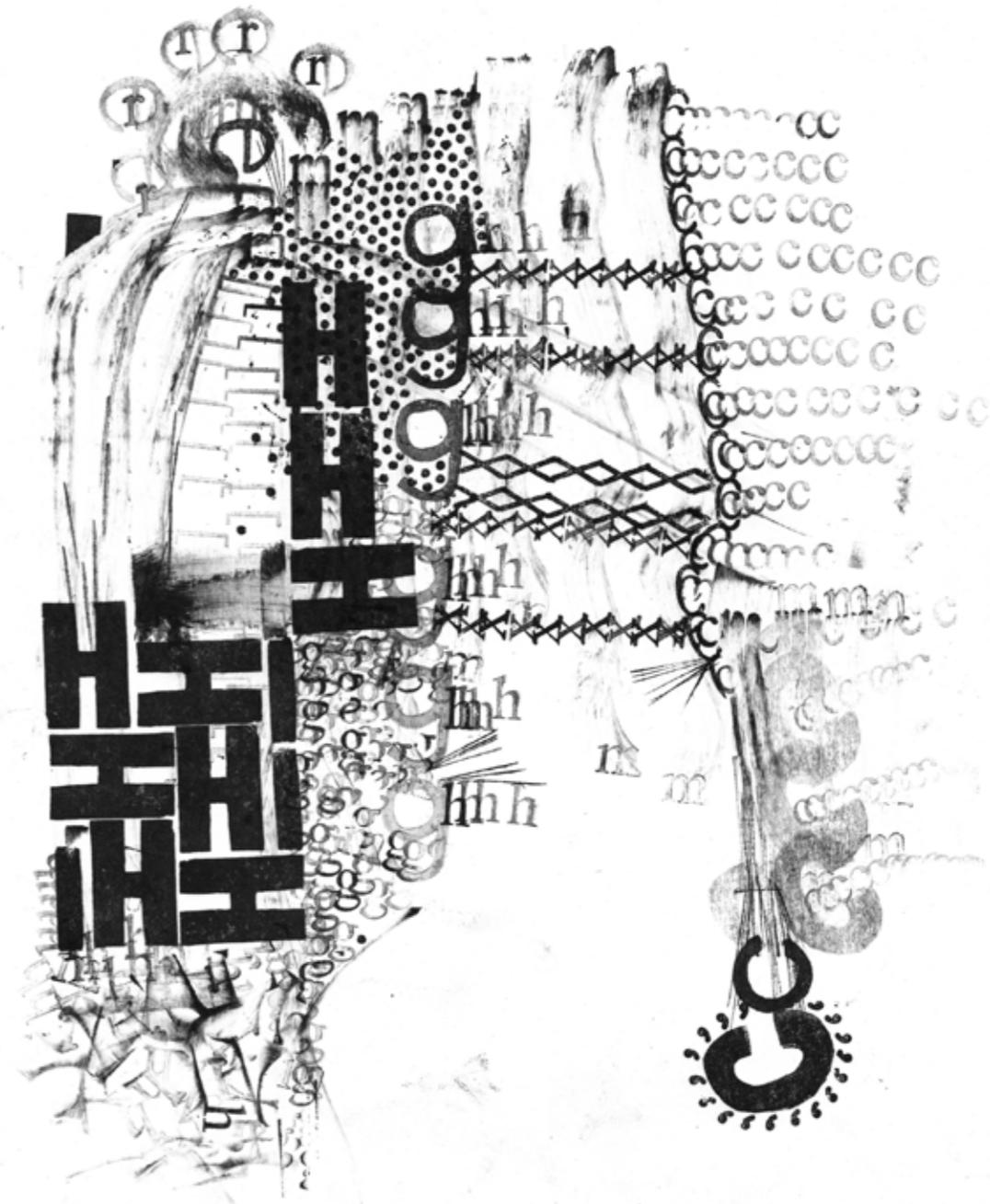
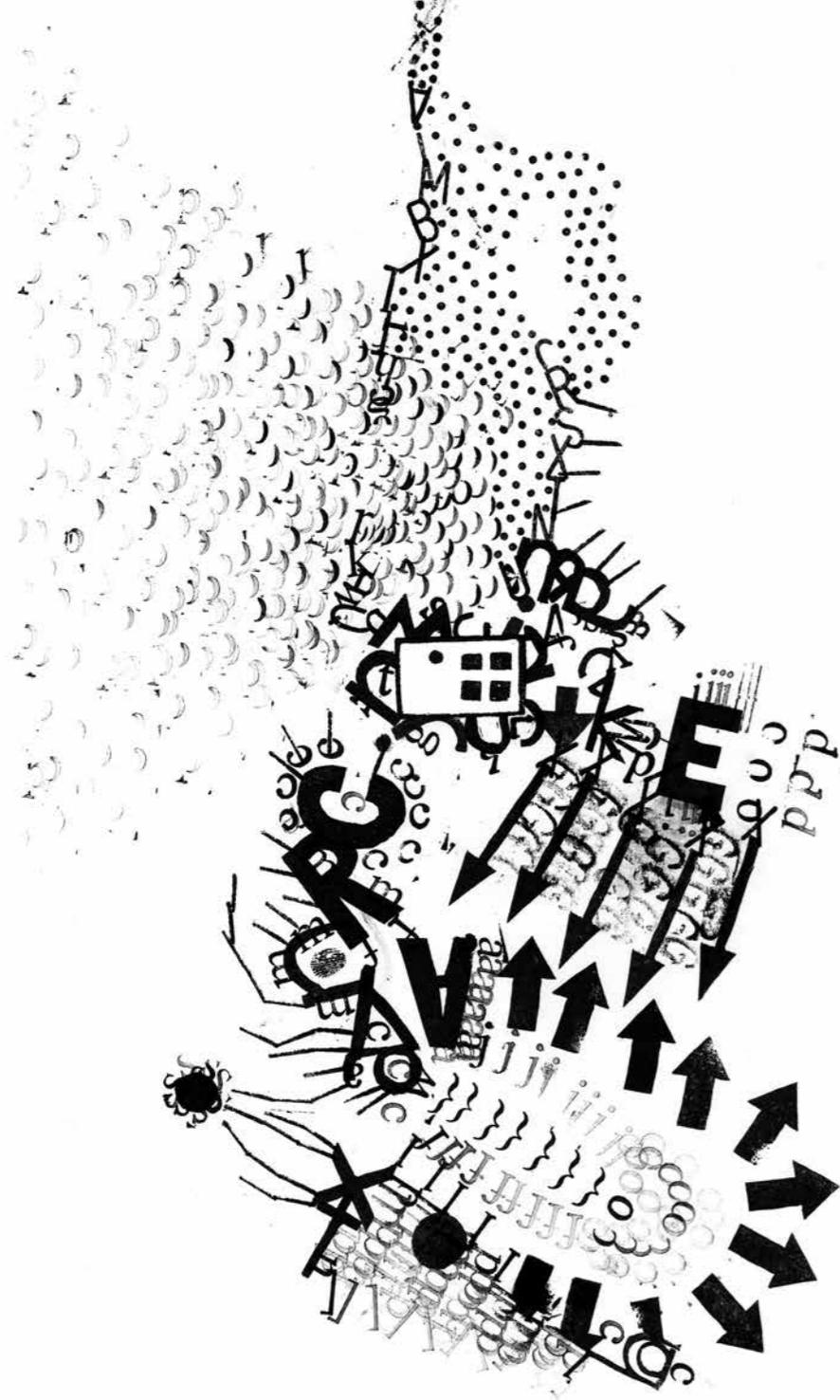




