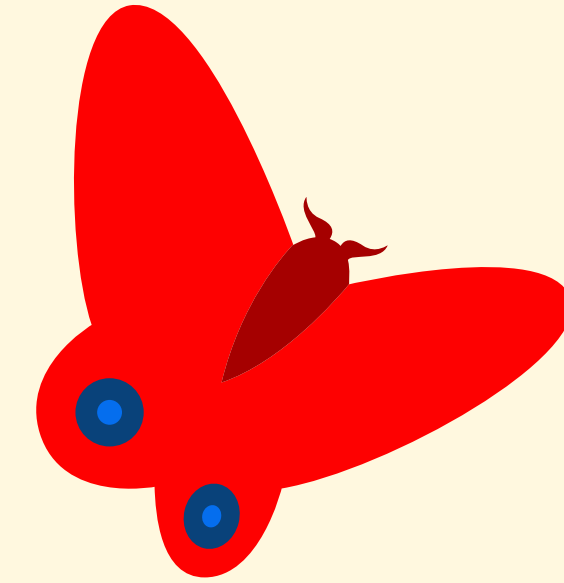


INNERFACE



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[View project here](#)

Graphic Design Thesis Project
SUNY New Paltz
2022

Process Book



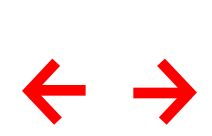


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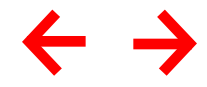
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION



Many of us go through life in search of love, acceptance, and belonging from the world around us. Doing so can cause us to forget who we are. “Innerface” is a video walk-through of a digitally simulated computer interface that reflects the experience of losing touch with your sense of self due to outside influences. These influences include toxic personal relationships, societal standards, and capitalism, represented through text messages, a social media feed, and pop-up advertisements, respectively. In letting the world around us dictate who we are, we lose sight of our true selves. The design of “Innerface” compares the influence of these external forces on our view of ourselves to the intrusiveness of the digital world. As the story of “Innerface” progresses, more influences are introduced to the user, causing the design style to alter from inviting and warm to loud and confusing. Color combinations that appear to vibrate are used throughout to reflect the disorienting feeling of losing yourself.

The goal of “Innerface” is to encourage people to explore themselves and question if the face they present to the world is their true one by displaying how we construct meaning about ourselves from the world around us.





THESIS 1 RESEARCH - INITIAL IDEAS



I started off Thesis I wanting my project to be about the impacts of narcissistic relationships. I wanted to create some kind of horror storytelling website that could highlight the effects of narcissism as a way of bringing awareness to the issue. As I started researching this topic and trying to find people to talk to about their experiences, I realized this topic was too heavy and sensitive for me to focus on. I shifted my focus to another topic that is important to me: the many ways in which the world around us can make us lose sight of who we are. I was still interested in creating some type of visual-based storytelling website with elements of horror. Some of the forms I was considering for my concept were: a click-through animation website, a choose your own adventure website, and a scrollytelling website.

