

In Publishing Forms

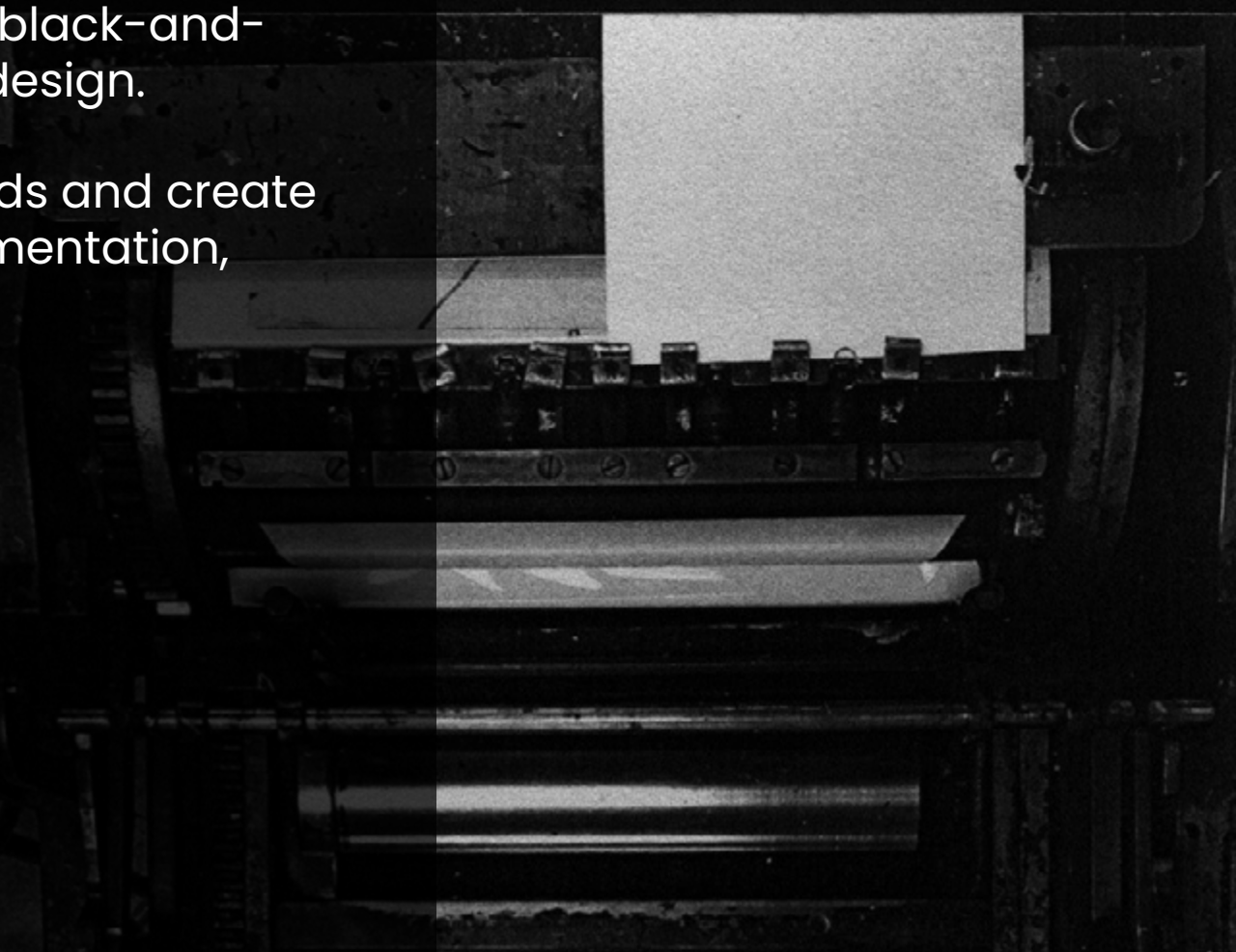
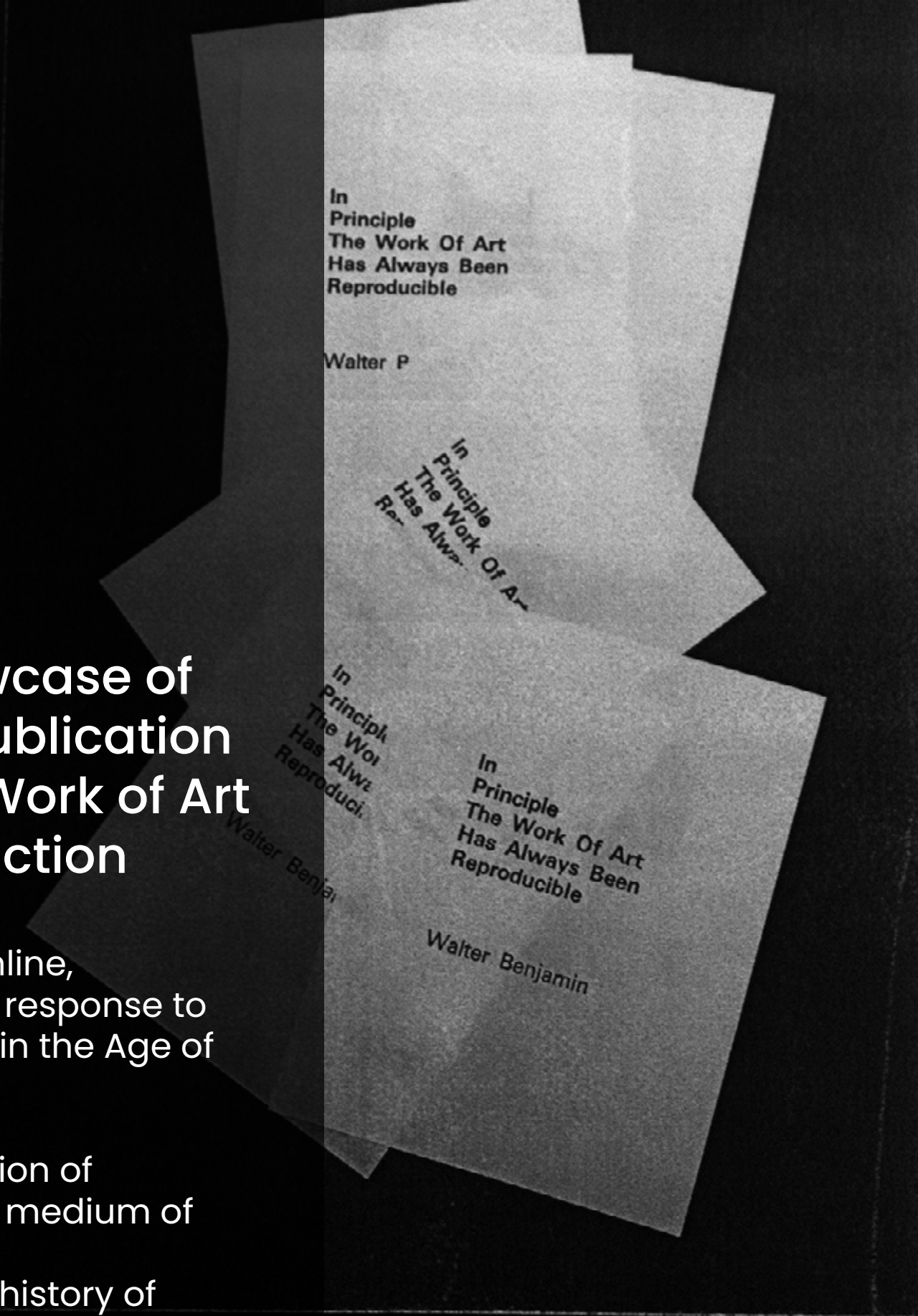
An Experimental Design and Showcase of
an Audiovisual Interactive Web Publication
Based on Walter Benjamin's The Work of Art
in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

The outcome of this project is the design of an online,
interactive web-based publication, developed in response to
Walter Benjamin's seminal essay The Work of Art in the Age of
Mechanical Reproduction.

This project engages in an experimental exploration of
publishing forms, aiming to rethink the book as a medium of
communication and storytelling.
Through a three-chapter structure reflecting the history of
mechanical reproduction, the disappearance of aura in art, and
the future of reproduction, the project integrates black-and-
white visual layouts with audiovisual interactive design.