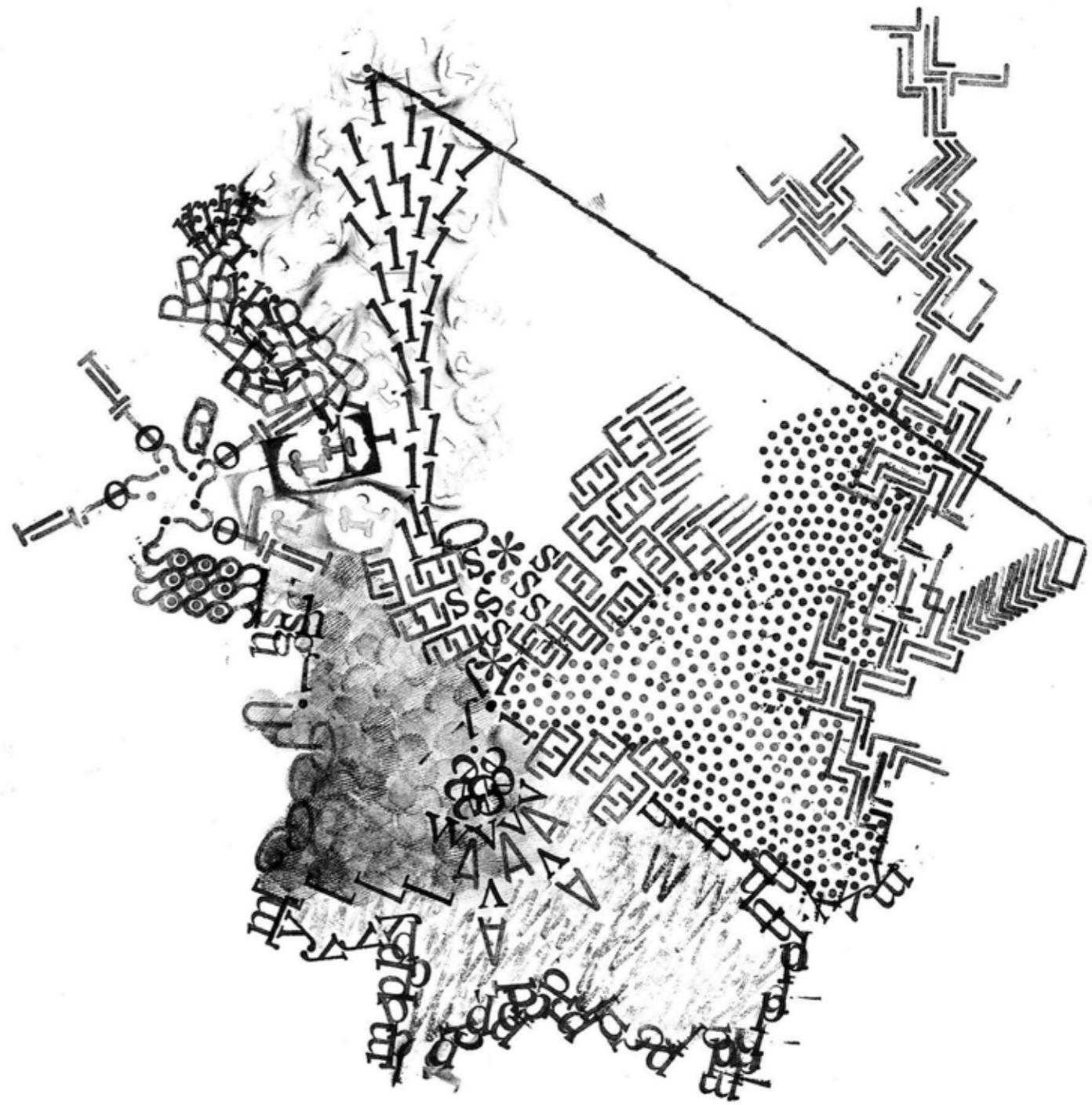


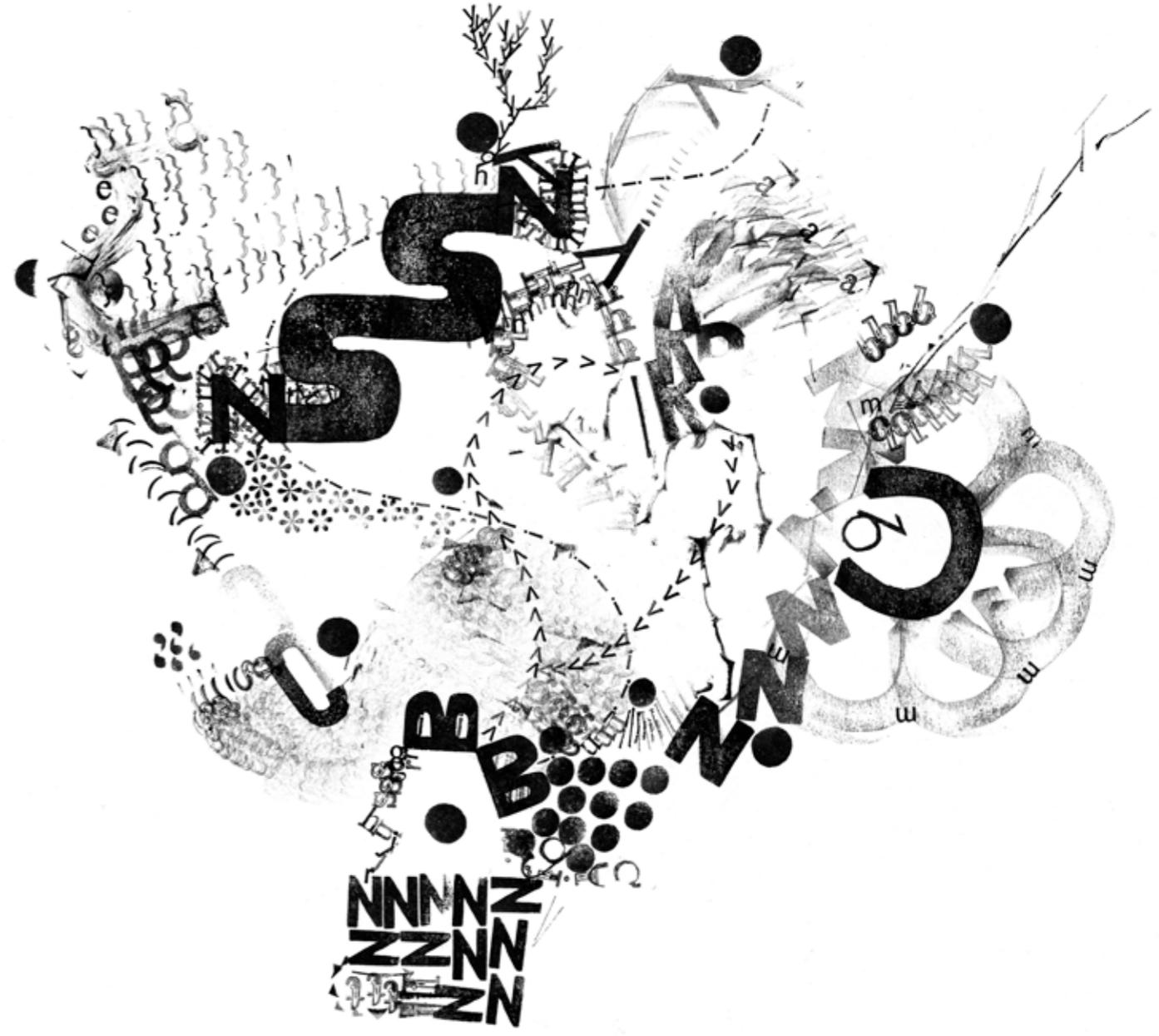


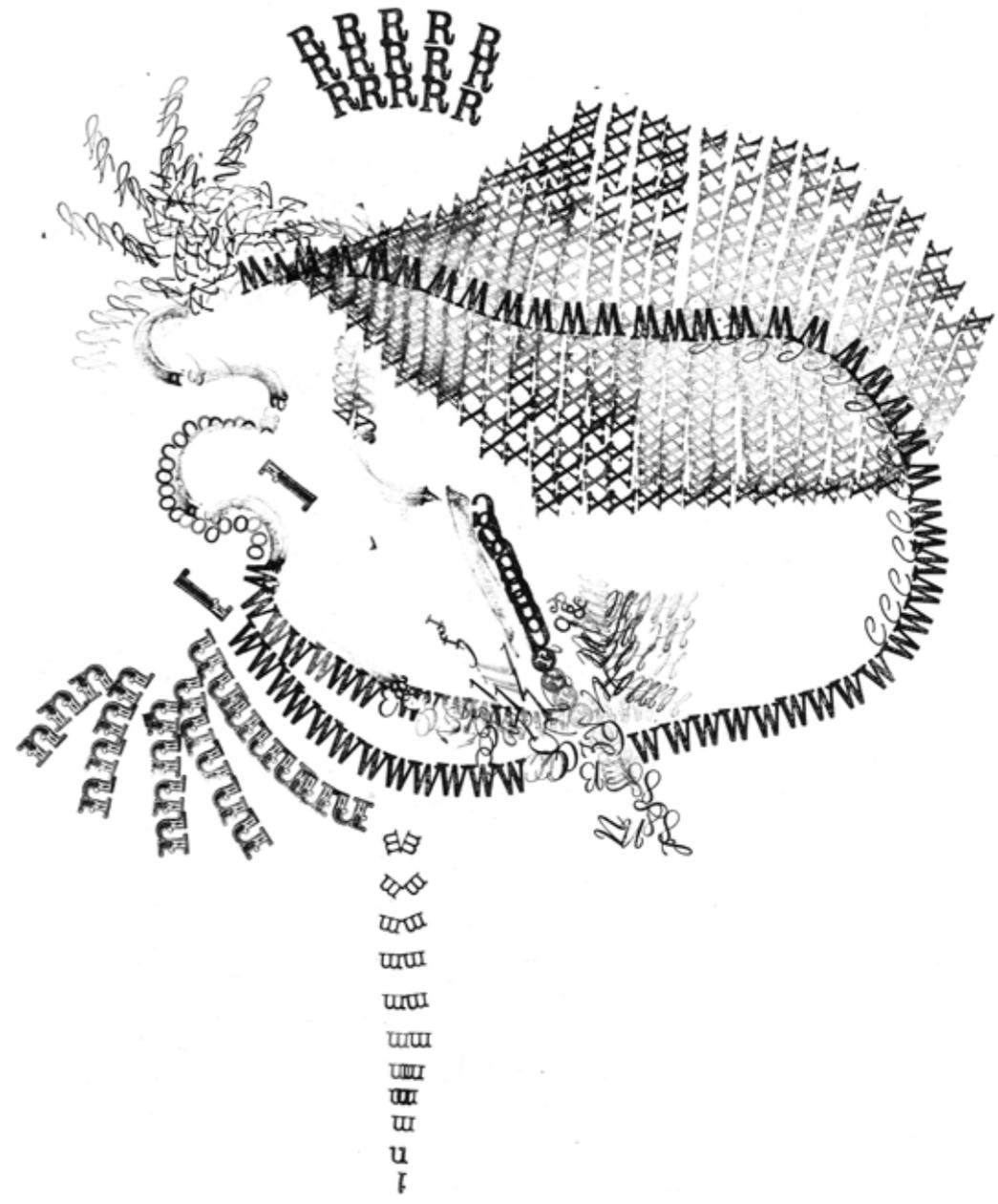
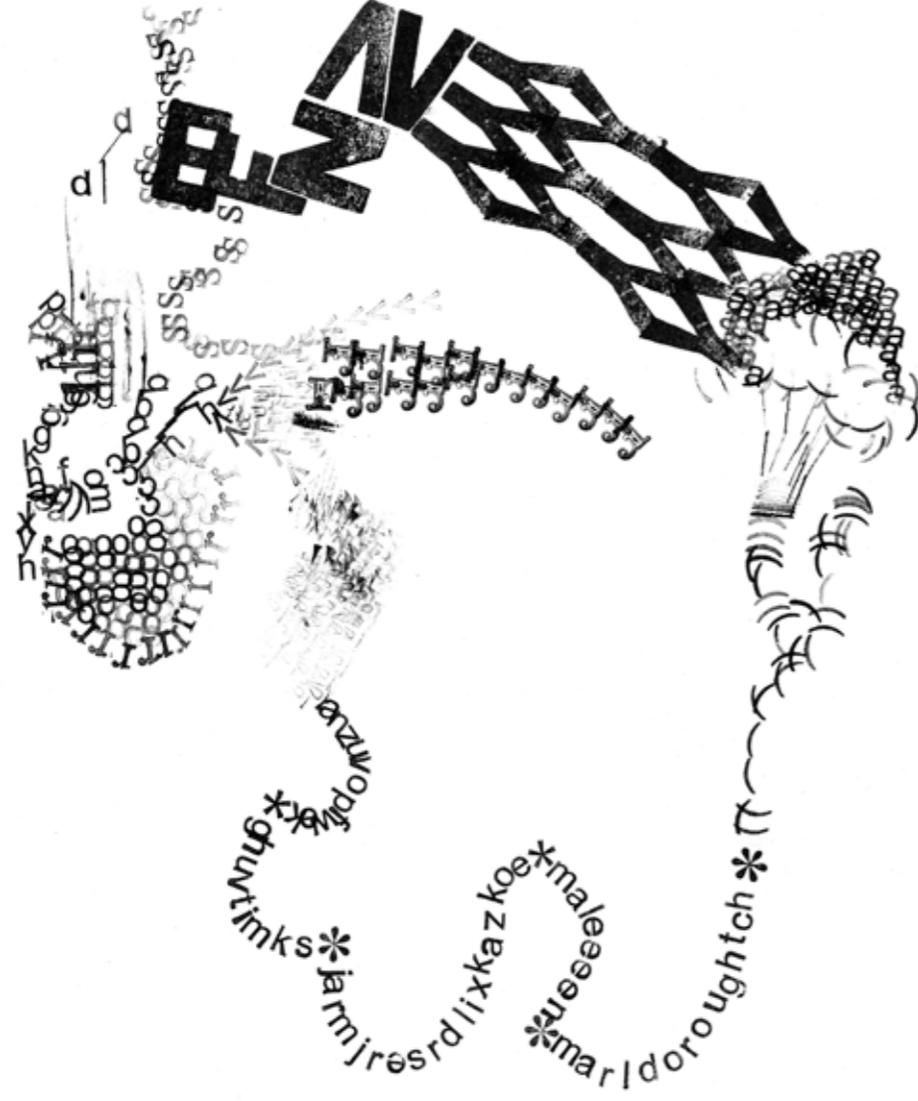


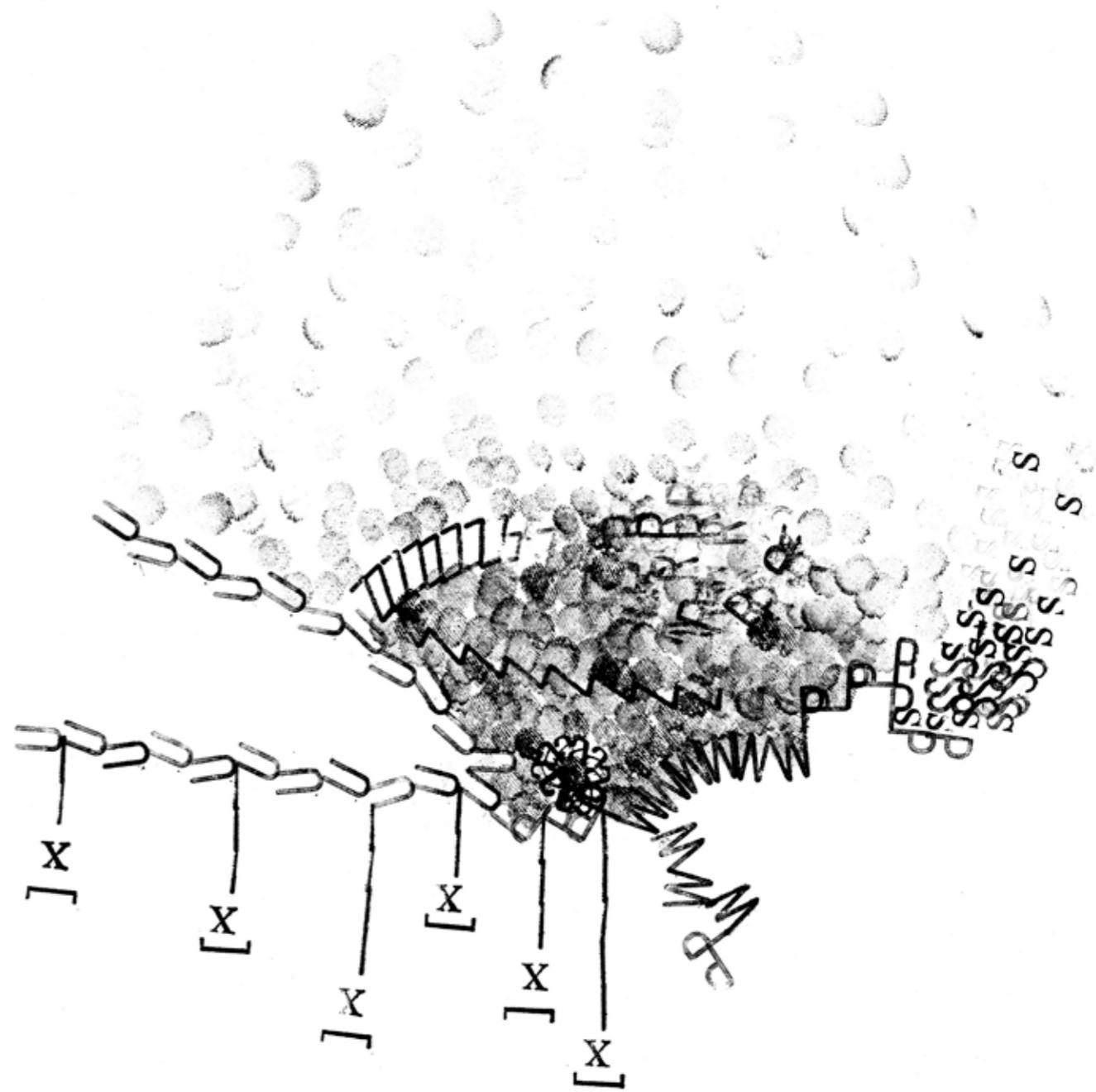
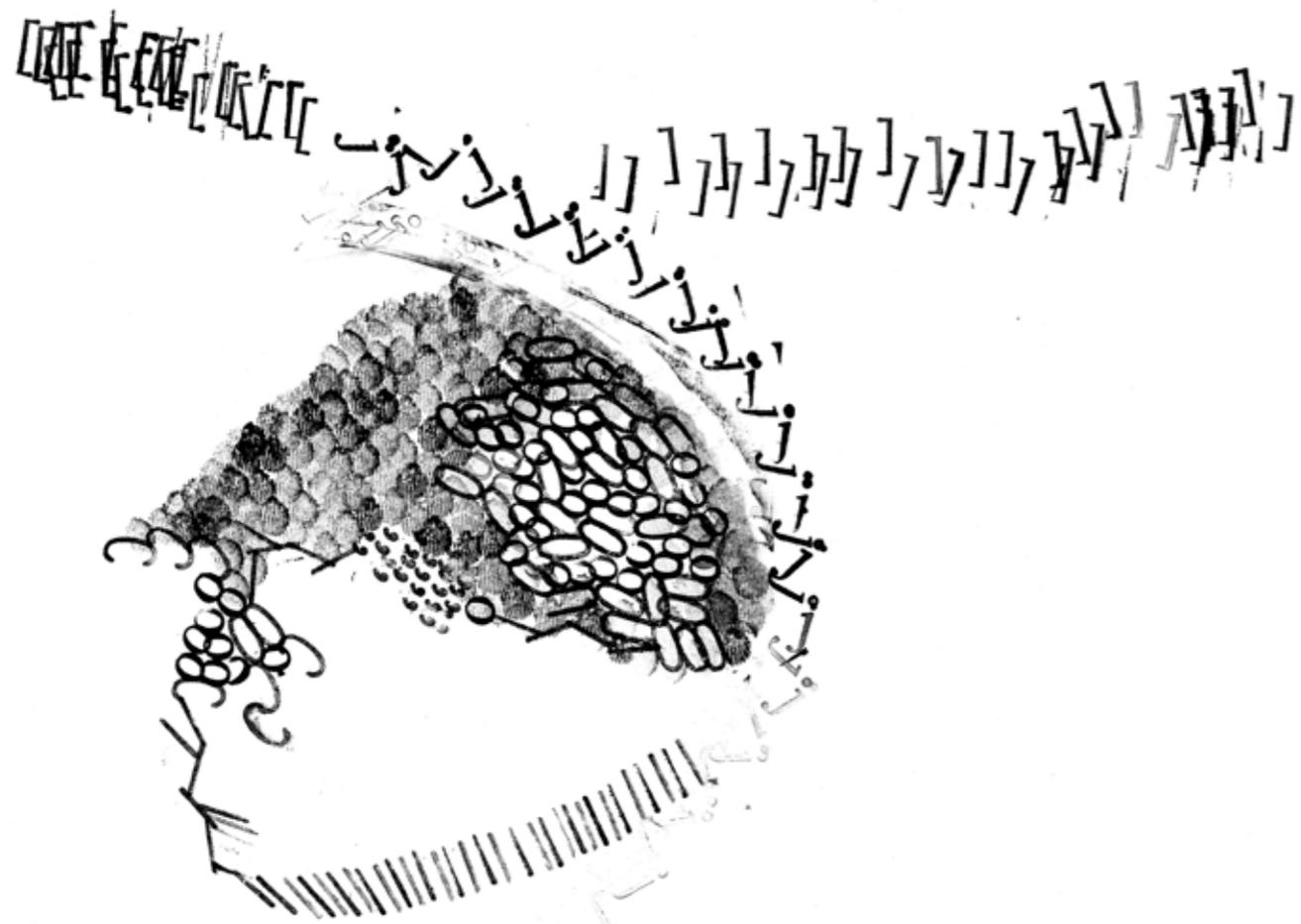