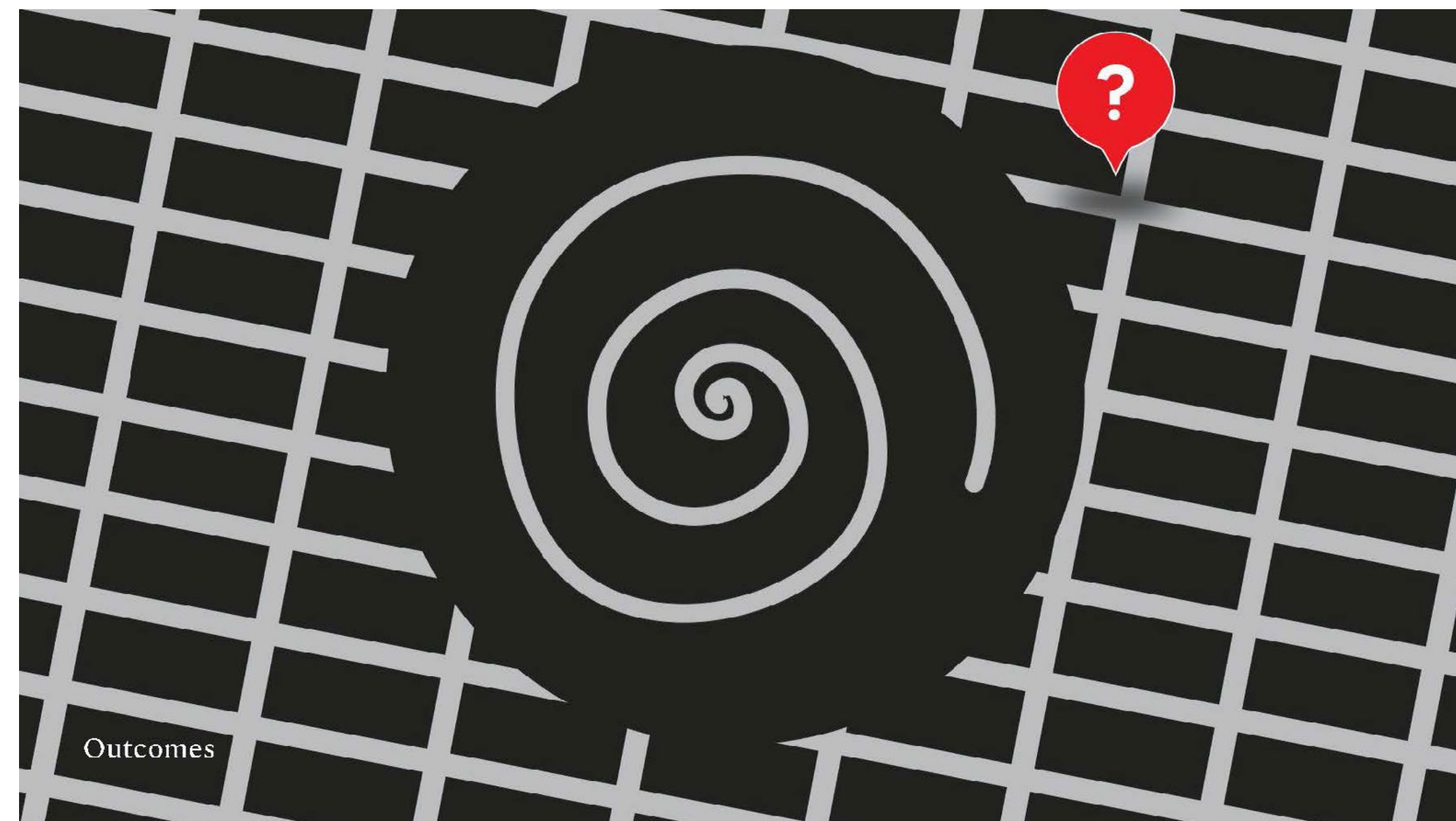




THESIS 1 RESEARCH - CHANGING TOPIC



By the time of my Pecha Kucha presentation, I thought that my project was going to be an interactive storytelling map about finding yourself. My plan was to create a map with 4 pinpointed locations that the user could visit. Each location would represent a different stage in the process of losing yourself. It wasn't until the winter break that I started thinking of making a computer simulation. I did research early on about how to create feelings of horror in design. I kept some of that original vision of horror storytelling alive through the unease and general creepiness I expressed through the colors and fourth-wall breaking in my final project. I didn't want the sense of horror to be too obvious, so I intentionally strayed away from typical horror aesthetics.