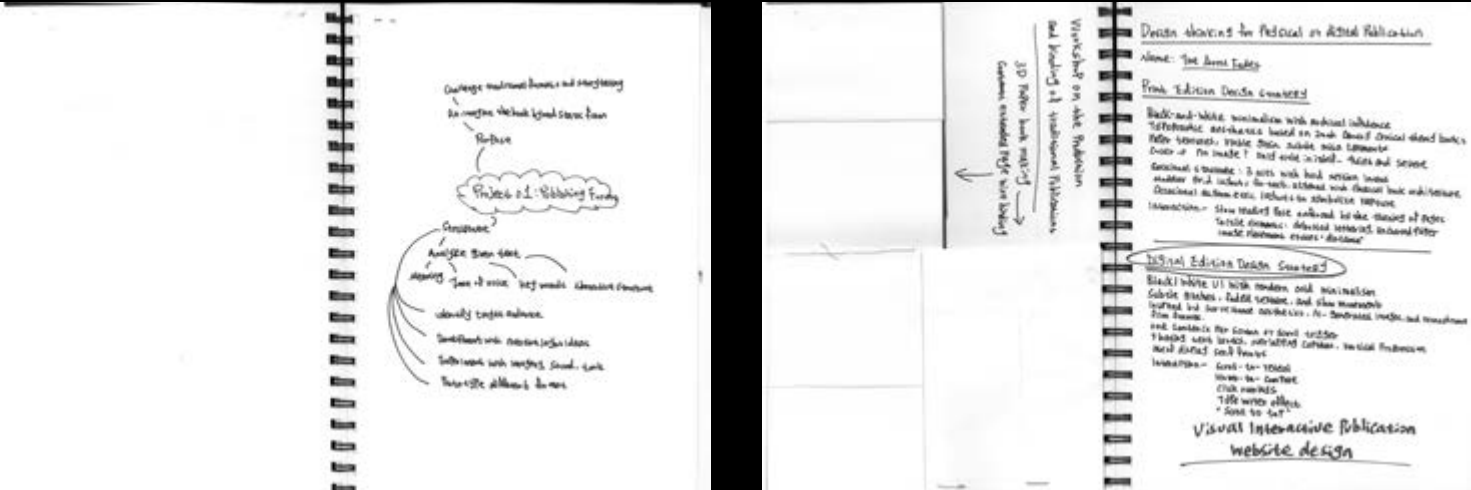
It seeks to break traditional linear reading methods and create
a new publishing experience that merges experimentation,
interactivity, and narrative.

Project 01 – Publishing Forms
Project designer – Jialai Cao



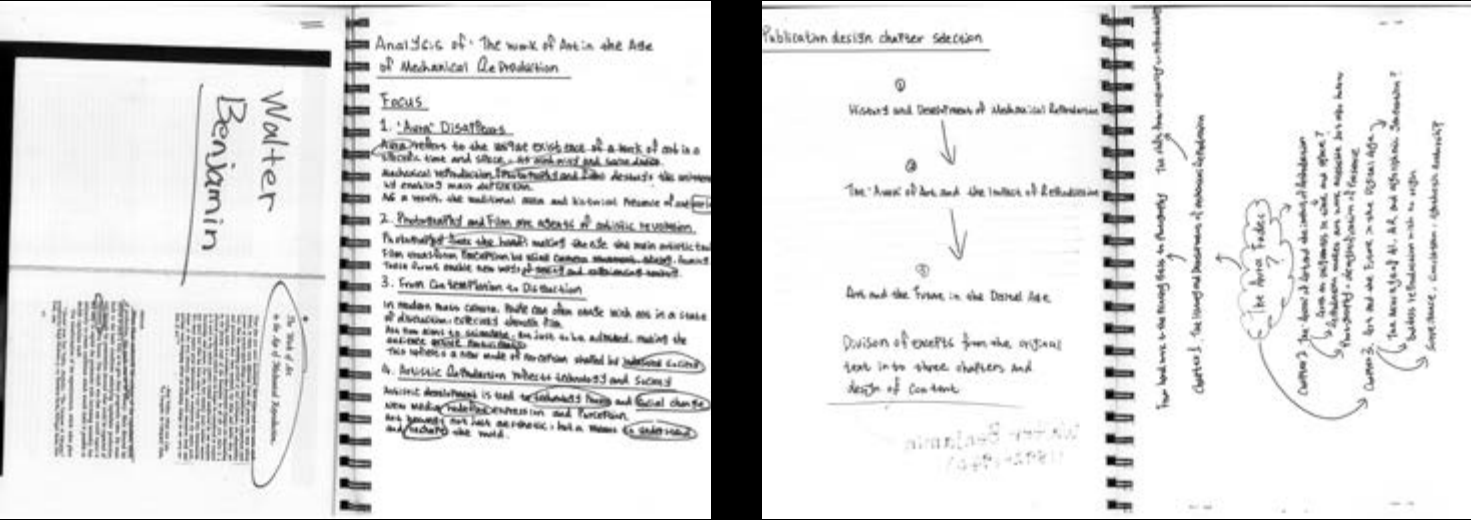
Research and References

Project analysis & Planning



During the research phase, after carefully reading the project brief and analyzing the original text of Walter Benjamin's essay, I developed the initial design direction and conceptual ideas for this project.

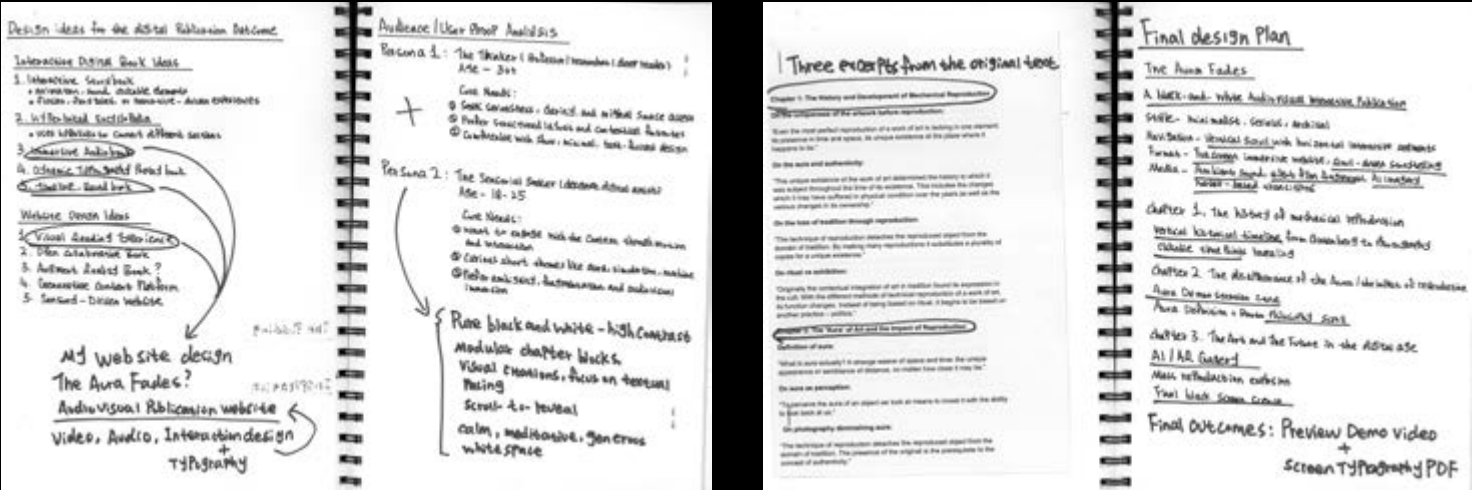
Identify design themes



- MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION** – The process that disrupts originality through mass copying
- AURA** – The authenticity and uniqueness of an original artwork
- PHOTOGRAPHY & FILM** – Media that redefined perception and authorship
- DIGITAL SIMULATION** – AI/AR as a new form of artificial creation

To determine the design of this publication, I researched from the original work and identified several key themes within the broader context related to art, reproduction and digital interaction. These themes became the conceptual basis for the structure of the three chapters.

Final Design Solution

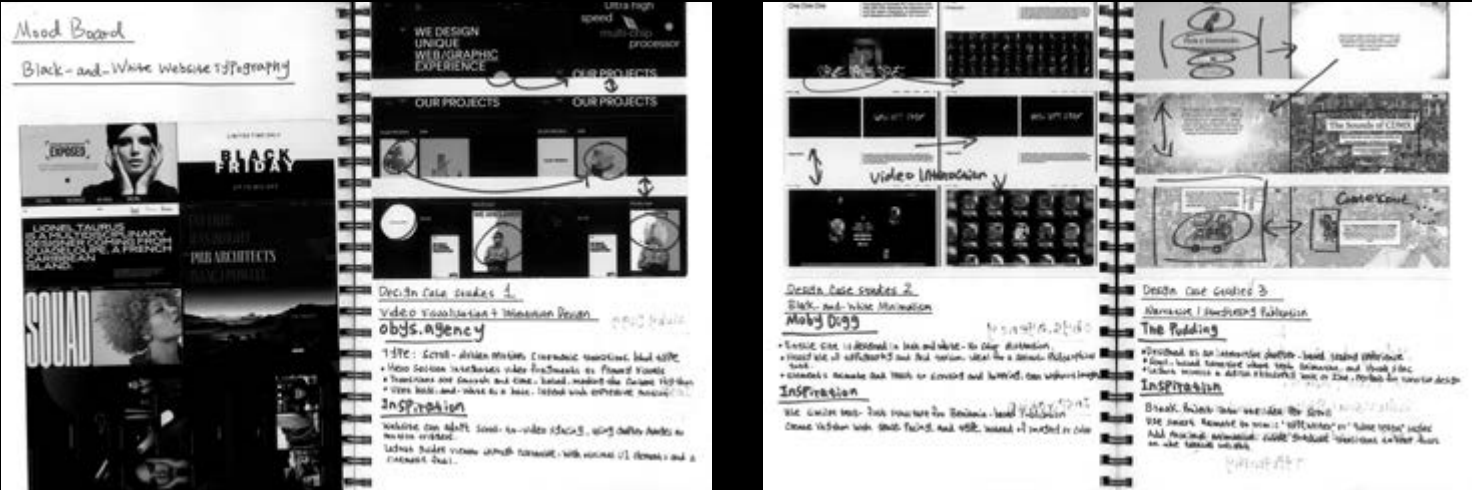


The final design solution is a three-chapter black-and-white audiovisual website. It is presented through a preview video and a complete layout of the publication.