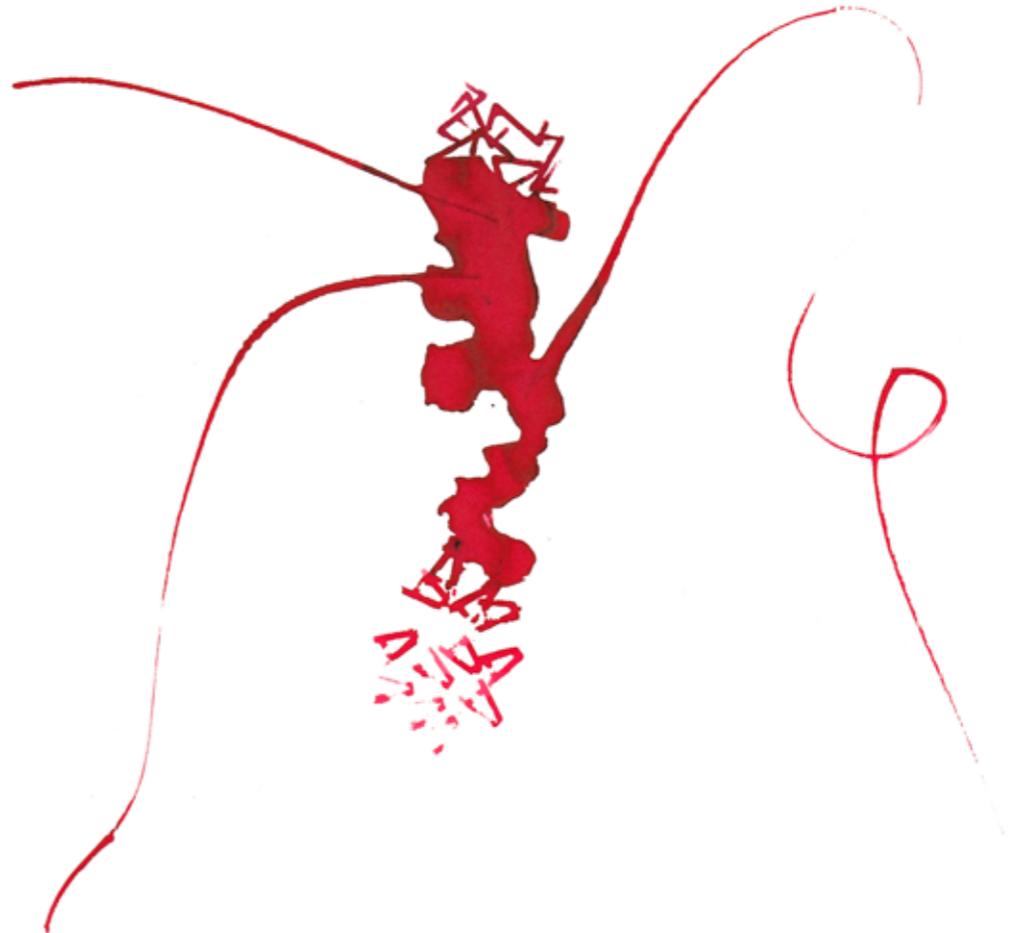




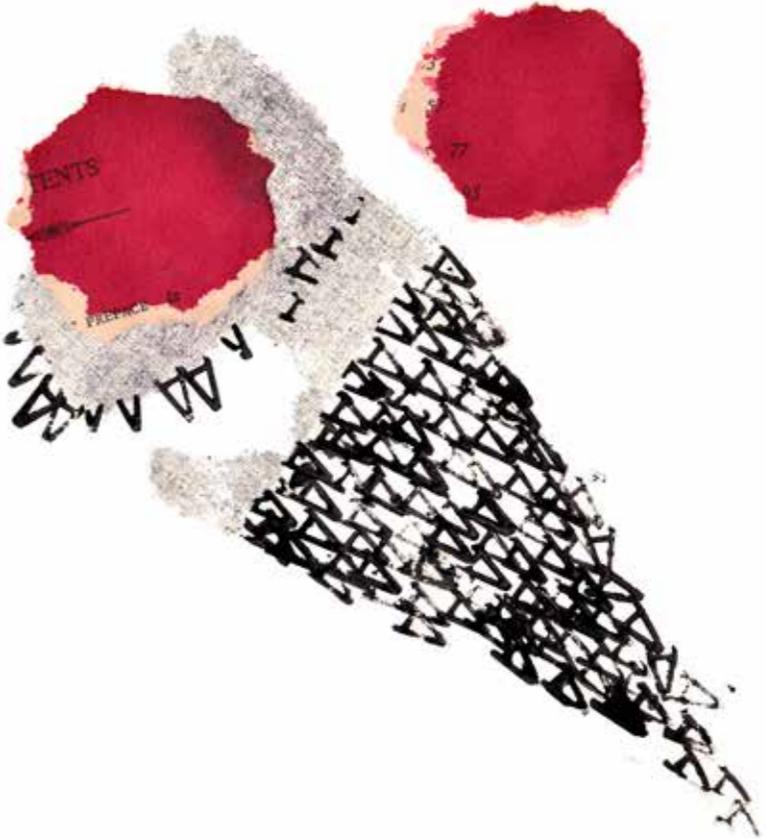


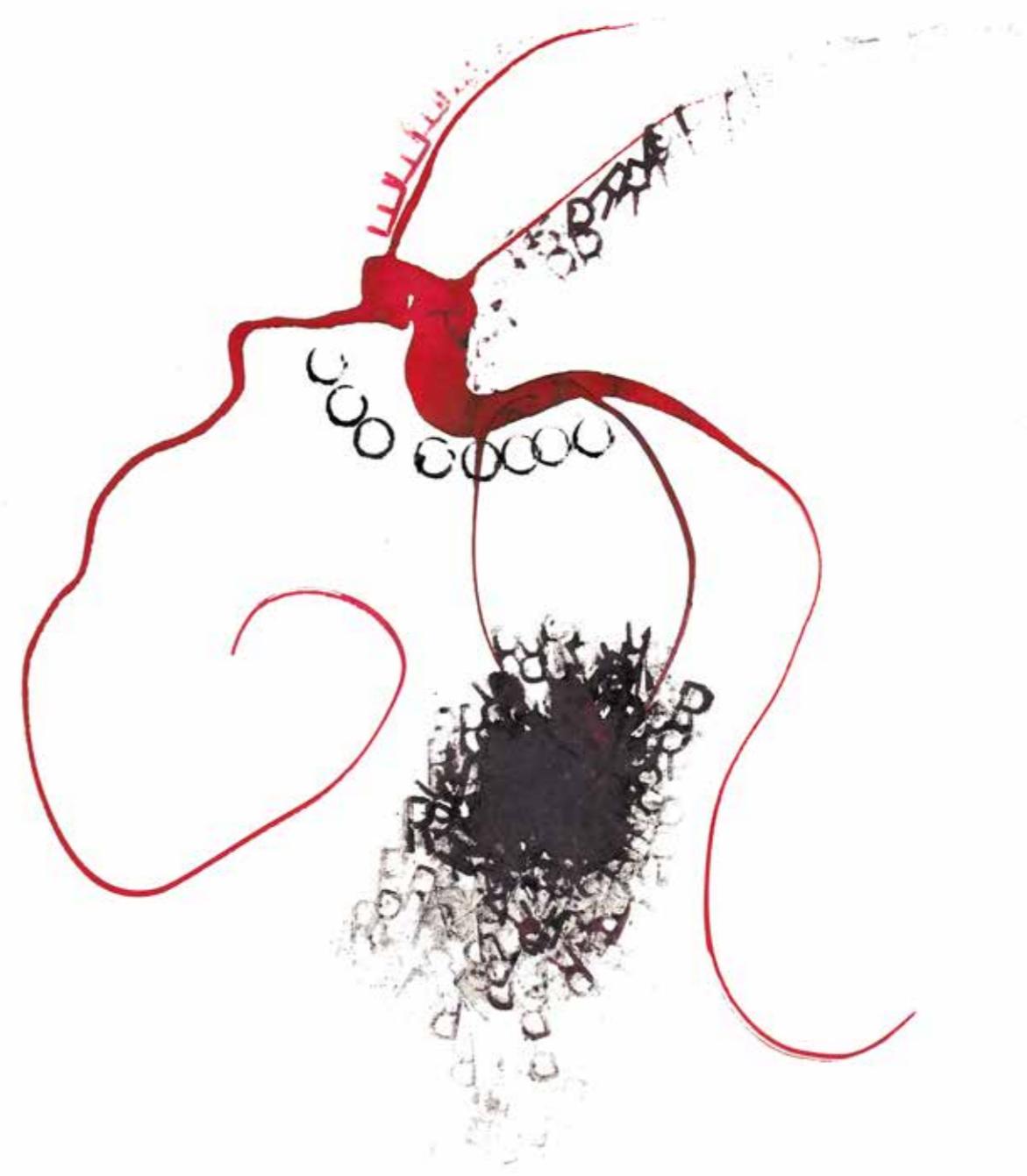
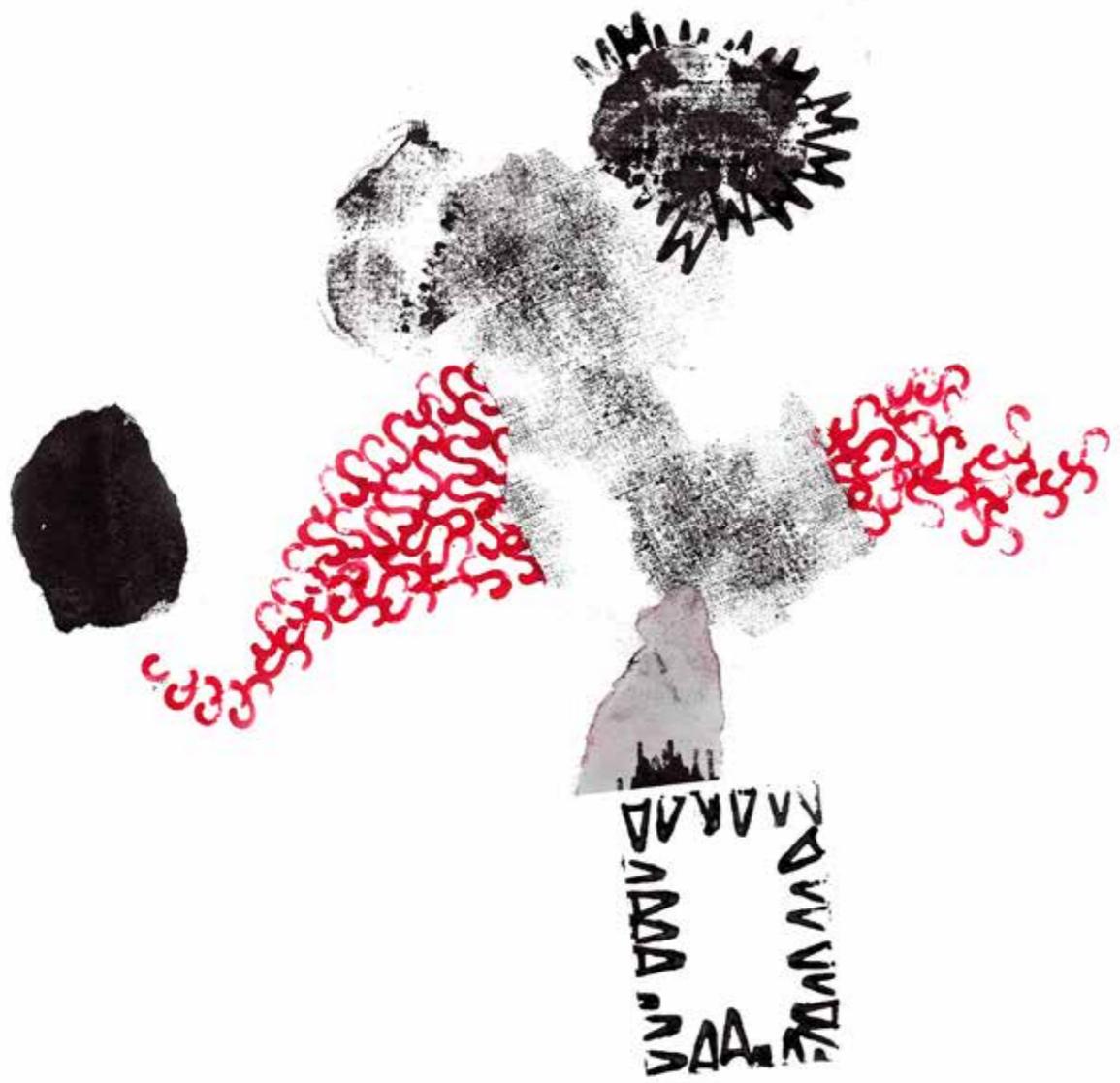