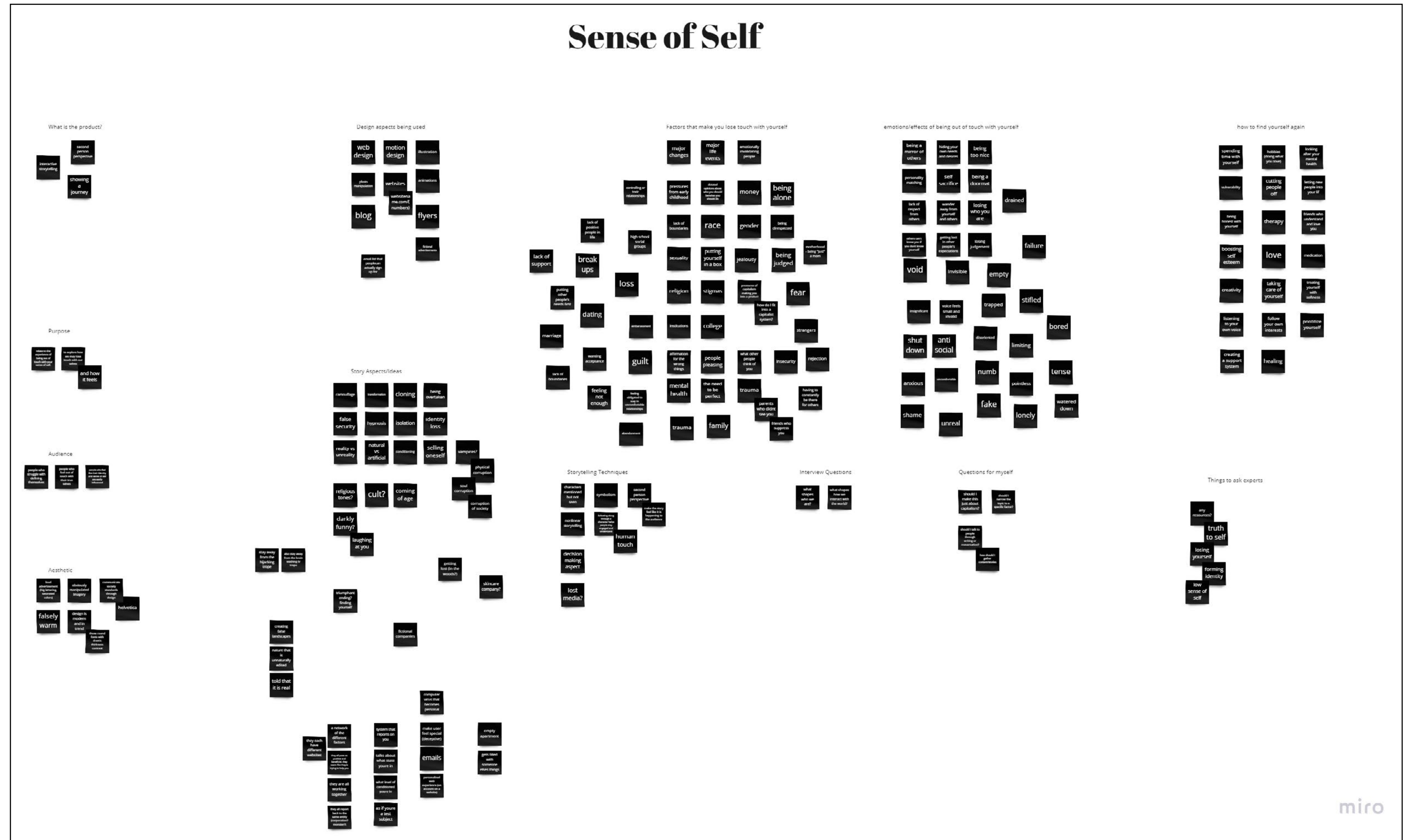


Slide from Pecha Kucha Presentation



I began the brainstorming process with a mind map. I dumped all of my ideas onto a Miro board and then organized them into categories.

View Miro board here:
https://miro.com/app/board/o9U_lspVb9k=/?share_link_id=936166163524



7 P's

Purpose: To explore what makes people lose touch with their sense of self and relate to the experience of that loss or confusion.

Product: I will produce websites that allow for interactive storytelling

People: I will talk to people of varying ages about their experiences with their sense of self. They will help with providing experiences and emotions for me to draw from. I will also talk to experts in social psychology and identity formation to learn more about the psychology of identity and the self.

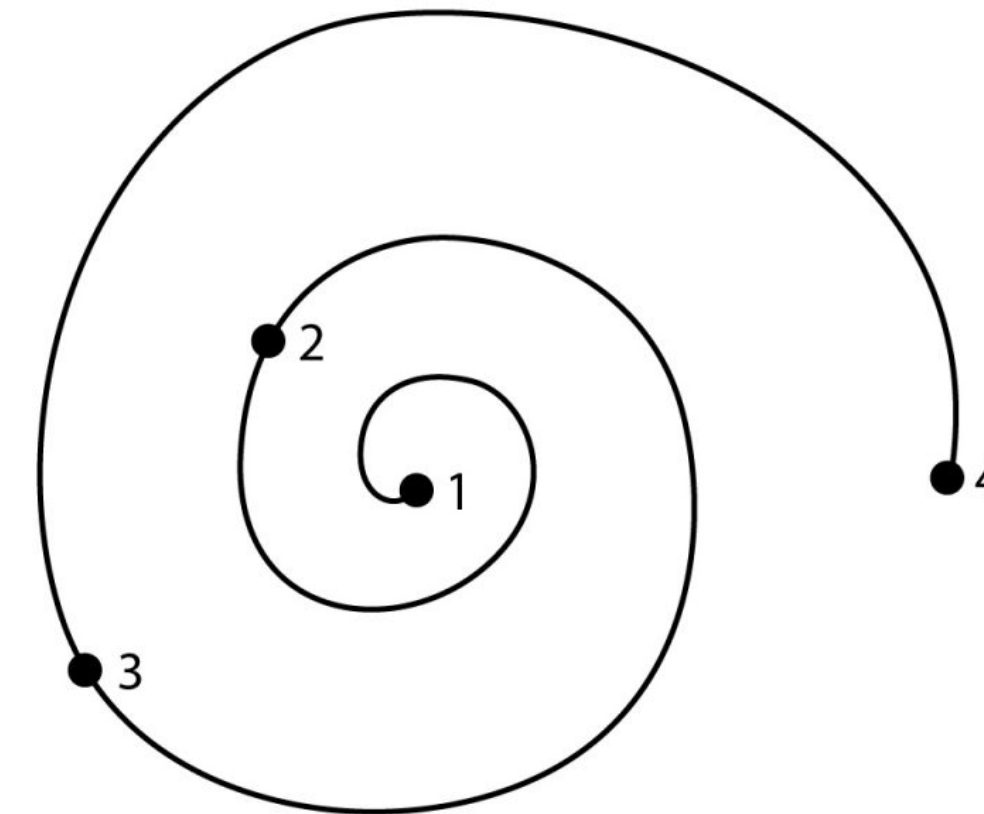
Process: I will engage audiences with this project by creating visual storytelling that uses a 2nd person perspective. I will also utilize storytelling techniques that help create a larger world. This will help the audience feel like they are involved in the story and can take an active role in it.

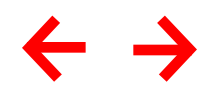
Pitfalls: Some risks of this project are my lack of coding skills. However, I have found other website making tools that I will be able to use without knowing how to code. I also do not have a lot of experience with storytelling like this, so it is something I will have to learn more along the way.

Prep: The biggest thing I need to prep before actually creating the project is creating some sort of outline for the story I want to tell and what specifically I want to create.

Practical Concerns: I need to figure out how I am going to find people to talk to about their experiences. I can find people on this campus somehow, but I'm not totally sure how to reach out to them. I also would need to figure out how to include people of other ages and how to reach out to them as well.