Key Theoretical References

- 1. On the uniqueness of the original (Chapter 1)**
“Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”
Used to support the idea of a timeline visualizing how reproduction distanced art from its origin.
- 2. On the definition of aura (Chapter 2)**
“What is aura actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.”
Forms the conceptual foundation of the interactive ‘aura loss’
- 3. On film and mechanical reproduction (Chapter 3)**
“The aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays.”
Informs the future-facing section, where surveillance and AI generation erase individuality.
- 4. On perception and shock**
“The spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film.”
Supports the use of scroll-based interaction and abrupt visual transitions to reflect perceptual disruption.

Related Design Case Studies



- 1. Video-Driven Visual Interaction Website**
Case – Obys Agency Portfolio – <https://obys.agency/>
Inspiration – Website design can adopt scroll-to-video syncing, using chapter changes as motion triggers.
Layout guides viewer through narrative, with minimal UI elements and a cinematic feel.
- 2. Black-and-White Minimalism Website**
Case – Moby Digg Portfolio – <https://mobydigg.de/>
Inspiration – Use similar text-first structure for your Benjamin-based publication.
Create rhythm with space, pacing, and type, instead of imagery or color.
- 3. Narrative / Storytelling Publication Website**
Case – The Pudding – <https://pudding.cool/2022/09/cdmx/>
Inspiration – Break your project into one idea per scroll.
Use Smart Animate to mimic “typewriter” or “quote reveal” styles.
Add minimal animation, subtle grayscale transitions to keep focus on the textual weight.

Research Phase Summary

By analyzing Benjamin's essay and exploring related theories and interactive publishing formats, I identified core themes such as aura, reproduction, and digital transformation.

These insights shaped the three-chapter structure and guided my use of black-and-white visuals, scroll-based interaction, and audiovisual elements to reinterpret Benjamin's ideas in a digital context.

Target Audience and Personas

User Groups

For this project, the audience is divided into two core user types based on their interests and modes of engagement:



The Thinkers

Analytical and research-oriented users such as students and scholars who seek structured, theory-based content and prefer clear, minimal reading environments that support deep intellectual engagement.



The Sensorial Seekers

Experience-driven users like designers and artists who are drawn to immersive, audiovisual, and interactive storytelling that allows them to feel and explore ideas beyond linear text.

Persona Create



Alex is a **22**-year-old **philosophy student** based in a university environment. With a strong interest in **media theory** and **cultural criticism**, Alex engages with texts methodically, seeking structure, clarity, and original sources. For Alex, reading is a **focused**, immersive process—one that benefits from calm layouts, minimal distractions, and direct access to citations and

references. Their goal is to deeply understand how technology has transformed the **meaning and experience of art**. In terms of interaction, Alex prefers **linear scroll-based formats, high-legibility typography**, and the ability to access supporting materials with ease. The design should prioritize thoughtful pacing, textual authenticity, and conceptual clarity.



Lina is a **28**-year-old **multimedia designer** who thrives on experiential learning and emotional engagement. She is attracted to **storytelling through movement, sound, and visual transformation**. Unlike traditional reading, Lina explores digital content with her senses—responding intuitively to hover effects, visual metaphors, and dynamic transitions. Her goal

is to **feel** the concept of aura fading, not just read about it. Lina values ambiguity, **interaction**, and surprise. For her, a successful publication must go **beyond words**—it must create an atmosphere. The design should **feature audiovisual layering**, nonlinear narrative pacing, and poetic, immersive sequences that allow the reader to **discover meaning through experience**.

Pain Points / Opportunities analysis



Pain Points

1. Philosophical texts are **dense** and **abstract**, making key ideas difficult to grasp quickly.
2. Traditional book formats offer passive reading and **cannot visualize** concepts like "aura" loss.
3. Users struggle to connect historical theory with contemporary **digital contexts** (e.g. AI, media).
4. Lack of **immersive flow** makes it hard to maintain engagement or emotional connection.
5. Diverse user needs - some seek **depth** and **structure**, others prefer **sensory, emotional experience**.

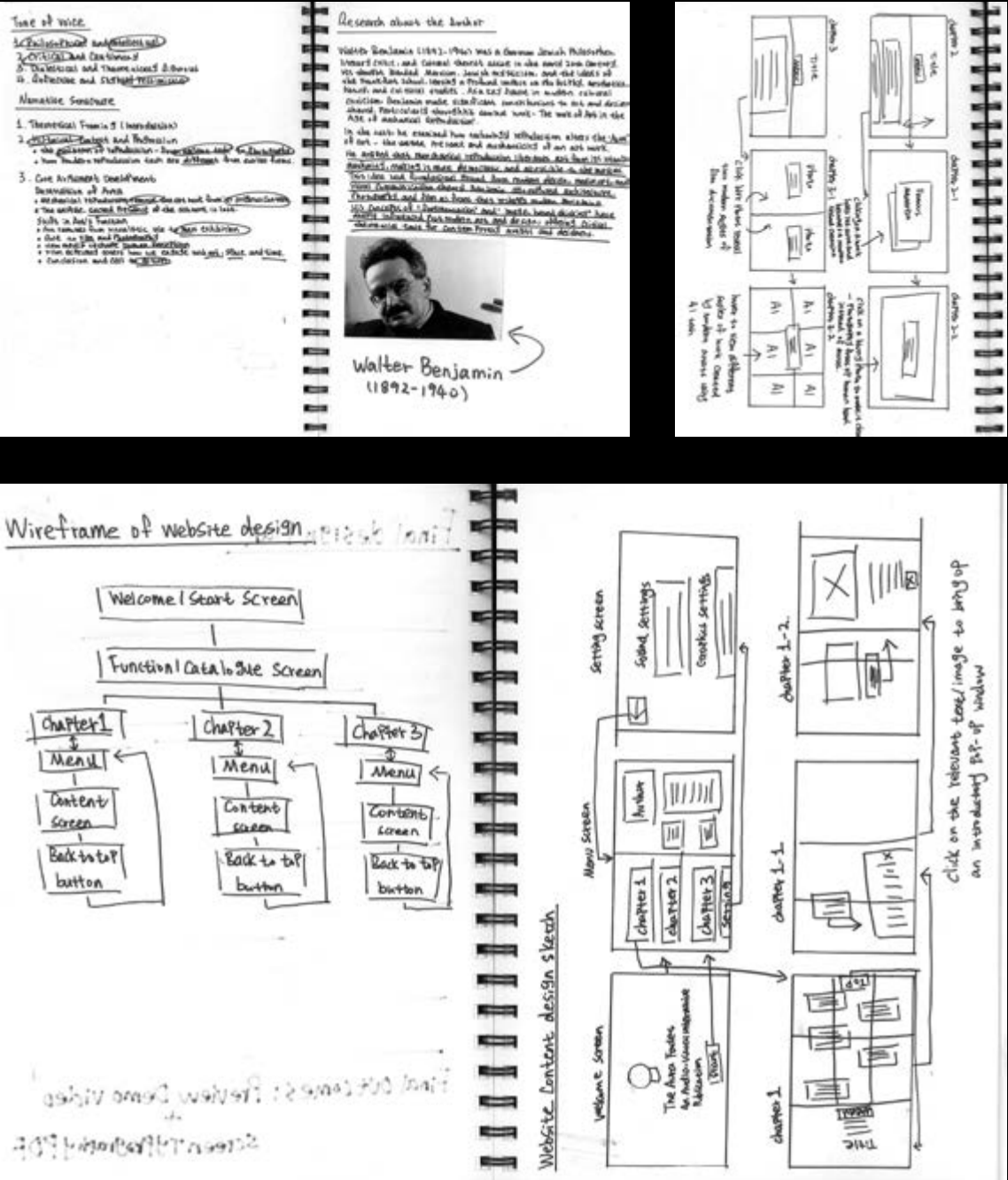


Opportunities

1. Break the content into three thematic chapters with **scroll-based pacing** and typewriter-style reveals.
2. Use **interactive visuals** (e.g. hover-to-transform images) to embody **abstract ideas** like aura and loss.
3. Integrate AI-generated imagery and surveillance visuals to **connect** theory with **future reproduction**.
4. Apply minimalist black-and-white design, ambient sound, and smooth transitions to **create immersion**.
5. Design for **dual pathways**: structured reading for **Thinkers**, audiovisual storytelling for **Sensory Seekers**.