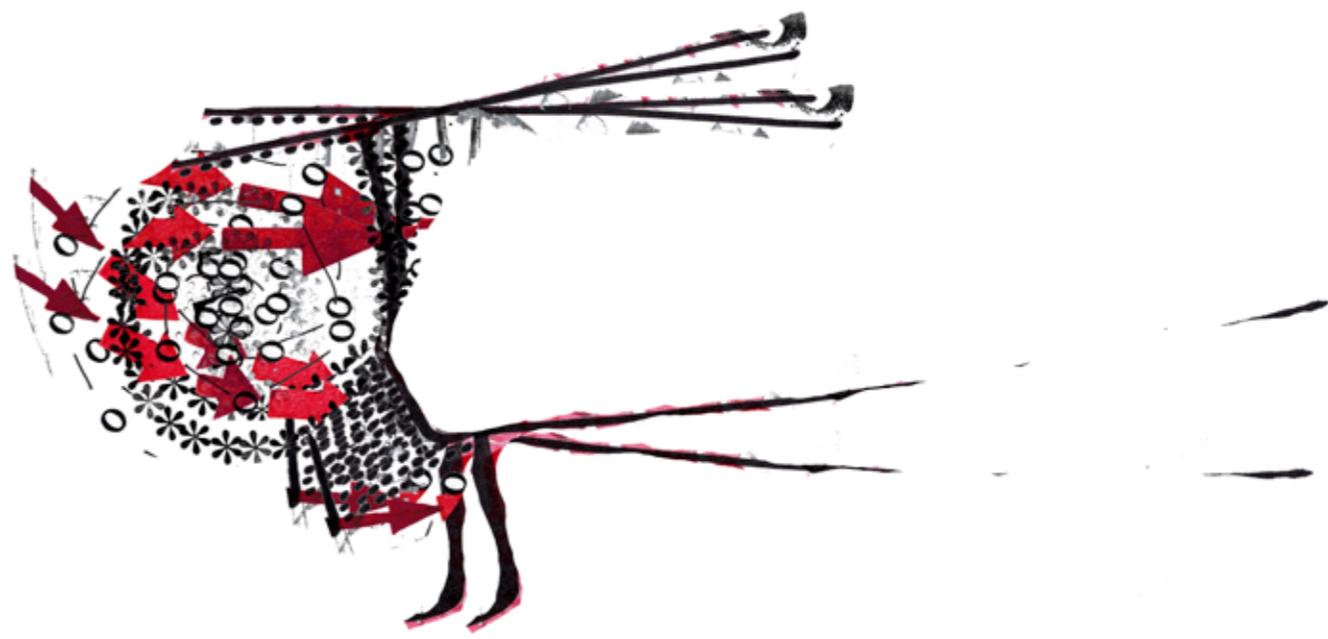


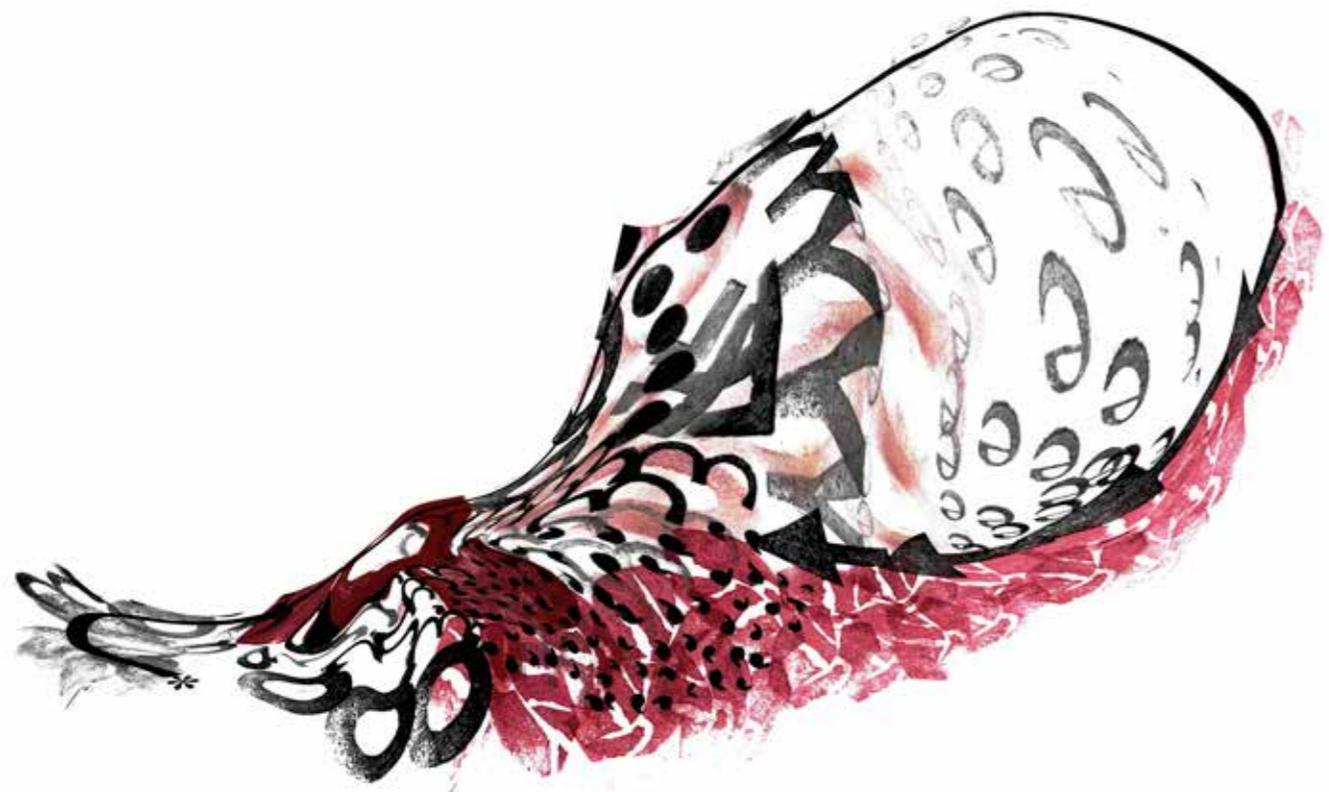


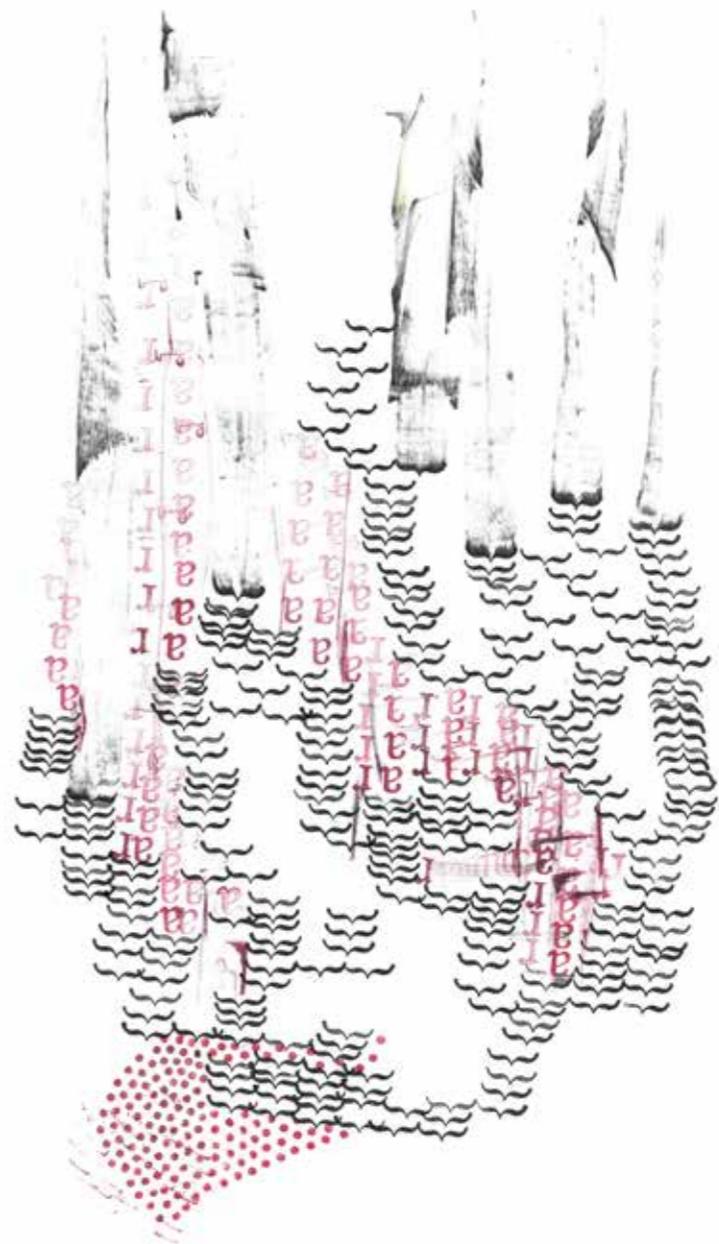
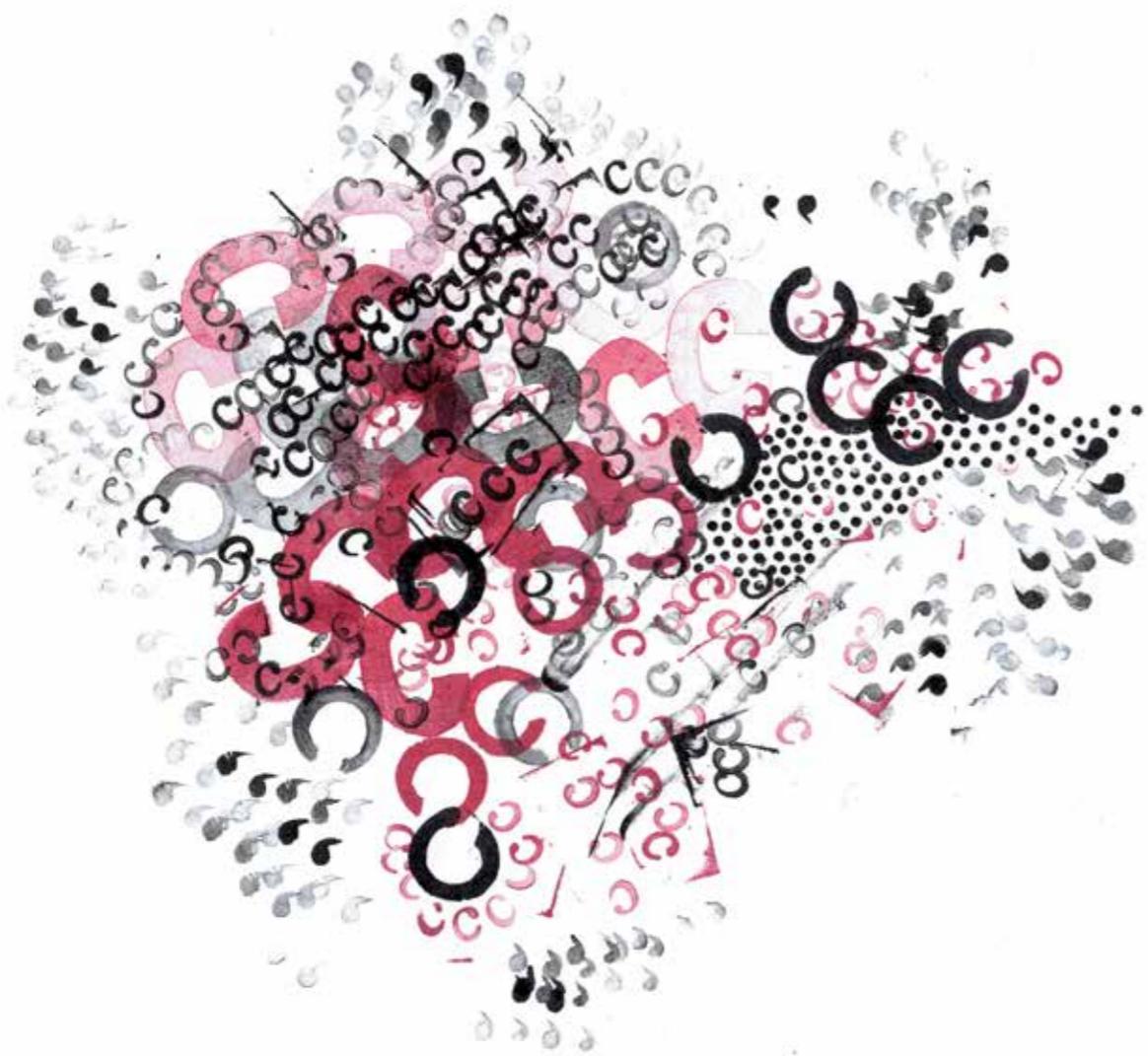
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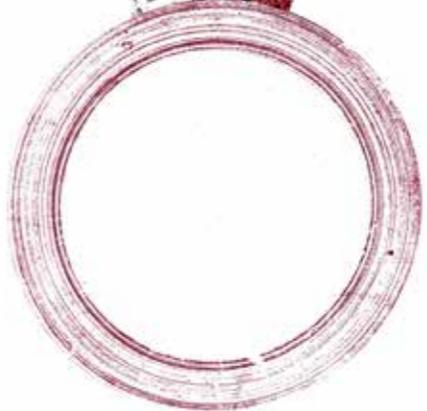
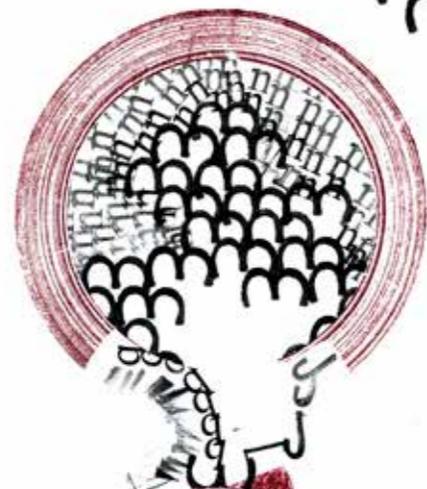
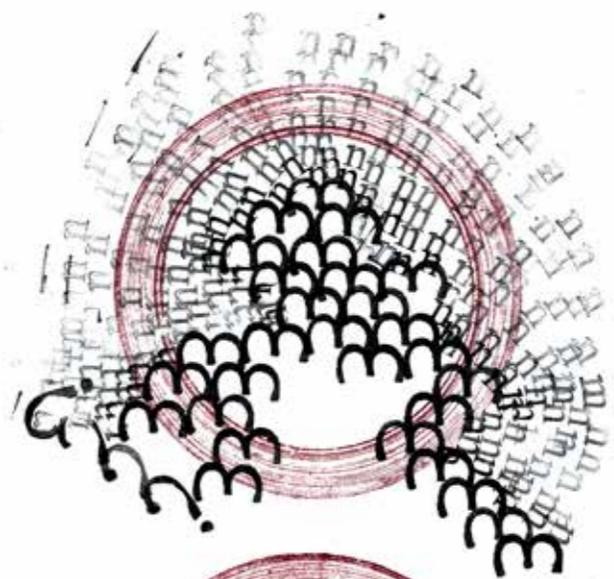
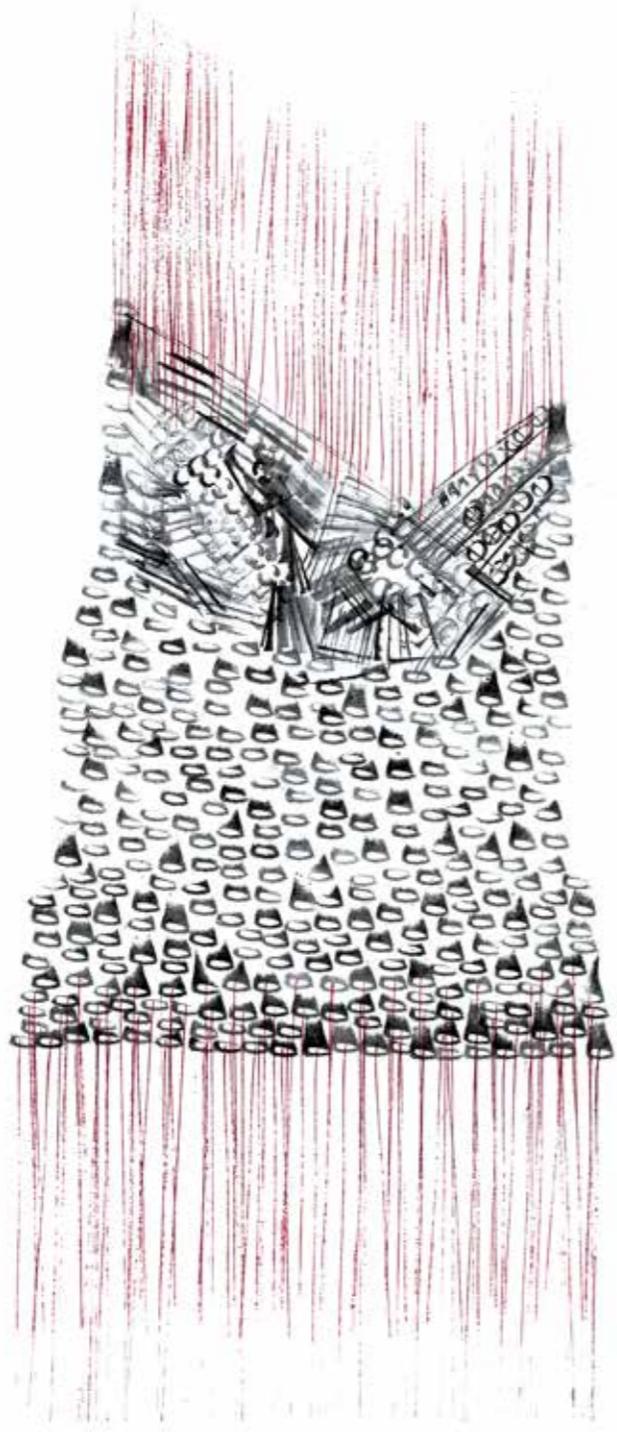