THESIS | SKETCHES

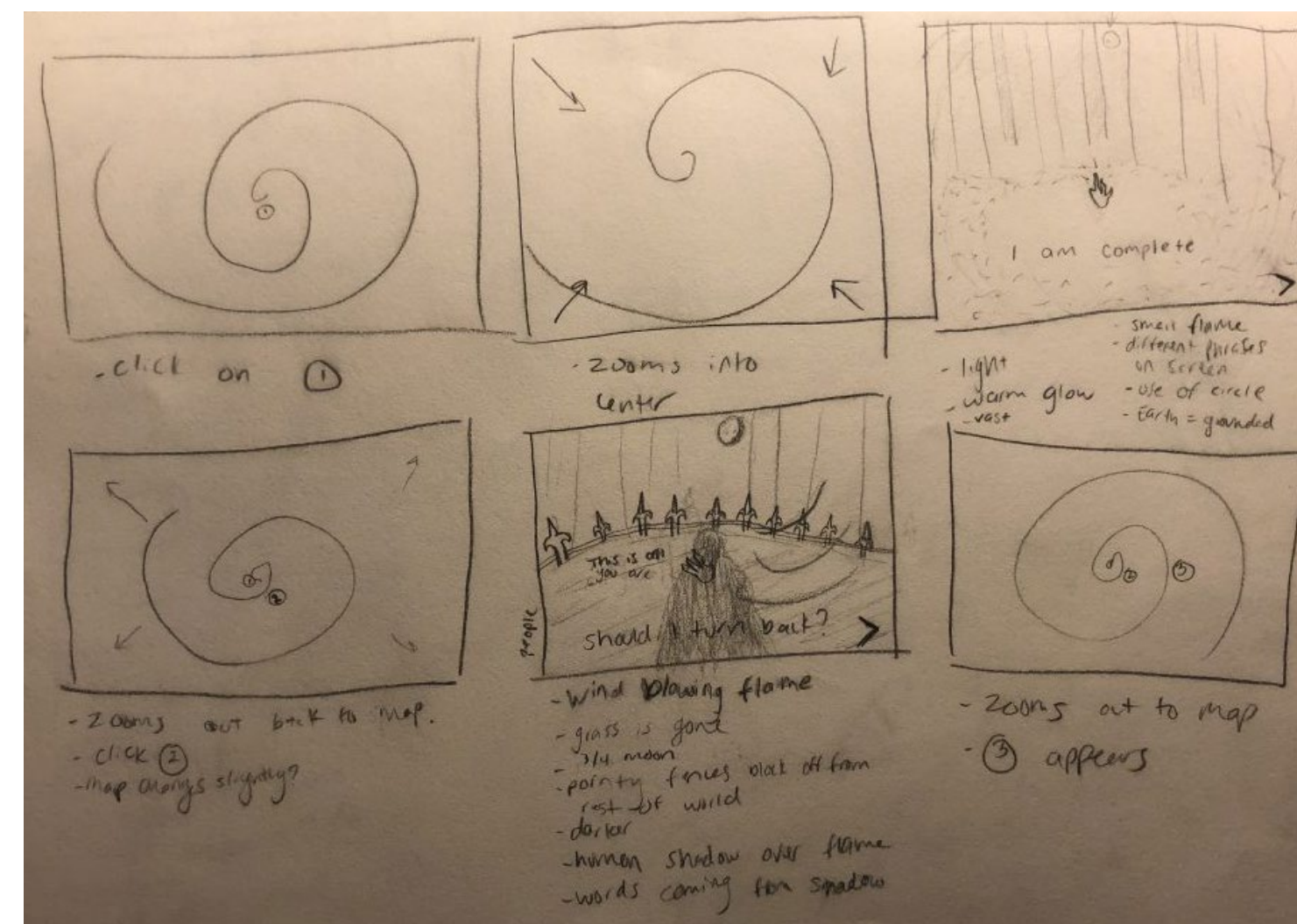


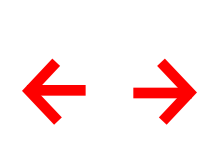


BRAINSTORMING - STORYBOARDS FOR MAP CONCEPT



These storyboards are using a landscape in the woods as a metaphor for the experience of losing yourself. First you see the spiral map and you click on a number and it zooms into the "location." The landscape changes in some way for each stage of the journey. I am using the different elements as symbols. Fire is symbolic of the sense of self, the earth is a symbol of grounded-ness, and the wind is a symbol of the outside pressures that cause people to lose themselves. I also used the moon in various phases to represent the progress in the journey. The full moon is the most authentic self and it becomes progressively darker as the story progresses.