Experimentation and Process

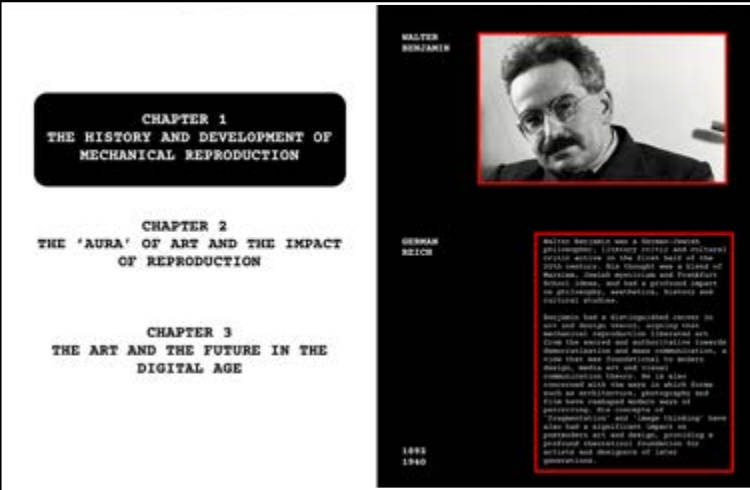
Initial Concept Sketches



After conducting research and analysis on the original text and the author, I began developing **early-stage sketches** for this project. These included **page flow** diagrams to explore the **narrative structure**, as well as layout compositions to define the **visual hierarchy** and black-and-white aesthetic of the publication. One of the key interaction strategies I focused on was **vertical scroll-based navigation** across a **long-form page**, designed to support smooth transitions between chapters and emphasize the unfolding nature of the narrative.

I also sketched **hover-based interactions**, and **sound-triggered segments**, mapping out how text, visuals, and audio would respond to user behavior. These sketches helped define the structure of the experience as a dynamic **storytelling interface** rather than a static reading page.

Abandoned Directions For Exploration



What was tried:
Originally, I explored using a traditional multi-page website structure with hyperlinks connecting each section, mimicking the form of a digital book with separate pages.

Why it was abandoned:
This structure interrupted the narrative flow and reduced immersion. The segmented pages felt too rigid and lacked the continuous rhythm necessary to reflect the evolving nature of the content. Scroll-based navigation was ultimately more suitable for creating a seamless audiovisual experience.

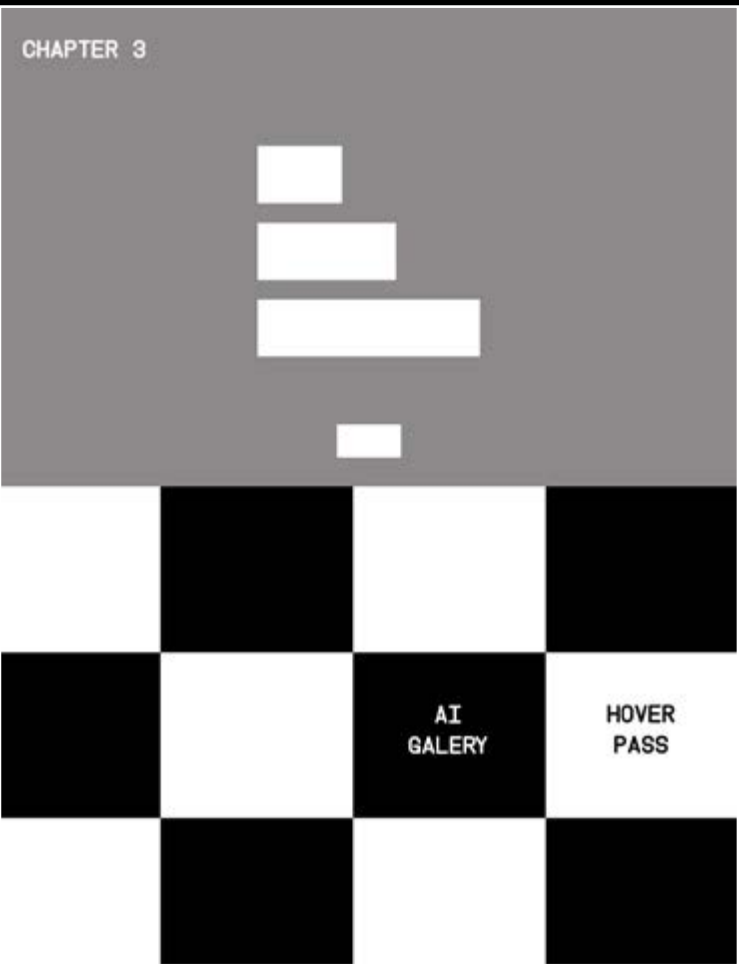
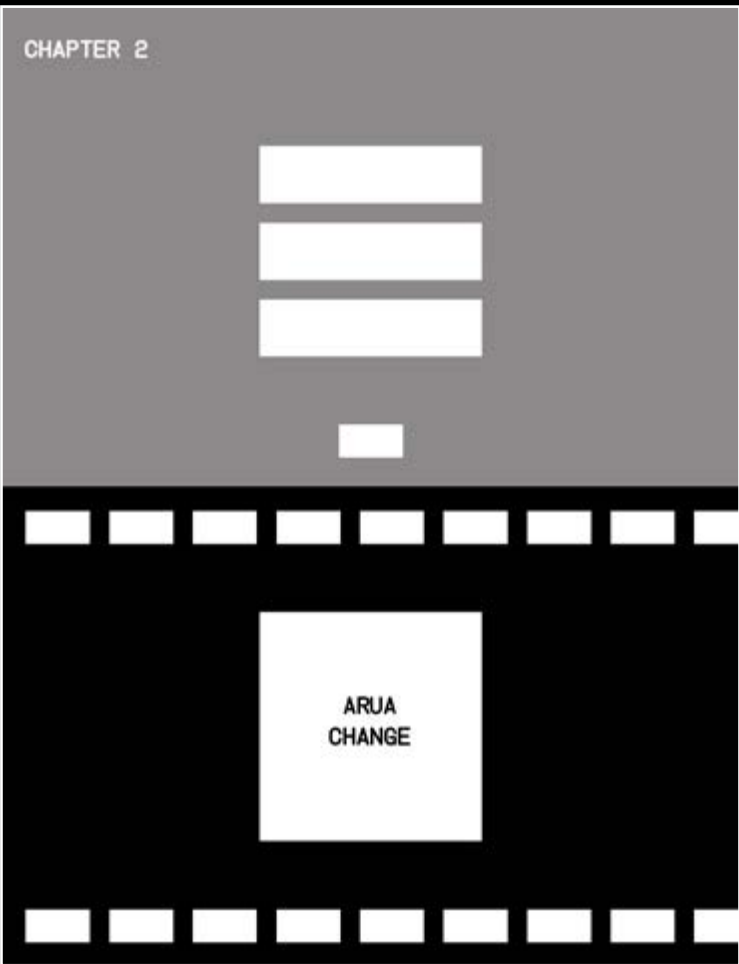
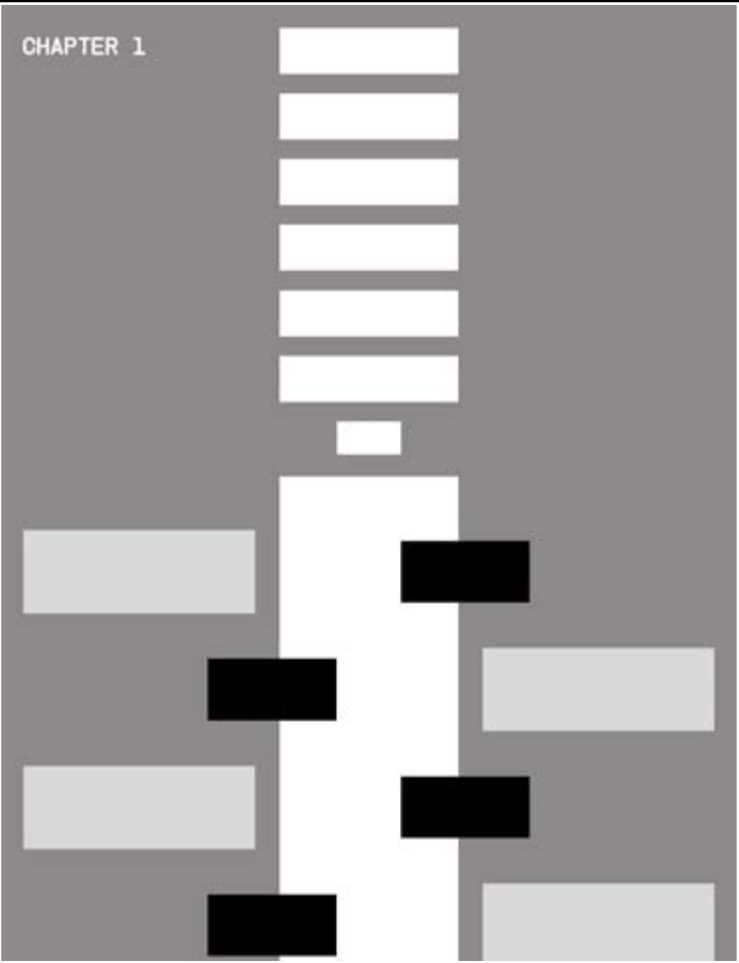
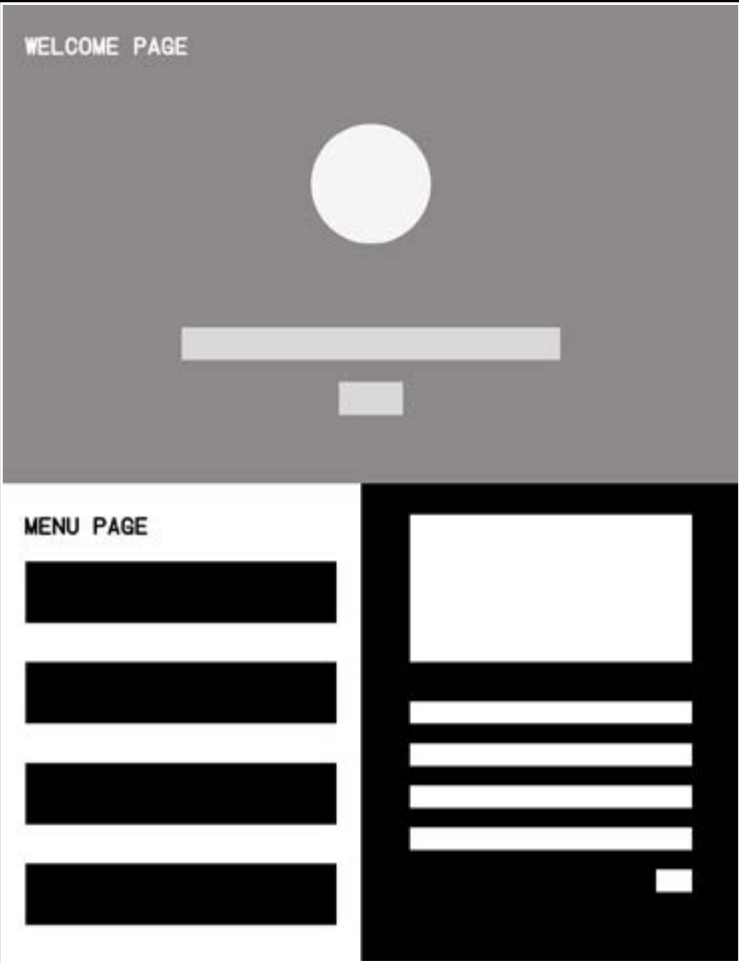