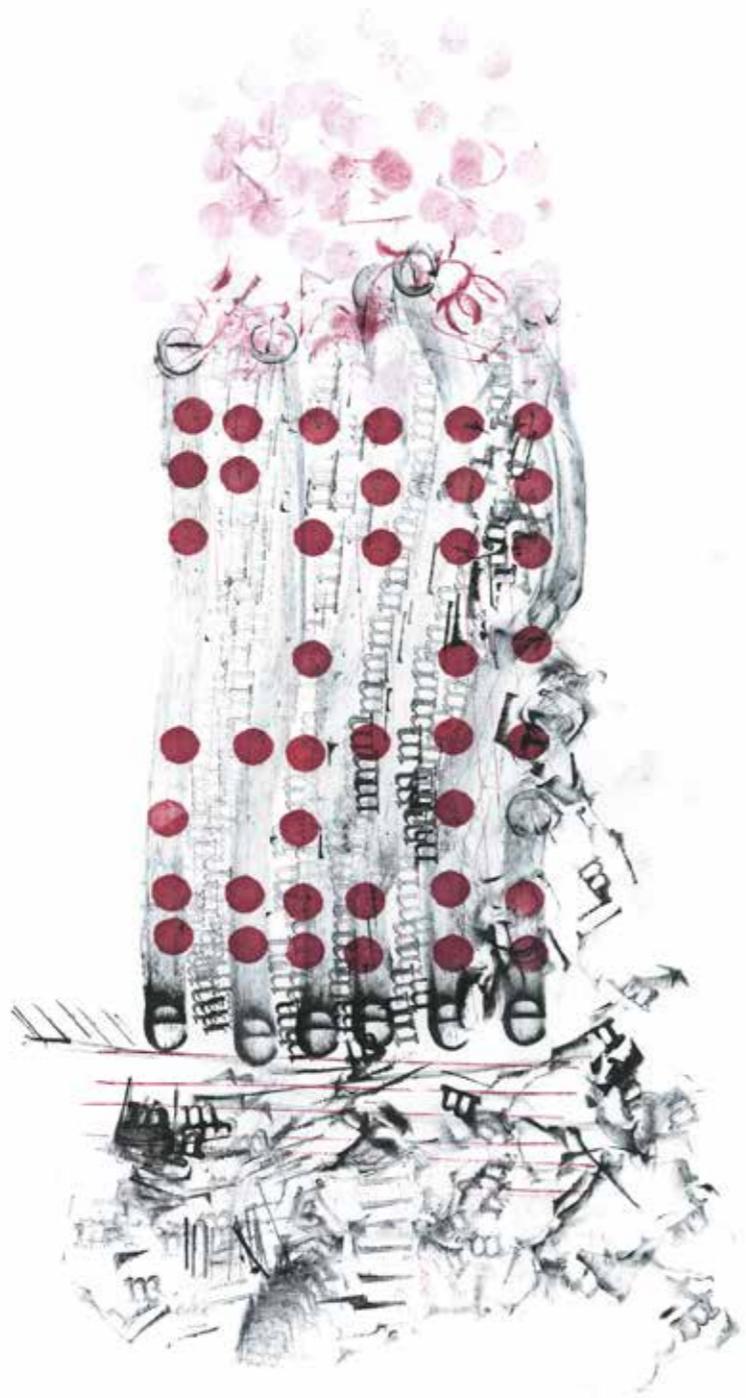


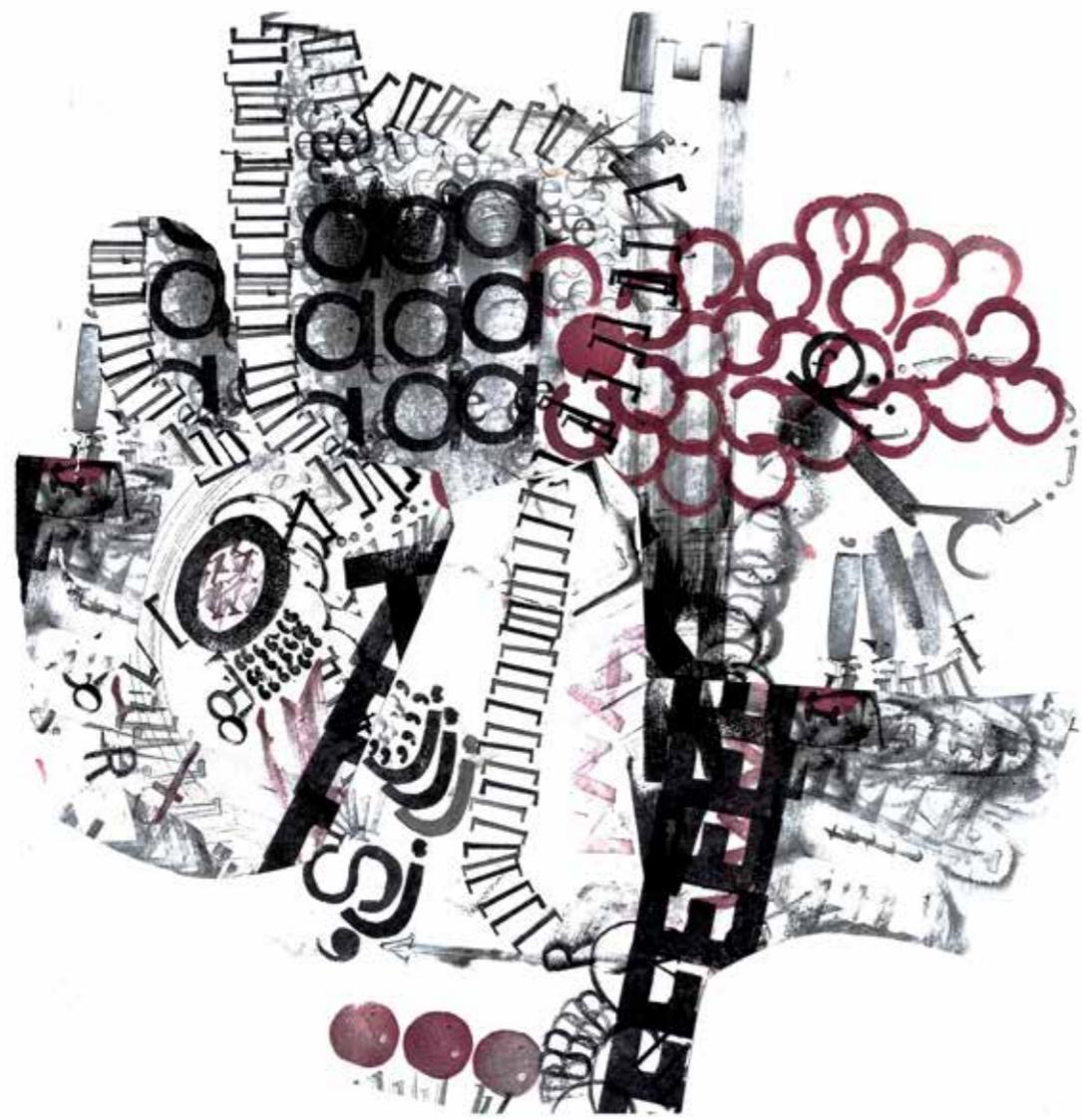


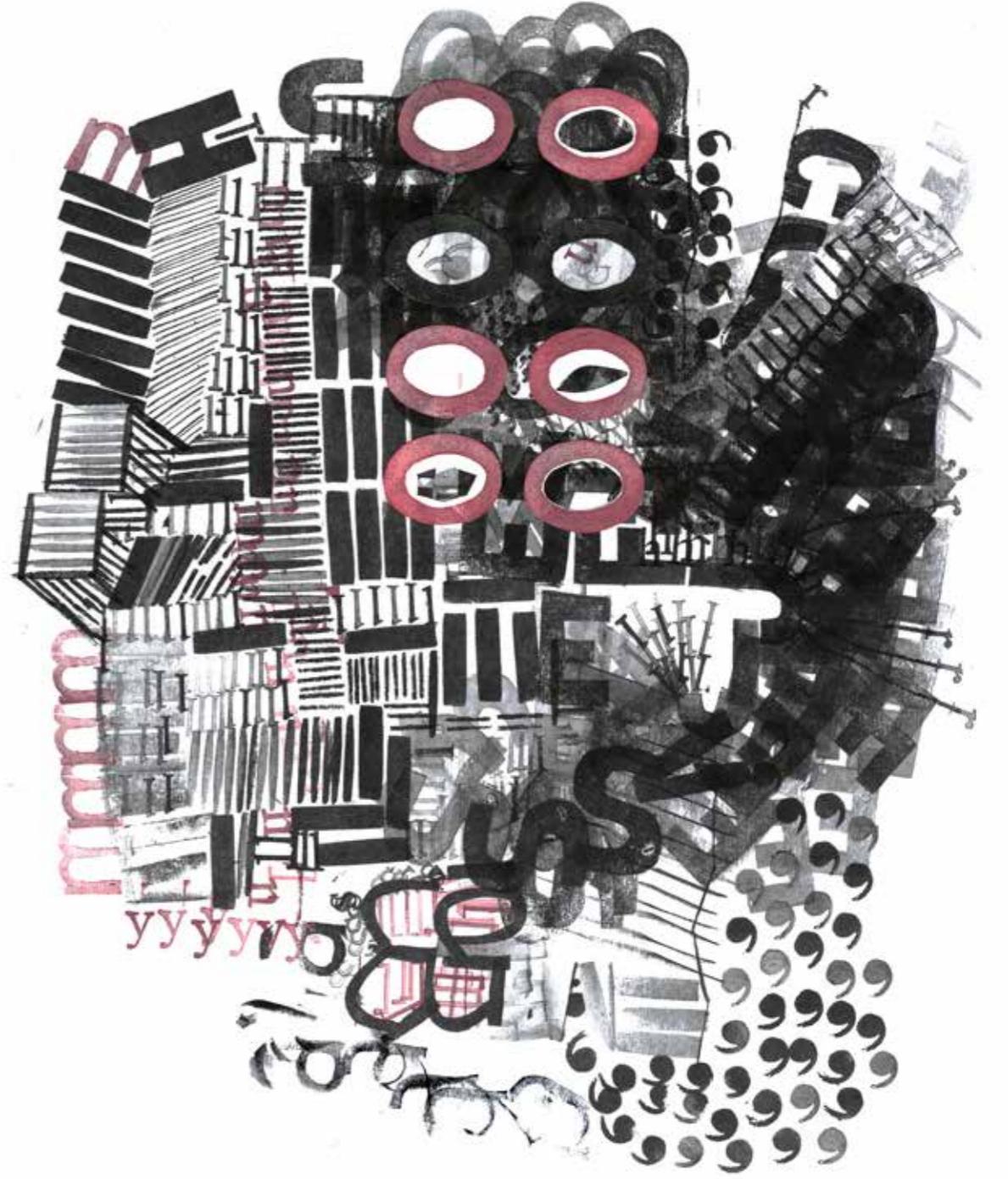


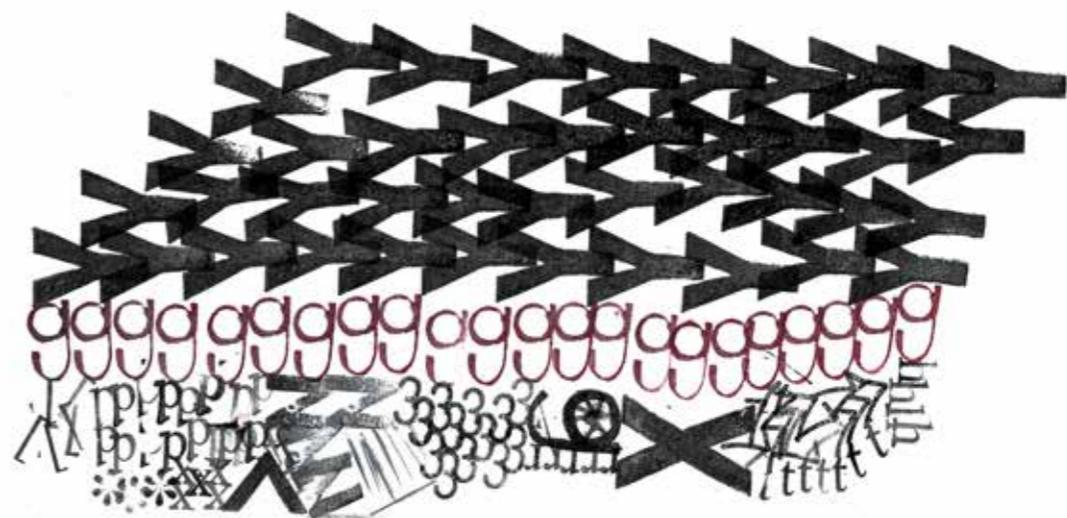
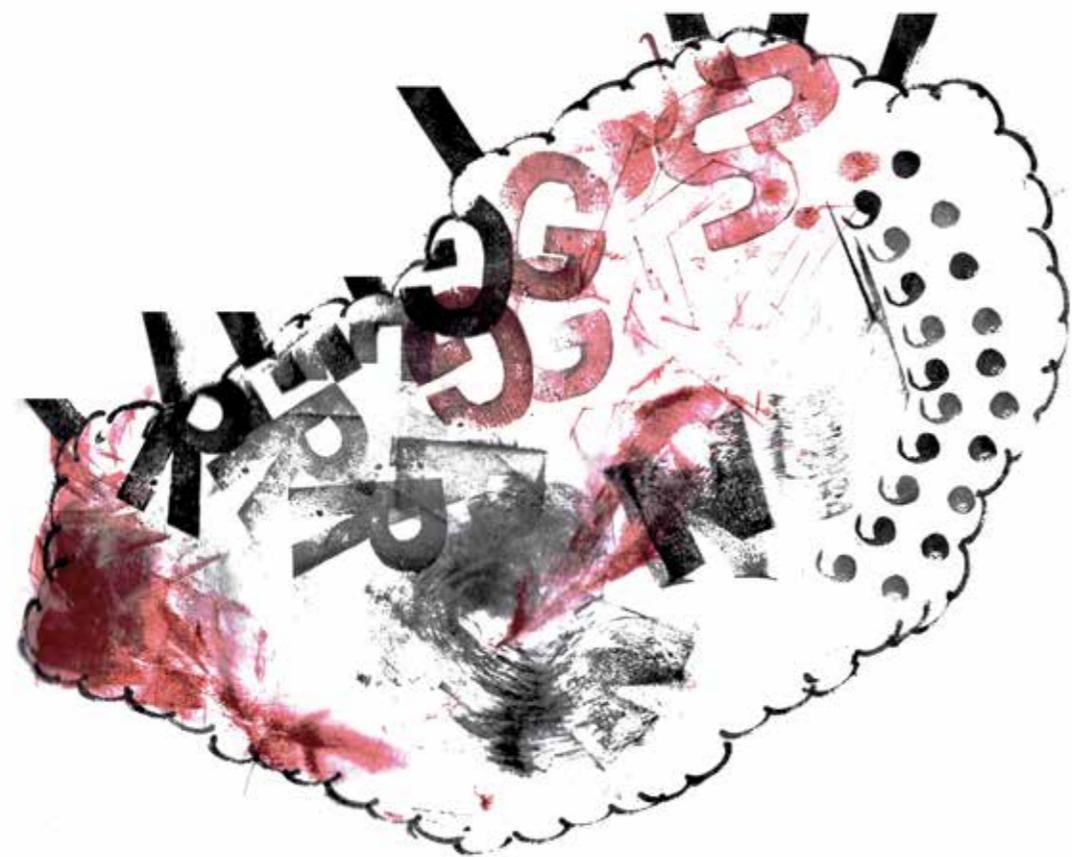
Handwritten text featuring the word "ANG" in large, bold, black letters. Above "ANG" is a red stamp with the word "ANG" repeated in a grid pattern. Below "ANG" are various decorative elements including a red diagonal line, a series of black curved lines, and a series of black vertical lines. At the bottom, there is a series of black vertical lines and a red stamp with the word "ANG" repeated in a grid pattern.