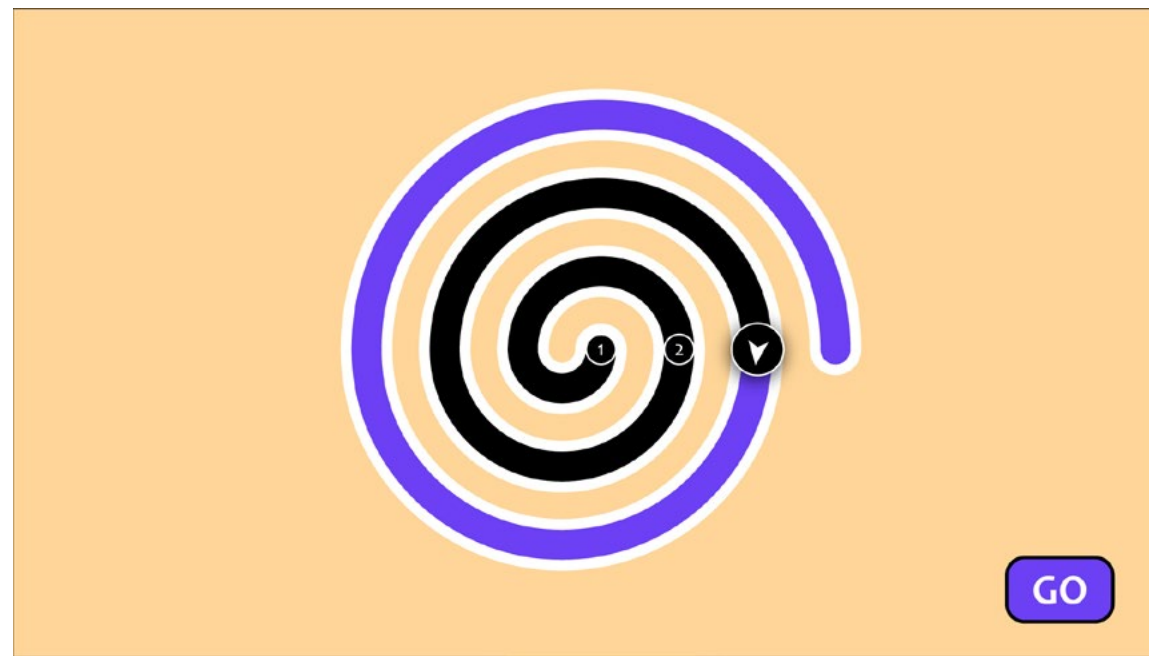
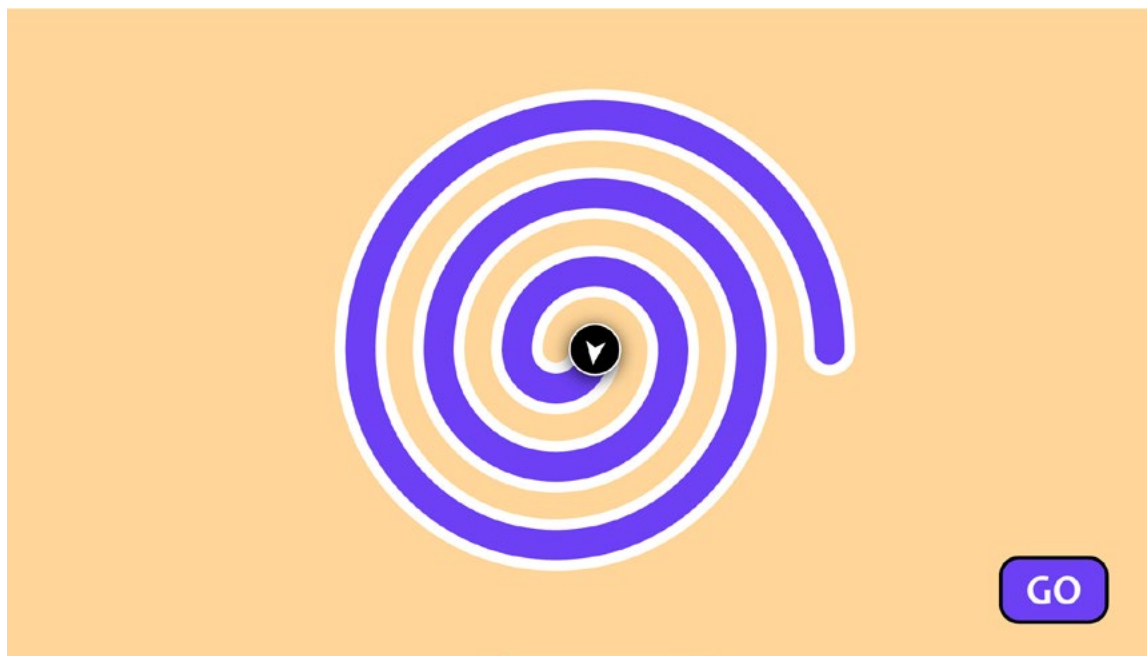
BRAINSTORMING - STYLE BOARDS FOR MAP CONCEPT



1.