What was tried:
In early layout experiments, I tested subtle color accents (such as red or blue) on key words and visuals to emphasize contrast and thematic moments.

Why it was abandoned:
The color elements conflicted with the project's black-and-white conceptual direction and weakened the visual consistency.

Hyperlinked Multi-page Navigation

Low-fidelity Draft



Design Decisions and Conceptual Framework

Design Decision Narrative

Black & White Color Scheme

Reflects the seriousness of the theoretical content and reinforces the archival, historical tone. It also symbolizes the binary nature of aura presence vs. loss.

Three-Chapter Structure

Mirrors the philosophical progression in Benjamin's essay: from historical development to conceptual analysis to future speculation. Helps guide user comprehension.

Vertical Scrolling Navigation

Allows for seamless, narrative-driven flow that mimics the experience of reading a long-form publication while supporting immersive interaction.

Hover-to-Transform Image Interaction

Makes the abstract concept of aura disappearance visually tangible. Encourages user engagement through active observation and participation.

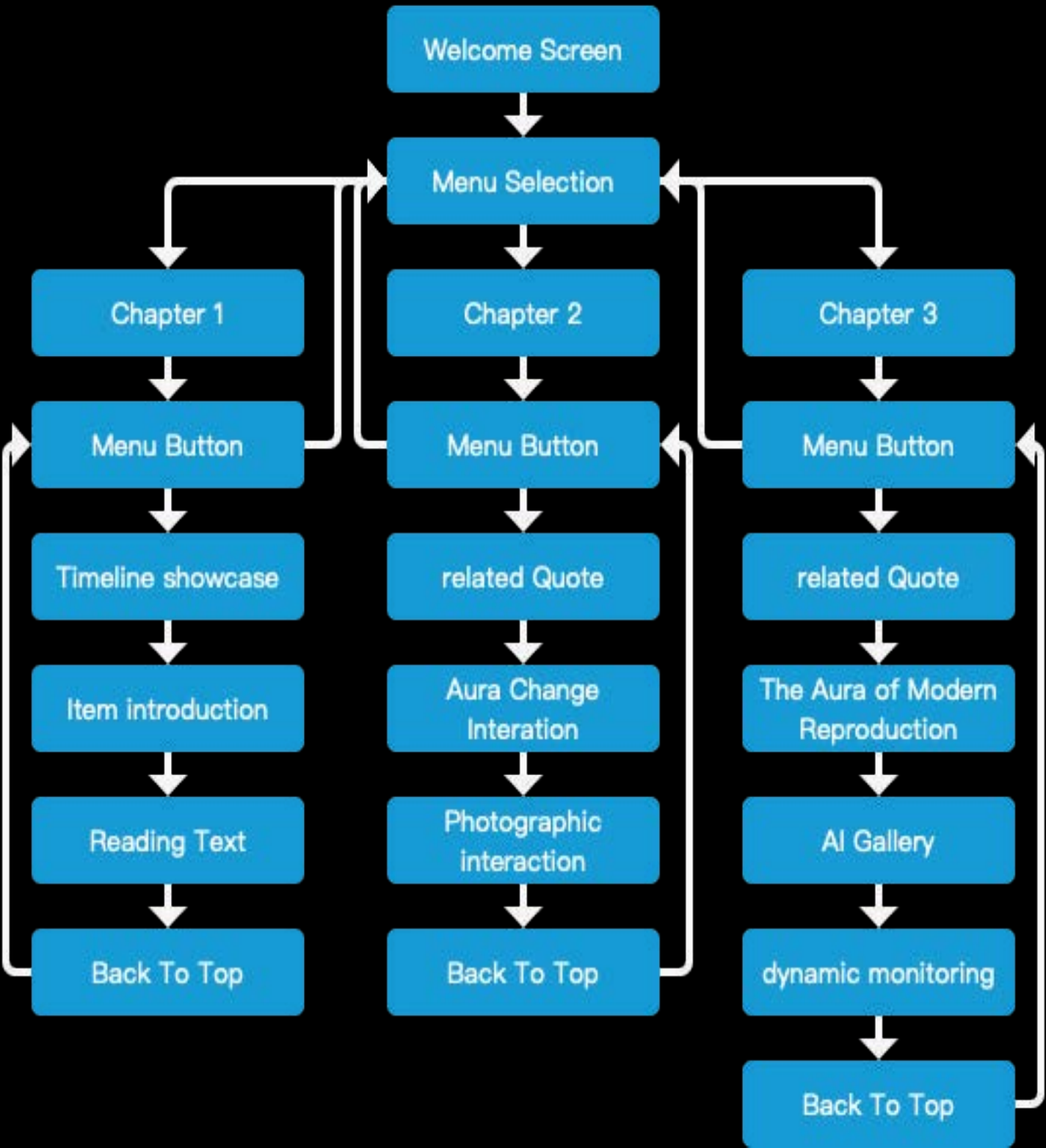
Sound Integration (Ambient/Typing)

Adds depth to the experience, creating an emotional and spatial atmosphere that complements the visual pacing and theoretical weight.