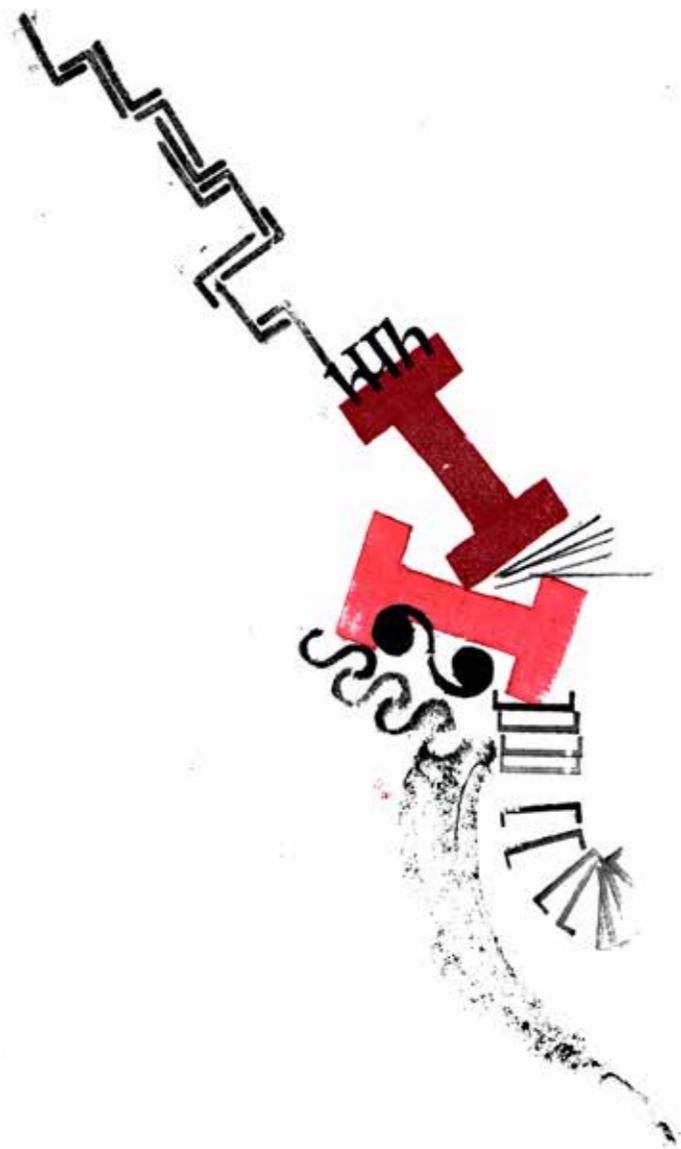
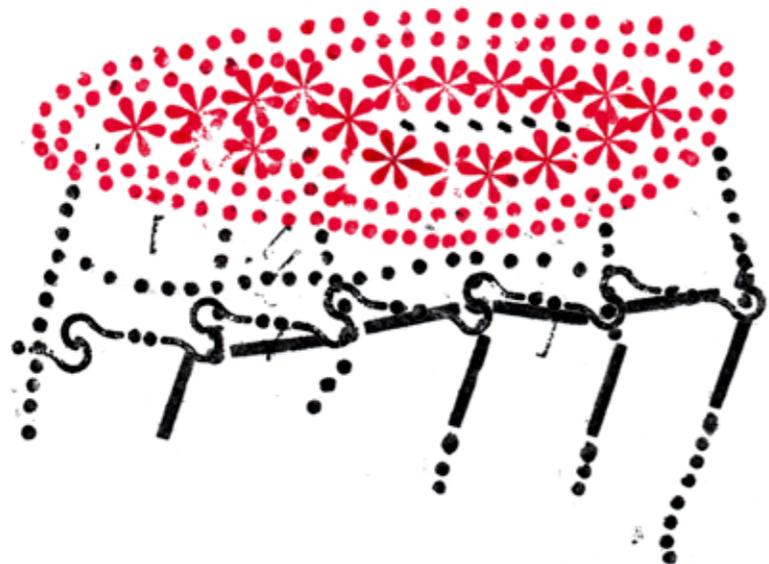
A complex, abstract graphic design featuring the word "ROCK" in large, bold, black letters. The letters are surrounded by various decorative elements including a red diagonal line, a series of black curved lines, and a series of black vertical lines. The design is highly stylized and includes a red stamp with the word "ROCK" repeated in a grid pattern. The overall composition is dynamic and visually striking.



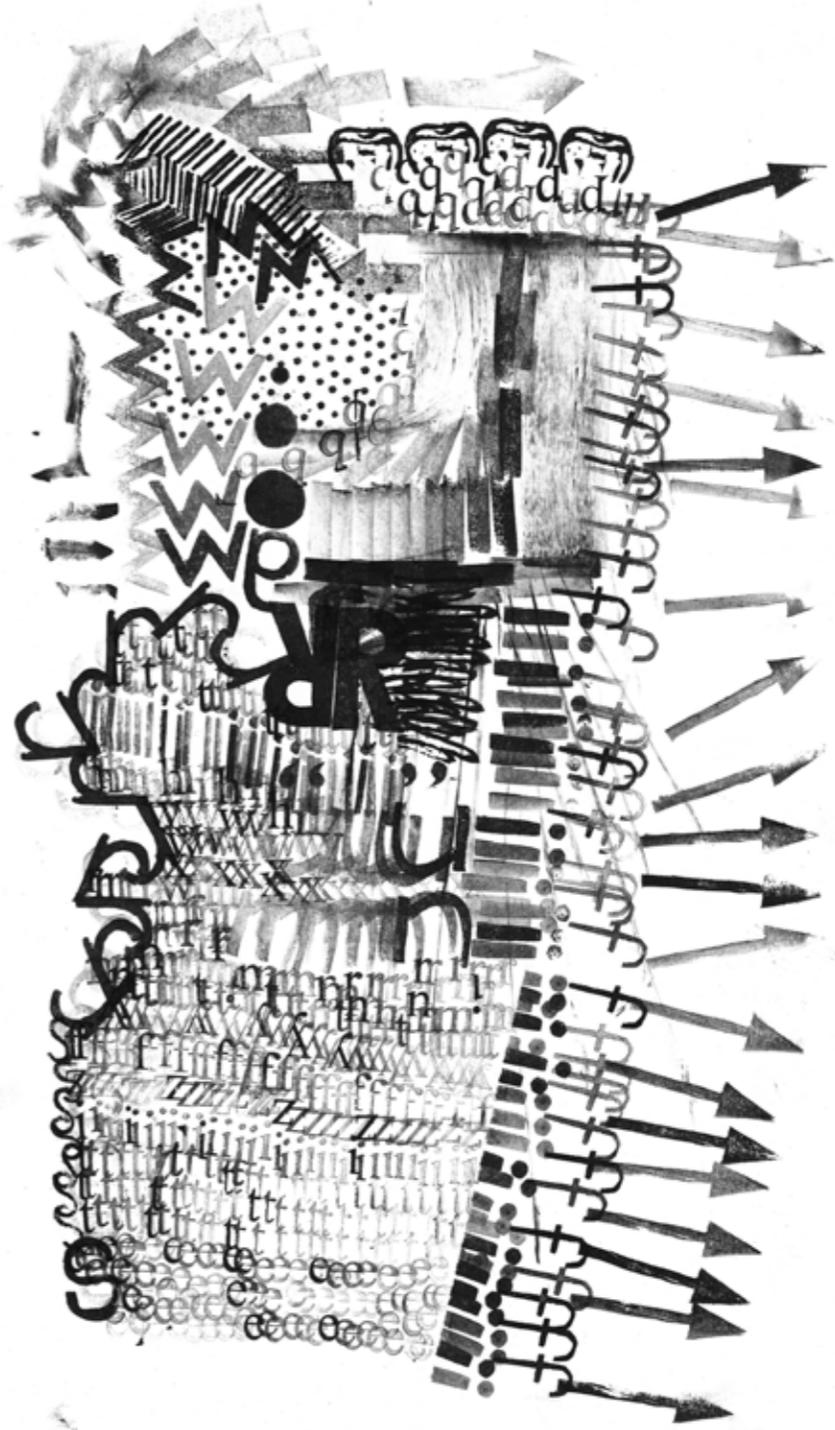


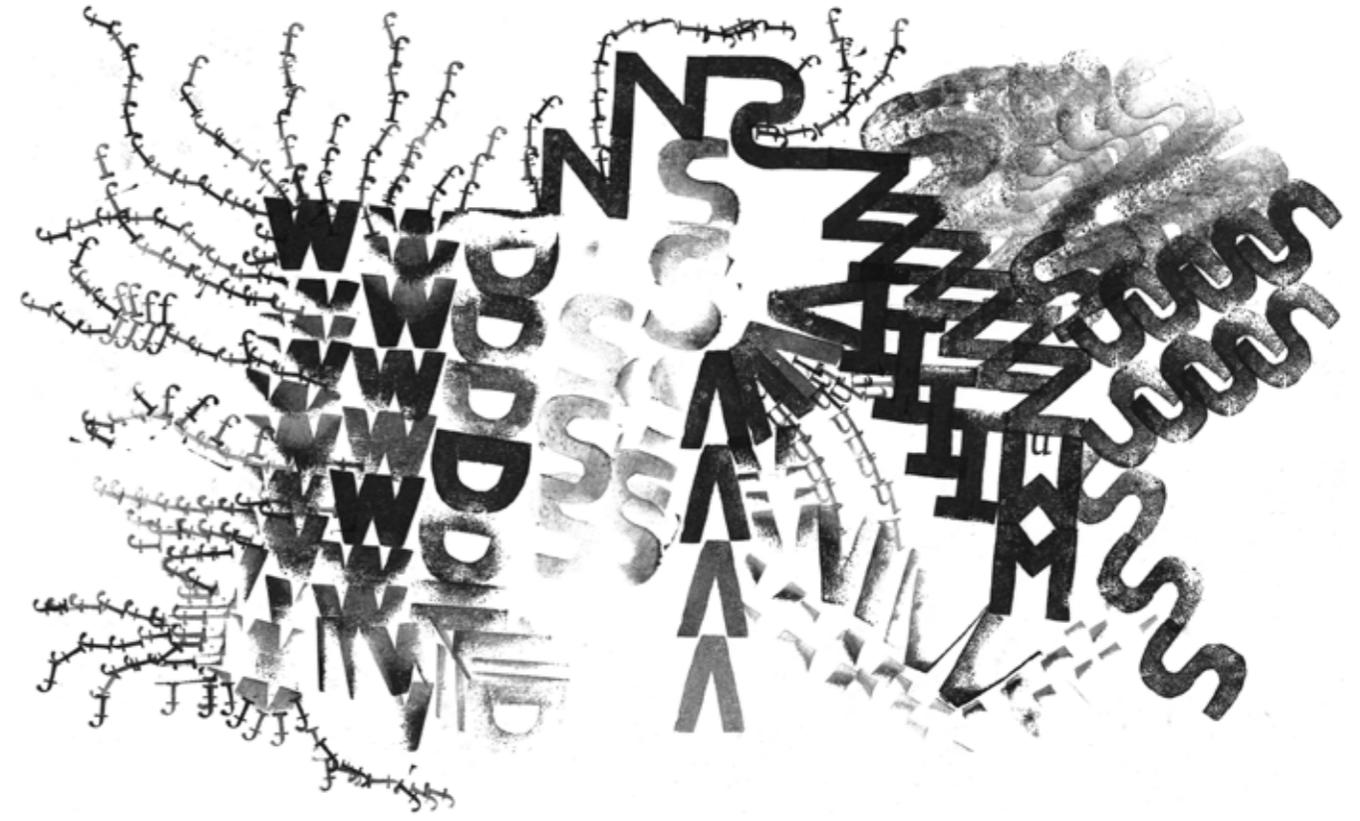
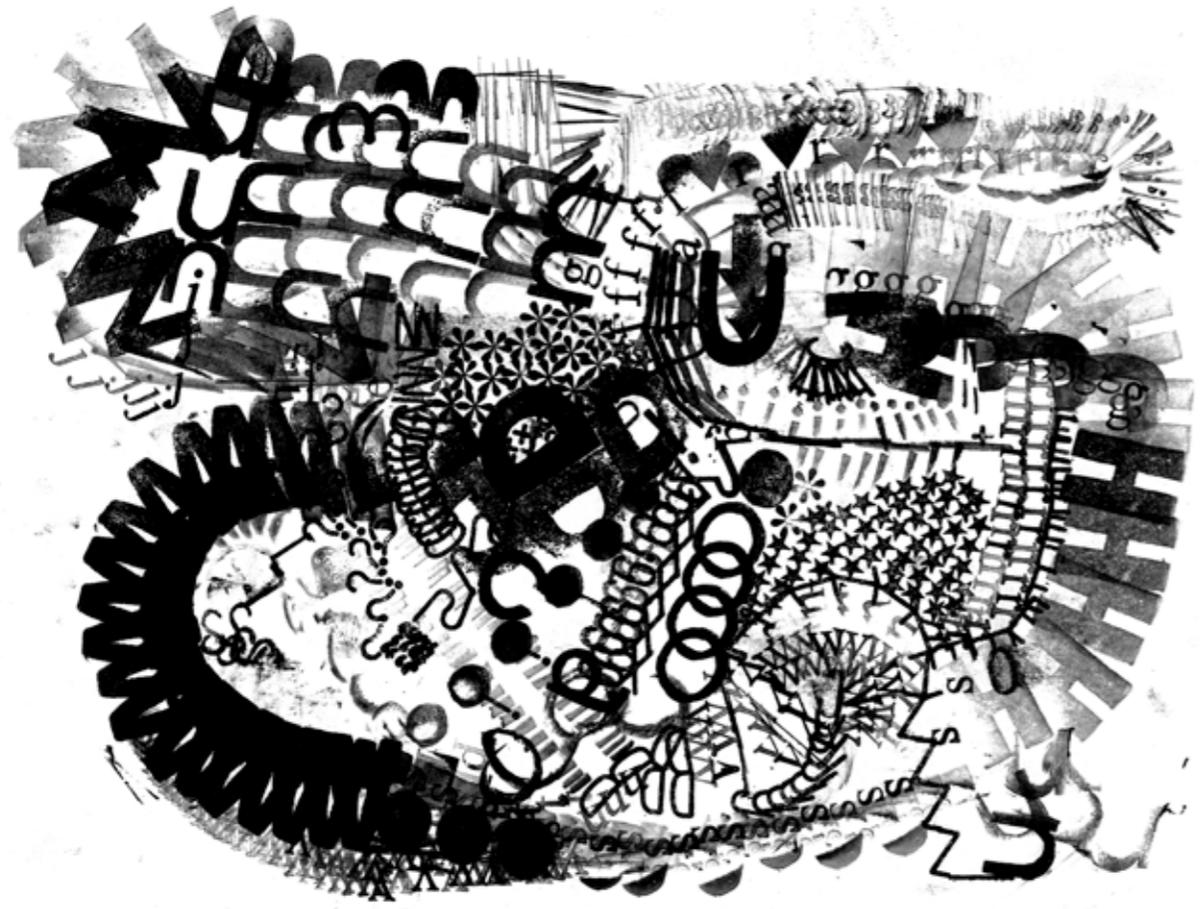