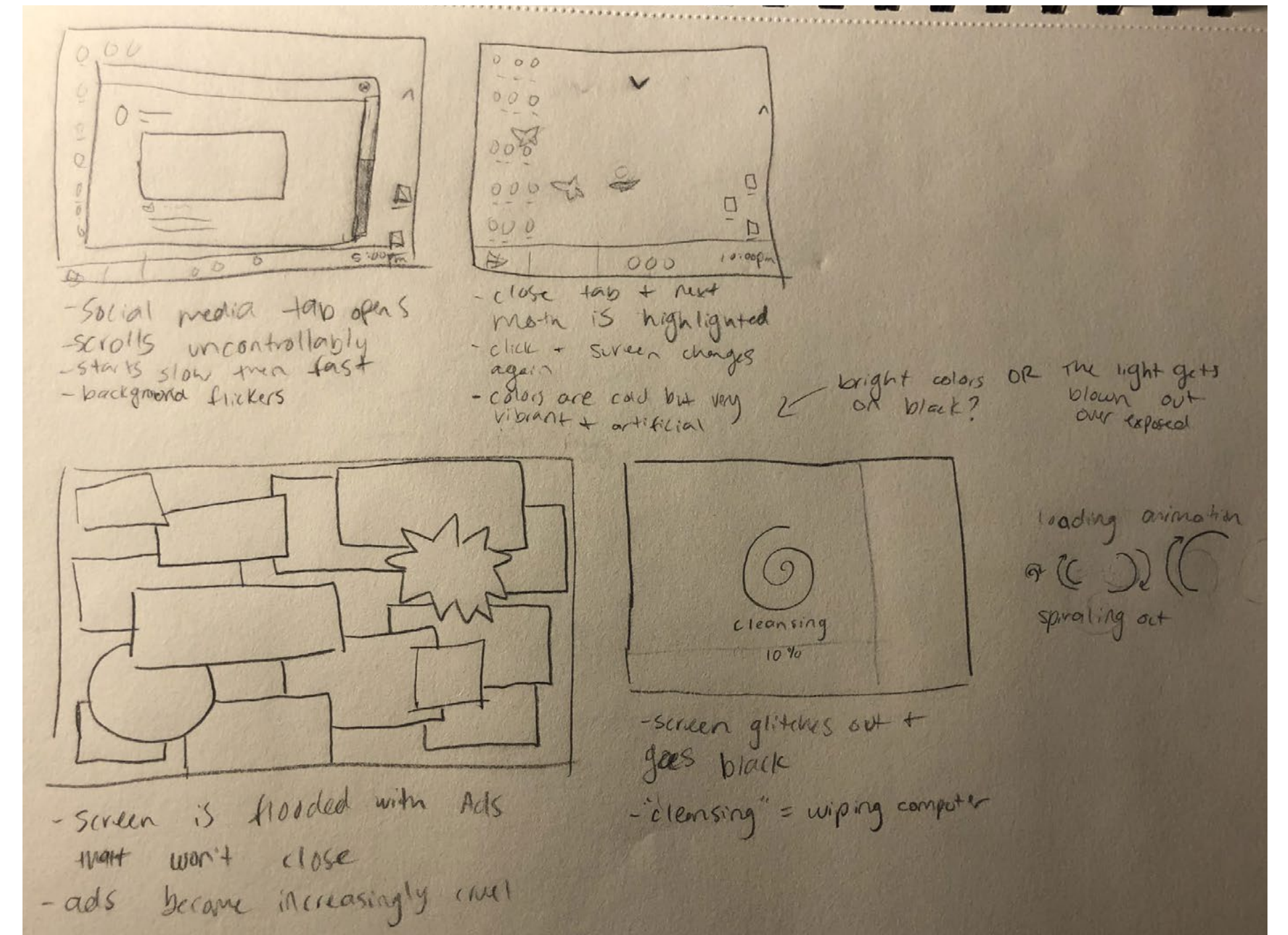
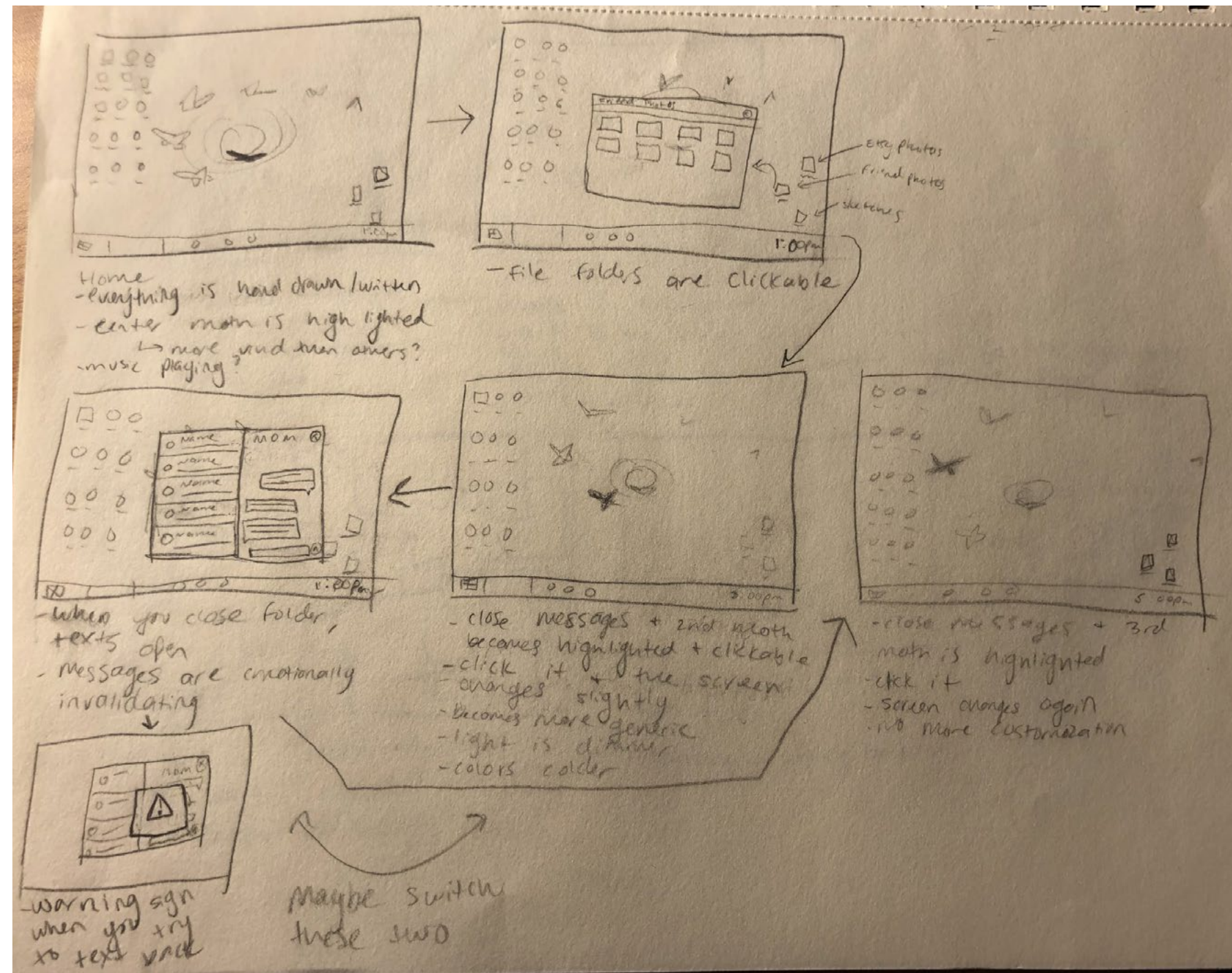
2.