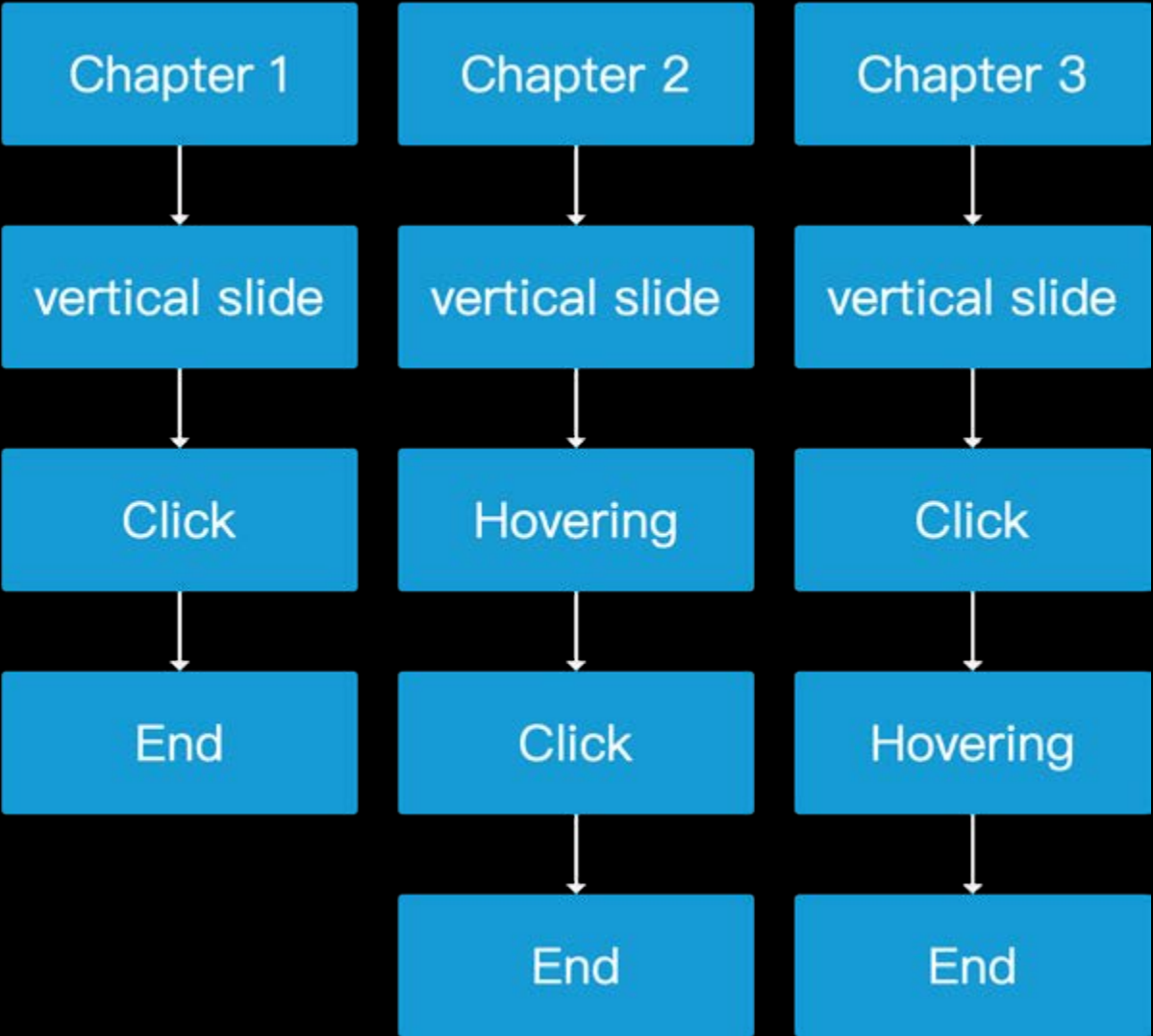
AI-Generated and Surveillance Imagery

Connects Benjamin's ideas to the digital present and future, illustrating how reproduction and perception are reshaped by new technologies.