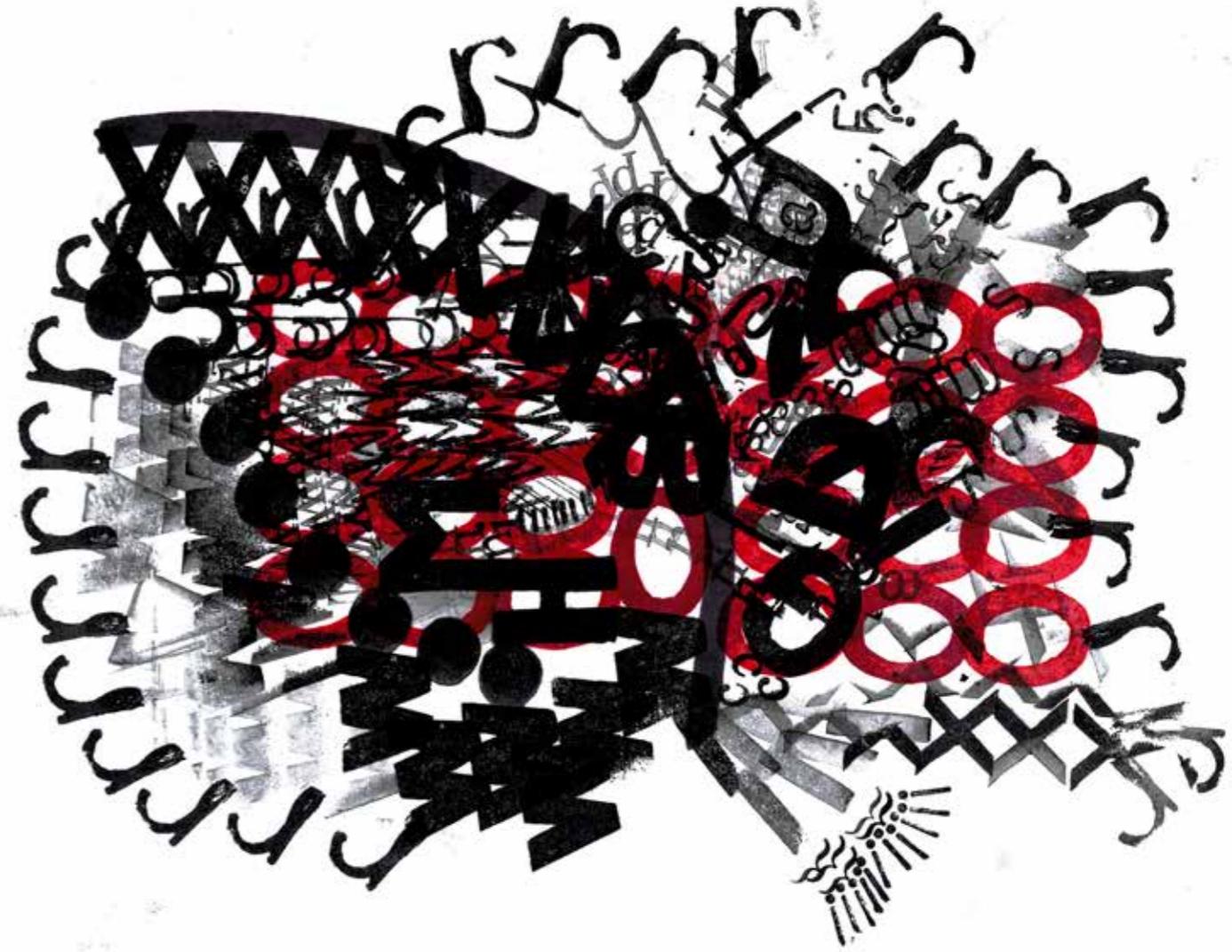




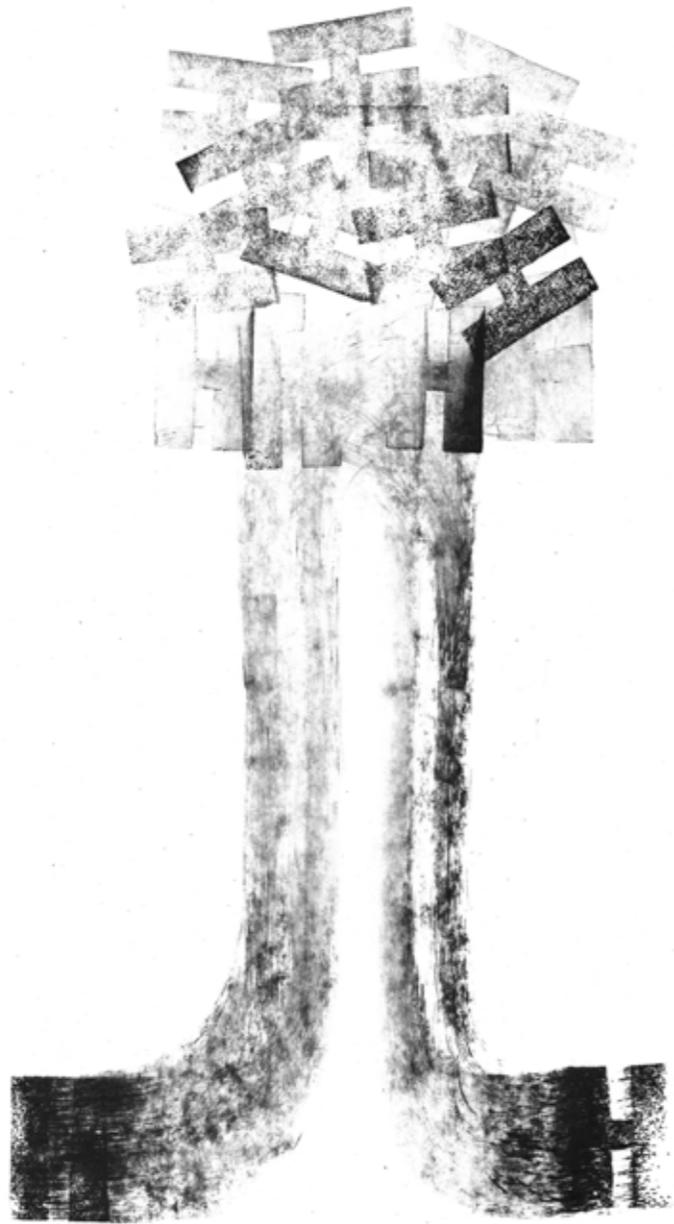




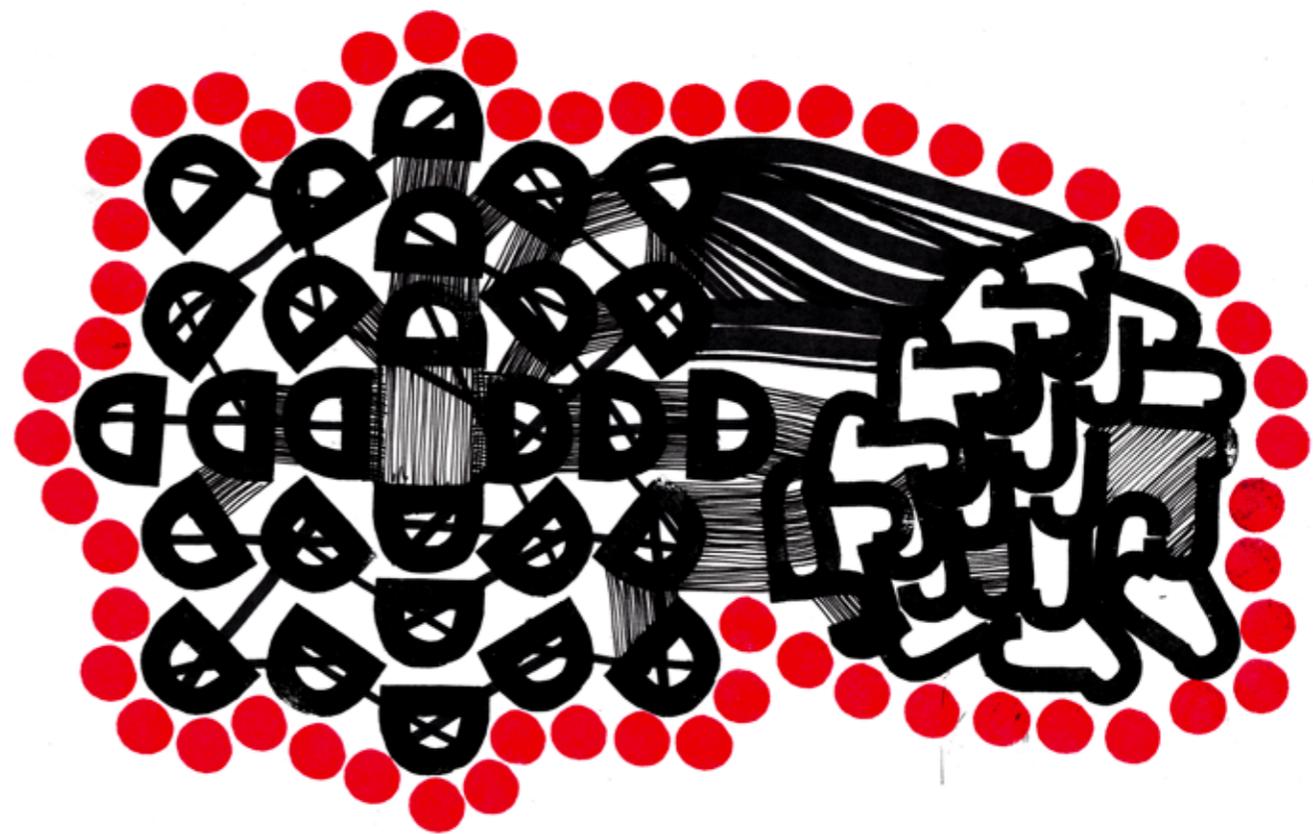
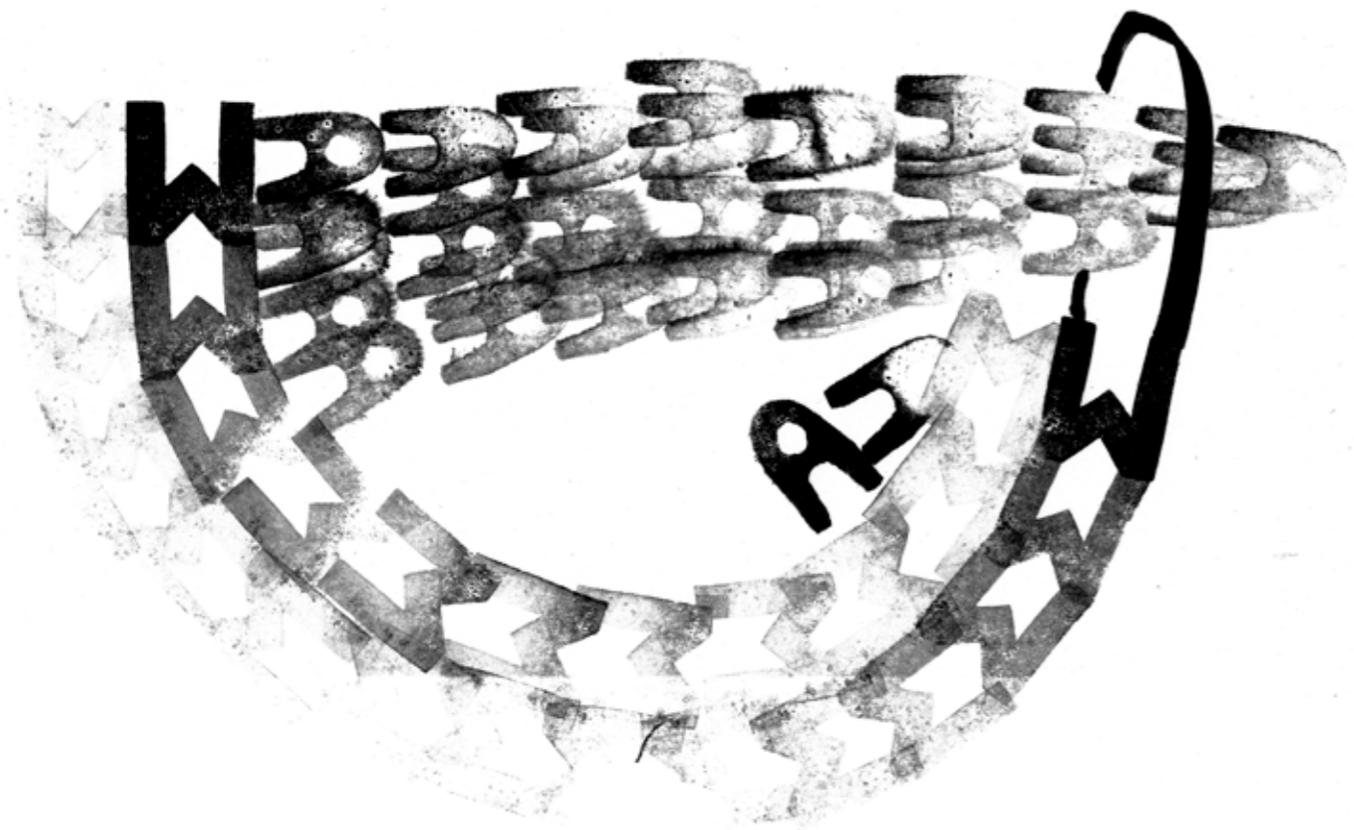