← → BRAINSTORMING - STORYBOARDS FOR INNERFACE



These are the beginning storyboards for what would eventually be INNERFACE.





HYPertext

hypertext.futurefonts.xyz



“Hypertext” is a website that showcases and celebrates fonts and type designers through depictions of aesthetics and history related to the type design. The website is broken up into three modules: “Hyperfood,” “Hyperweb,” and “Hyperage.” “Hyperfood” has a depiction of consumerism that I was drawn to in which the user clicks on different food items and purchases them, triggering an unceasing series of pop-ups that cover the screen. “Hyperweb” also uses excessive pop-up windows that cover the content of the page, making the user question whether the pop-ups or the content beneath the pop-ups is the actual focus of the website. I was inspired by Hypertext’s depiction of consumerism and the frustrating interactable elements. This website inspired the intrusiveness and disorienting feeling in some of the elements of my project.

LA BOCA

site.laboca.co.uk



La Boca is a design studio that specializes in illustration and image making. They were founded in 2002 and are based in west London. They create designs for album covers, movie posters, editorials, advertising campaigns, books, and more. They accurately describe their work as being “one foot in the past, and one foot in the future.” I mostly take inspiration from their design style. I like their use of eye-catching, high contrast colors and their abstracted, stylized forms, not quite belonging to this world. Their work feels fantastical, sometimes larger than life. With this, they create atmospheres with each image. The designs are intriguing and leave you wondering about these worlds they have created. This allows the audience to let their imaginations run wild and create their own meanings. I was inspired by the aspect of user participation that is present in La Boca’s designs. I was also inspired by them aesthetically in their high contrast colors and otherworldly atmosphere. I, similarly, tried to create an atmosphere that felt like its own world to allow the audience to become immersed in the work.