Content Structure Frame



Interaction Logic Schematics



Final Outcome Display

Complete Interface Preview



Color Schemes & Font Usage

SCHEMES AND FONT USAGE

#000000

#FFFFFF

KimberleyBI-Regular

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNn

1234567890

Courier Prime Regular

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNn

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Courier Prime Bold

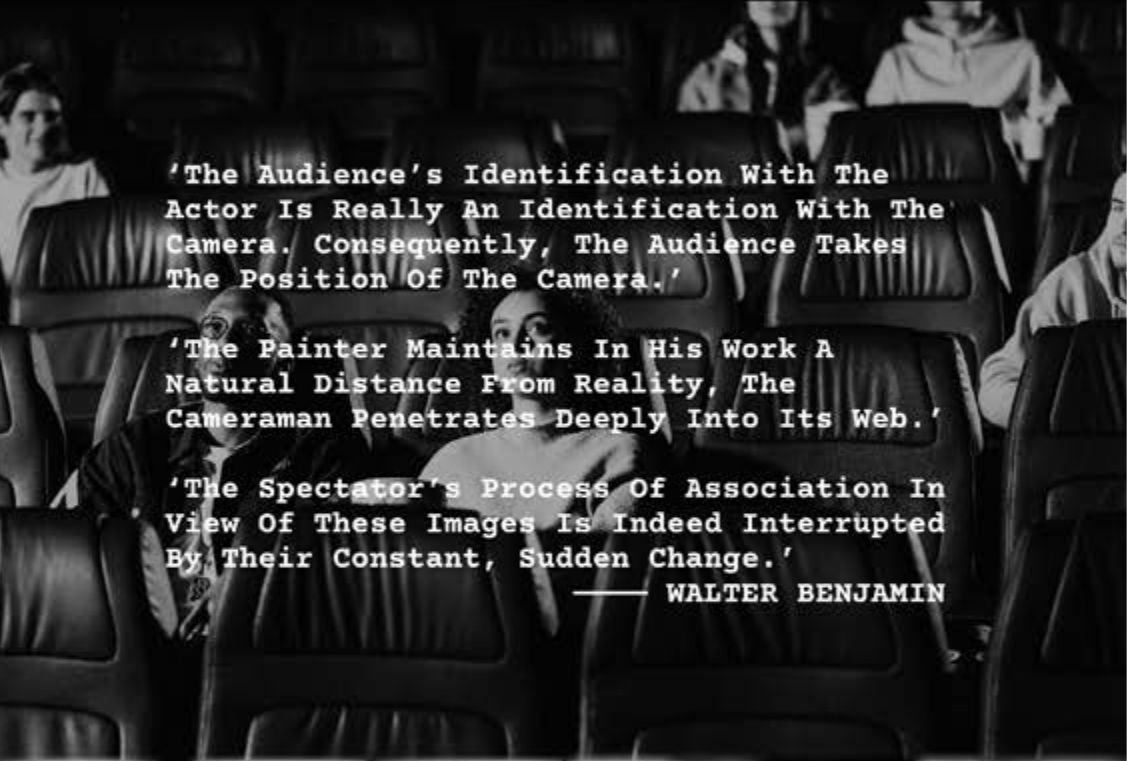
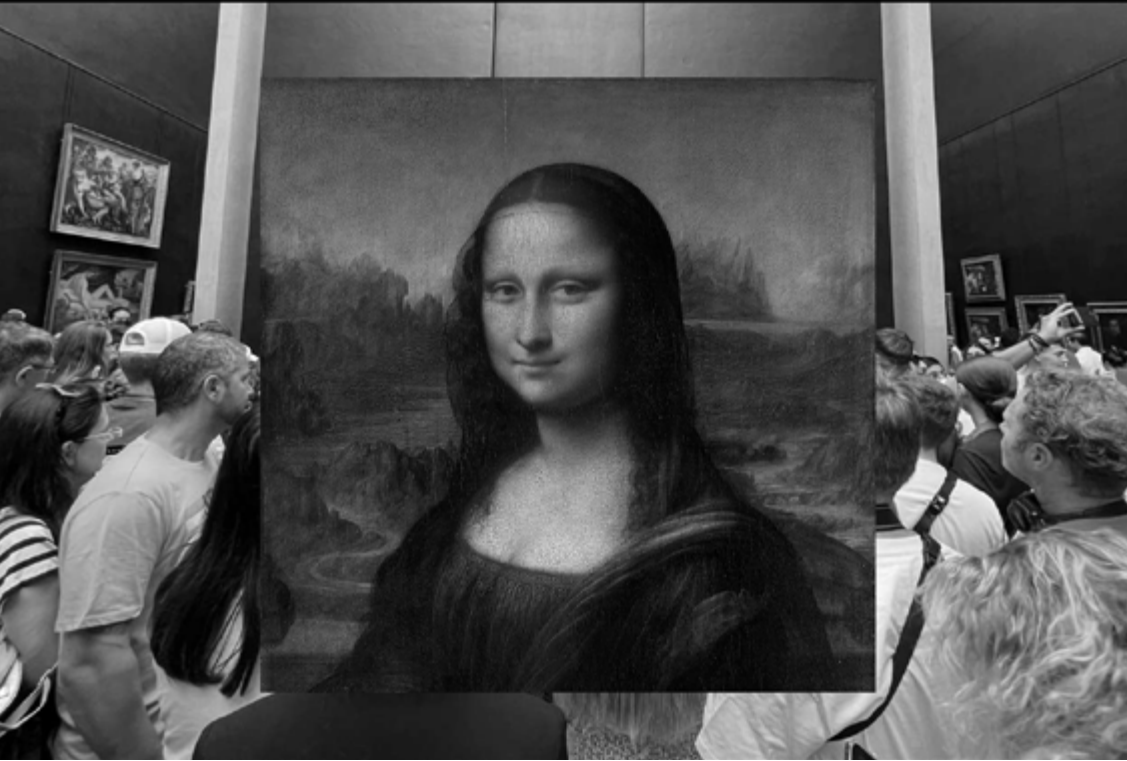
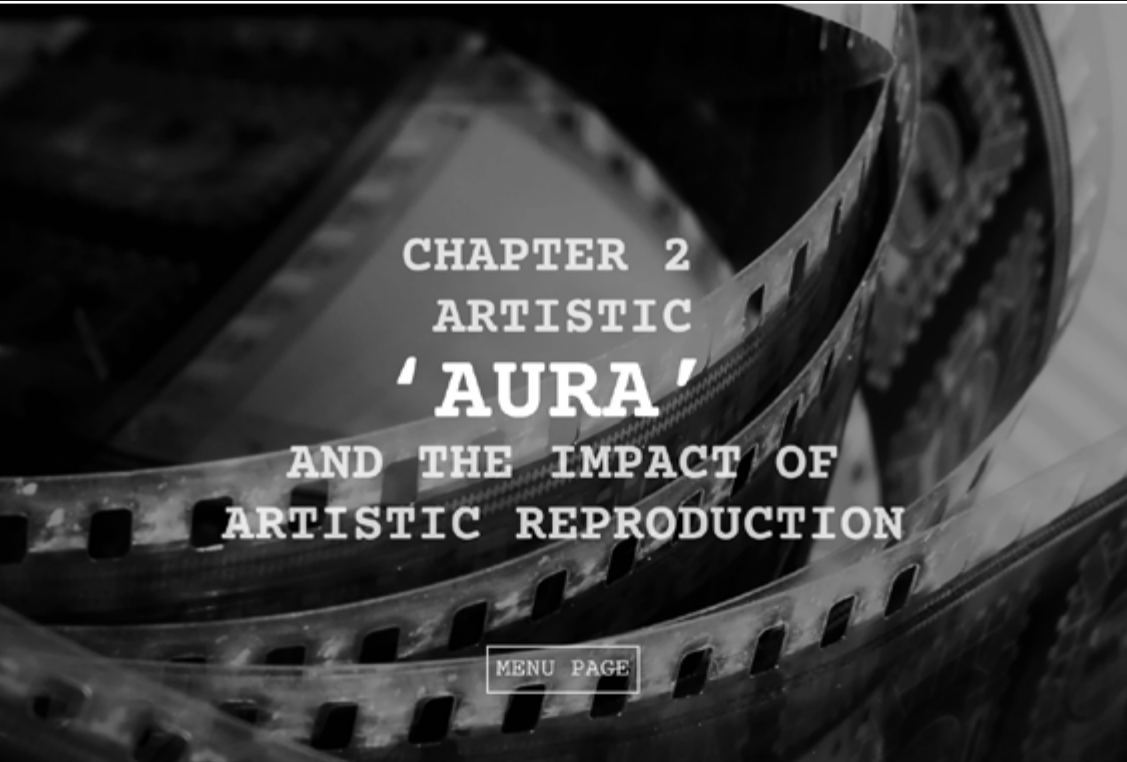
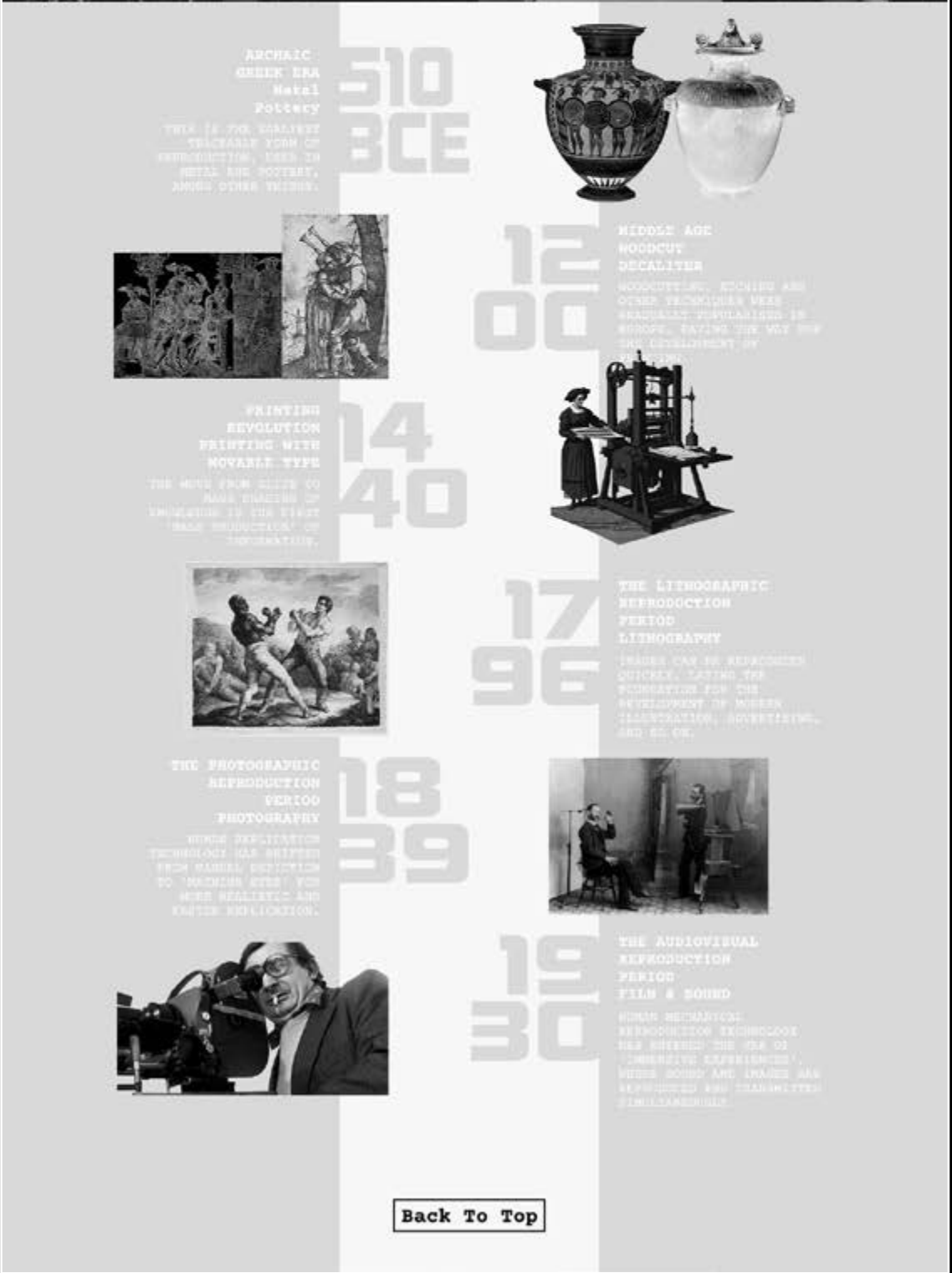
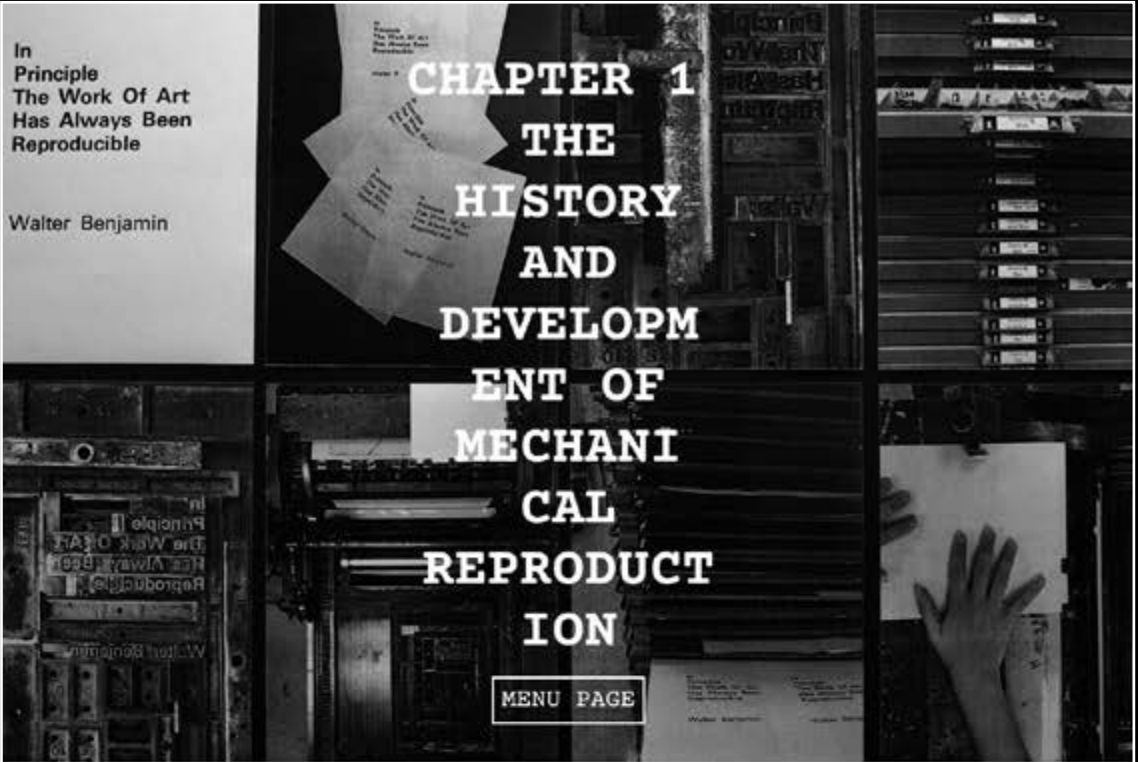
AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNn