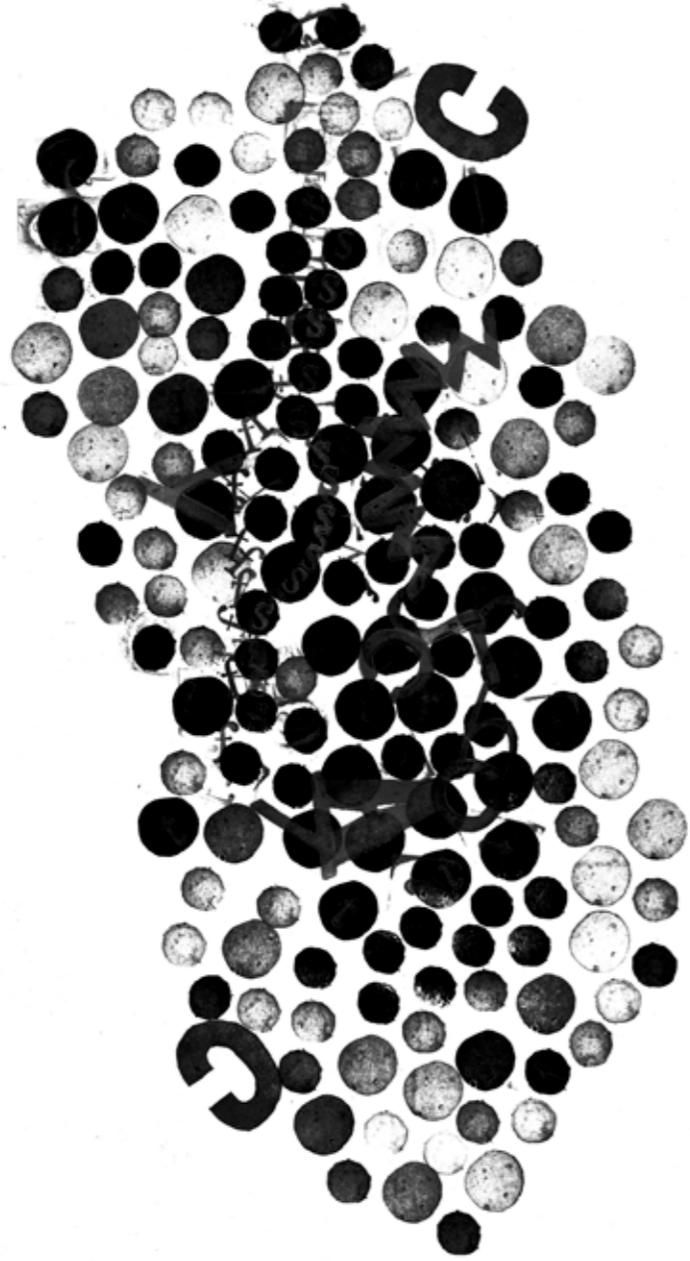


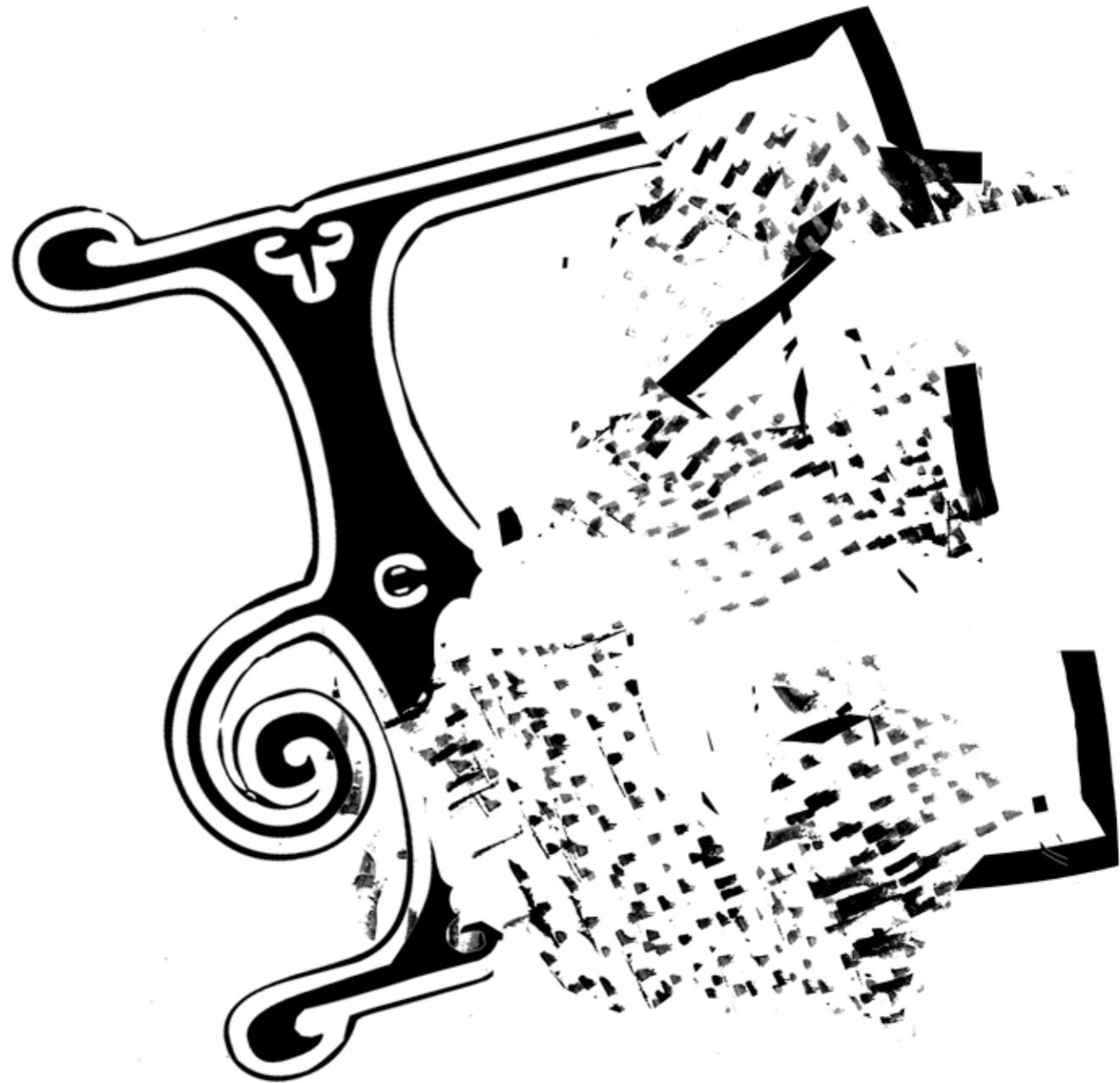
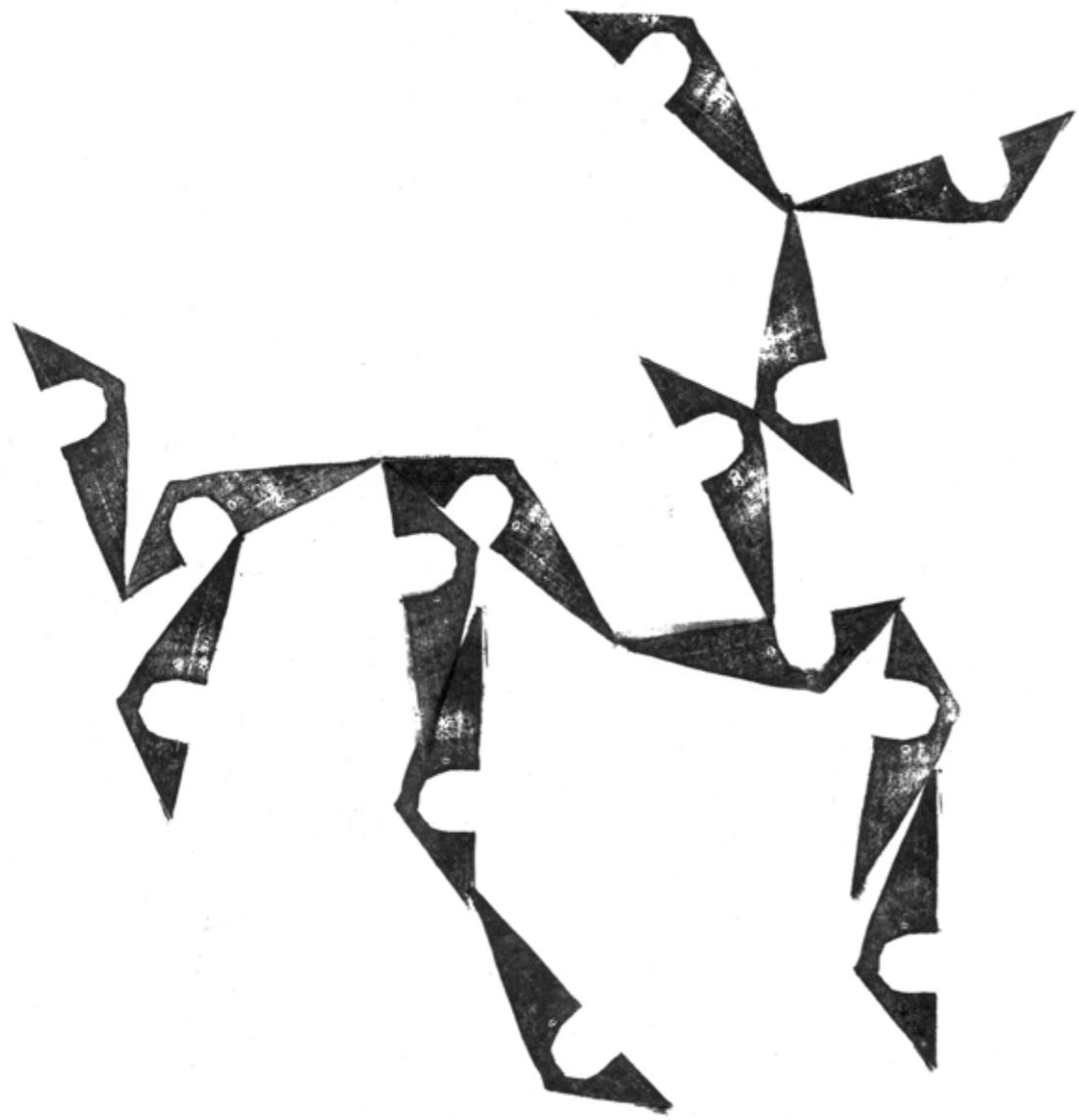




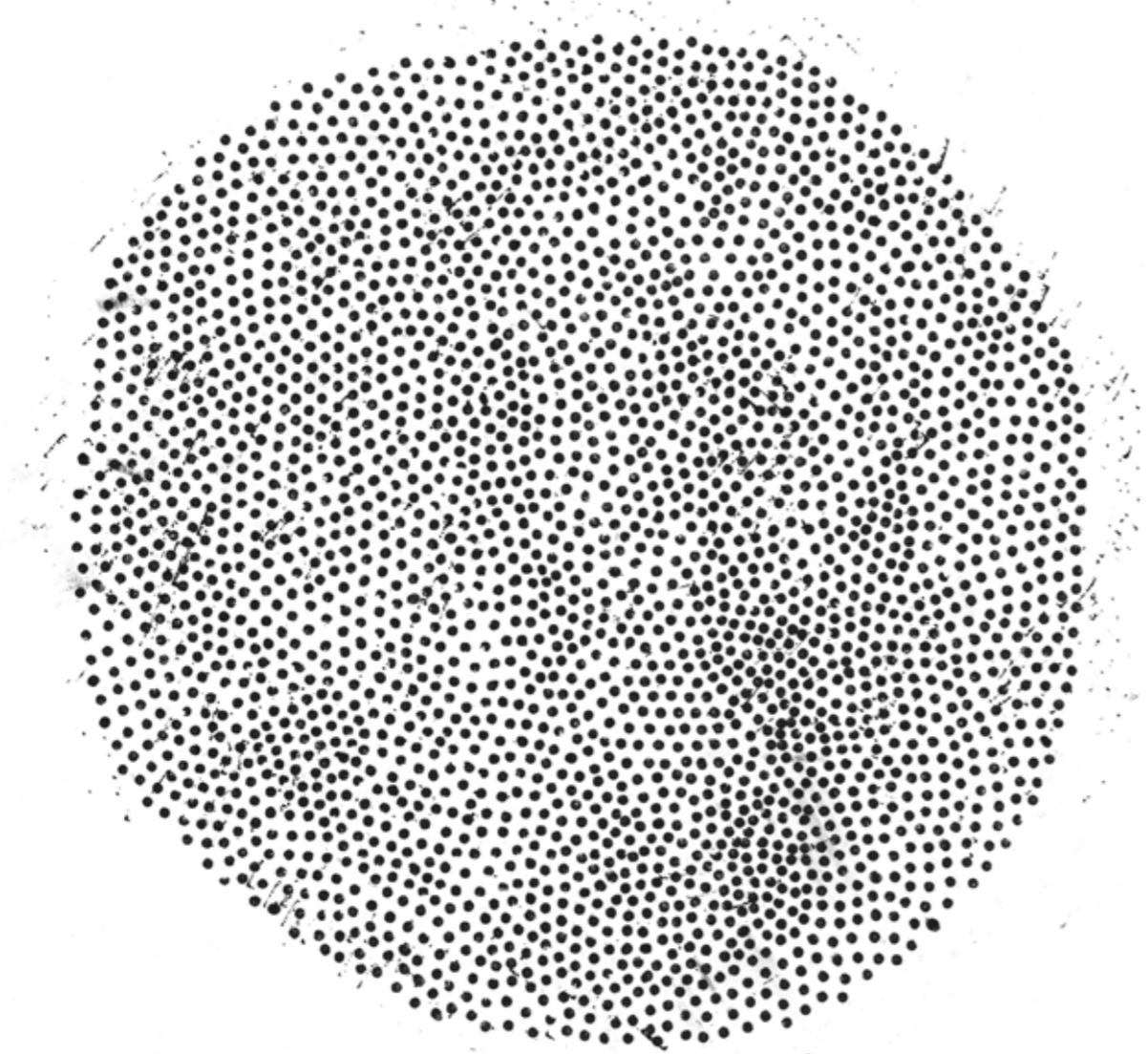












## Parable

Of the rituals performed which culminate in sleep, the initial determination is that final cigarette for which I step outside to the occasional haranguing of a weaving drunk, or the sonic caress of an altered muffler that tears through that silence felt in the bones of the night. The work day annulled by alcohol finds the hand that holds the can asleep; the mind unable to process the indications of the clock, I move to get my coat from where it's hanging on its hook. It is from this position that, glancing down the stairwell I find, by the fact that I am not met by darkness (that darkness reserved for basements—it is the open basement door on which the hooks are mounted, the coats hung) that the lamp that stands on my work table in the corner of my makeshift studio, its uncovered bulb, has been left on. A slight hesitation holds me there, between the coat and the stairs. Whether it is the notion that I am paying for the electricity, or an erroneous, passing conviction of some environmental impact, I descend the stairs. Having reached the bottom of the flight it is within two steps of my approach towards the lamp that I pause. I've forgotten the laundry. Just past the door to the laundry room, in front of the drier on

the concrete floor sits the laundry hamper, half filled with clothing. I shake my head and enter the laundry room. The washer is empty, the drier full, the clothing dry. This was Rui. Always my forgetfulness. Handful by handful I push the clothing down into the hamper in order that it will all fit, and furthermore, that as I lug the weight to the second floor a sock or shirt won't dislodge from the mass requiring its retrieval. Crossing the basement and climbing the stairs with the awkward mass, I find myself once again facing my coat. The hamper is left by the door, the coat lifted off the hook and I ready myself for, finally, that last cigarette. Outside, standing in the snow, the fireworks of synapses erase the surroundings and any possibility of being present so that when I return inside, it is only by the smell of smoke on my clothing, which I can barely register, that I know I've smoked the cigarette at all. Hat, coat, boots, scarf, they all come off. I make my way upstairs with the hamper, attend to hygienic banalities, take off my clothes and climb into bed where Rui, long asleep, snores like some sated tiger. The children, they're fast asleep. And I, I fall asleep. And that bulb burns in the basement.

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## Acknowledgments

The work in this book was all created (save a few pieces) in a very short time span. As a result there aren't a whole lot of people to thank. My wife Rui whose milk is the subject of the title, and our children, Alexie and Simone who consumed it, are constantly to be thanked regardless of book or no book. They are the life blood, the joy. Franco Cortese, he was there for the book, that is, for me. Even in this disorienting Corona, like Rimbaud and Verlaine without the penetration or the rage, at least in an immediate sexual sense. Thank you, my good friend, there really aren't any words (though he named *Berthsong*, and that's a word, now). derek beaulieu solicited some work (which has ended up in this book) and then when he got it held it hostage for a few years, but the poems didn't mind, they even tell me they had a good time. The chapbook that came of that is *Houses* and I'm incredibly grateful for his tireless work and encouragement. Eryk Wenziaak invited me to submit some work to A-Minor Magazine in 2018

making those pieces the earliest created in this book. I am grateful to him for that gesture. Joakim Norling, seeing a few pieces I posted online said he'd like to publish the series I was working on, though it actually wasn't a series until he said that. Then he got more than he bargained for. Many thanks for your support (in the face of your own appalling loss—we *will* drink together and raise our glasses to the irreconcilable absences)—and the conversation via books exchanged and our own words may they continue. Amanda Earl improved on the former title of the piece which owes its perfect name to her, *Icarus Waxes Poetic*. Hilarious. Thank you. Kevin Rees, who recently moved into the neighbourhood and has the distinction of being my first non-video-call-friend in the time of Corona stood in my living room and witnessed the mess of the unsequenced book and, undaunted, produced some fantastic insights for which I am incredibly grateful. And last but not least.... No, that's it.

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