1234567890

Viewing link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wer0U89BZKA>

Layout Showcase (main Screen of Chapter 1,2,3)



User Testing & Interaction Feedback

Testing Objectives

Focus areas included

- 1. Understanding of abstract theory through design
- 2. Intuitiveness and engagement of interactive elements
- 3. Emotional and narrative response to the structure

Interaction Test Scenarios

- 1. Scroll vertically through all three chapters
- 2. Hover on images in Chapter 2 to observe transitions
- 3. Click/tap on timeline points in Chapter 1
- 4. Observe and react to typing animation at the ending
- 5. Provide feedback on pace, clarity, and engagement

Participant

Name – Yansong Wu
Age – 23-Year-Old
Background – Design graduate student who has read
<The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction>

Key Observations from Interaction Testing

For Scroll-to-reveal text

User Response – “Smooth and readable, felt like guided reading.”
Design Adjustment – No change Validated approach

For Hover-to-transform images

User Response – “Clear visual metaphor for aura loss, very effective.”
Design Adjustment – Retained as central chapter feature

Timeline dots (click)

User Response – “Unclear they were clickable at first.”
Design Adjustment – Added hover state/cursor icon

Audio layer (ambient)

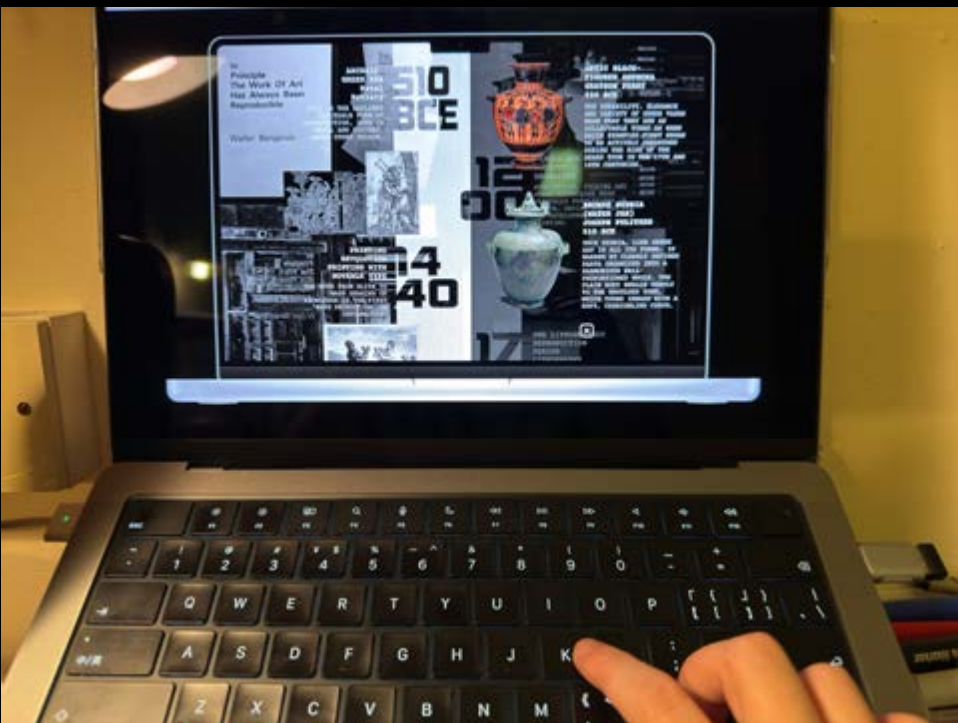
User Response – “Helped immersion but could be subtler on repeat.”
Design Adjustment – Volume adjusted and transitions smoothed

Reflections

User testing confirmed the conceptual success of combining scroll-based storytelling with minimalist interaction. Both analytical and sensory-oriented users were able to engage meaningfully, but clarity cues (like clickable hints) were key to accessibility.

The interaction testing reinforced the decision to prioritize subtle, poetic responsiveness over heavy animation, aligning with the tone of Benjamin’s text.

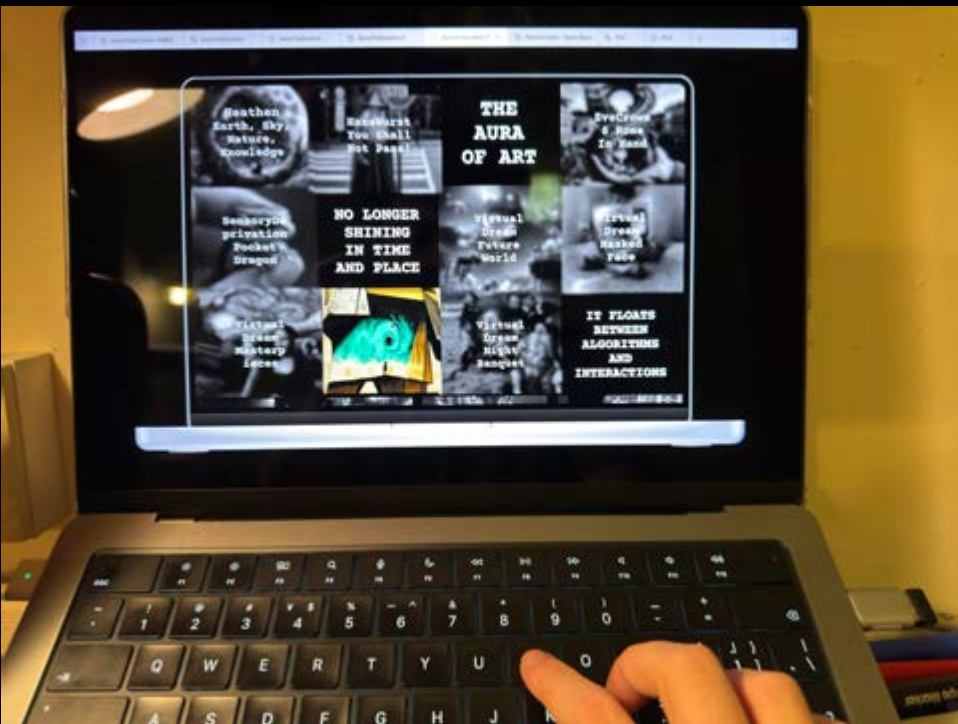
test footage



Testing the clickability of the timeline info window



Testing the aura transition interaction



Testing the hover shift interaction in the AI gallery



Critical Reflection

Design Purpose and Experience

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces a vertical timeline that traces the evolution of reproduction technologies, from print to film.

The aim is to visualize how mechanical reproduction gradually detached the artwork from its original ritual and tradition, setting the stage for aura loss.

Chapter 2

Through hover-based image interactions and cinematic scrolling, this chapter illustrates the fading of aura in modern reproductions.

It invites users to witness the transformation of iconic artworks and to reflect on photography's role in liberating art from its unique presence.

Chapter 3

This final chapter speculates on the future of reproduction through AI-generated images and a surveillance-inspired visual language.

It presents a cold, fragmented experience where authenticity has fully dissolved—closing with a black screen and a typing animation: “The aura fades. And we... go on copying.”

What I Learned

This project helped me understand how digital media can expand the traditional boundaries of publishing. I learned to translate abstract theory into interactive, visual, and experiential formats. I also gained insight into how different user types engage with content—some through thought, others through sensation—and how to design for both.

Optimisation Directions

With more time, I would explore deeper interaction mechanics such as scroll-triggered sound layers, generative text systems, or real-time user-driven transitions. I would also test different pacing strategies and refine mobile responsiveness to ensure a smoother multi-device reading experience.

Personal Takeaway

This project changed how I think about “a book.” I no longer see it only as a physical object, but as a flexible, immersive form of communication. A publication can be spatial, temporal, emotional, and digital. It can live on screen, respond to the reader, and still carry deep theoretical meaning.