ANTI-PIRACY SCREENS

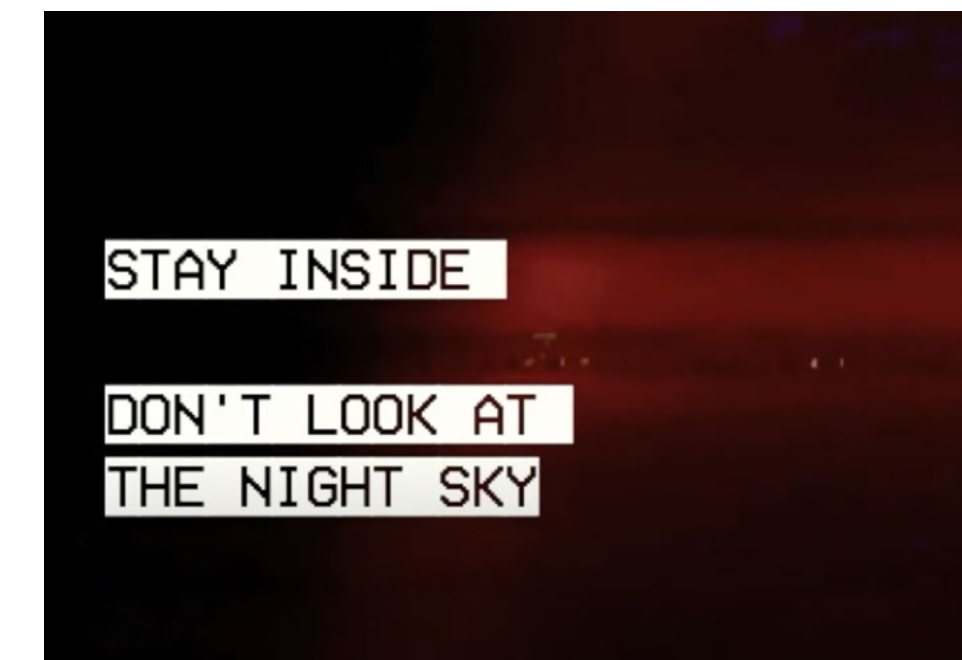


Donkey Kong Country 3, 1996

Anti-piracy screens are an effort to prevent and stop piracy of video games. Common starting in the 1970's, these anti-piracy screens would pop up in the beginning of a game, or even during gameplay, to warn you that piracy is a crime. These warnings would also be triggered if the system suspects you are using a pirated copy of the game. These screens have an inherent horror to them, as they break the fourth wall and feel as though they are talking directly to you. They almost make the game or console seem as if they have consciousness. What is so effective with these anti-piracy screens in freaking people out is how they catch people off-guard and break the fourth wall, making you feel like the game is addressing you directly for doing something wrong. There is even a community online of people who create fake anti-piracy screens who emphasize these creepy qualities. I took great inspiration from the fourth-wall breaking in these screens. I wanted my computer interface to feel as if it had consciousness and could speak directly to the user as these screens did.

LOCAL 58

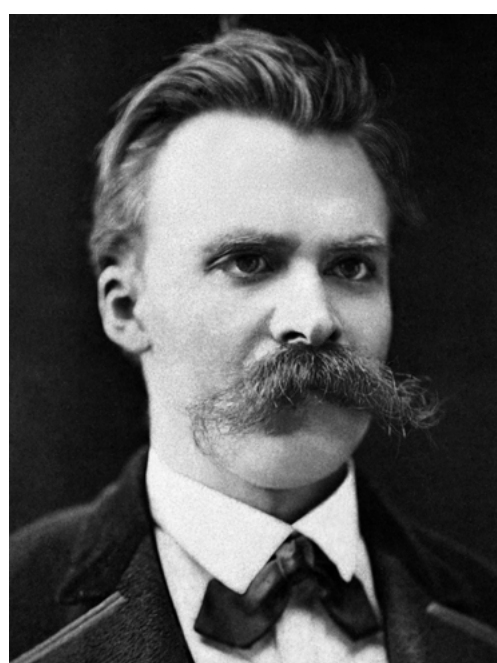
www.youtube.com/c/LOCAL58TV



"Local 58" is an analog horror video series on YouTube. Analog horror is a horror sub-genre in which a story is told using a pre-existing analog medium (VHS tapes, film reels, television broadcasts) and often does not depict any characters but instead uses the second person perspective. "Local 58" was uploaded to YouTube in 2017. The series takes the form of a local broadcasting station, including weather broadcasts, news, and a children's cartoon. It begins with an emergency alert about a meteorological event. There seems to be a conflict between two opposing forces of whether or not you should look at the moon. The sense of conflict comes from the feeling that the station is being hijacked or corrupted. The series has themes of brainwashing, manipulation, and corruption. I took inspiration from some of these themes and built off of them in my own work. I also utilized this second-person perspective in my work to make the user/viewer feel like they are experiencing the simulation for themselves.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE



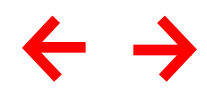
Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophies on how to find yourself became instrumental in my work. He directs people on their journey of self discovery through a few pointers: don't follow the herd, embrace the difficulty of self discovery, pursue what gives you meaning, and find your true values. One point that stuck out to me was how he urges people to analyze their fears, deep emotions, and darkness in order to rise above them. He suggests to challenge your demons but not to cast them out. This point is important to the transformation and rebirth that I wanted to communicate in my work. Nietzsche's philosophies were especially important to the ending of my project.

JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGY



Through his writings, Carl Jung has discussed how he believes the only way to become our authentic selves is through the integration of our conscious and unconscious realms that make up the totality of who we are. He discusses the idea of the persona, or the mask we present to the world based on what we deem appropriate and favorable. The mask hides our true selves that we have tucked into the shadows. He discusses how the shadow, the parts of ourselves that we repress because we deem them unfavorable, must be acknowledged and integrated into our conscious minds in order for us to accept ourselves fully. Jung's thoughts on authenticity and the conscious versus unconscious mind were important in helping me understand how to achieve self acceptance as well as teaching me how people bury their authentic selves from the world. This helped me amplify the theme of conscious versus unconscious in my project.





RESOURCES - PROGRAMS USED



PHOTOSHOP

Digital painting
Designing screens



ILLUSTRATOR

Designing screens
and interactable
elements



XD

Prototyping



AFTER EFFECTS

Animation &
motion design



PREMIER PRO

Editing all video
components
together



OUTREACH & FEEDBACK



I met with Josh Korenblat during Thesis I to help give me some direction on how to start creating this story. My biggest takeaway from my meeting with him was that I needed to create curiosity in the audience to want to continue watching/interacting with my project. I have to create some sort of interest or motivation in order for this journey to feel immersive and purposeful. He also encouraged me to think about how I am going to address the user. Overall, he gave me a lot of helpful questions to help guide my thinking.

I interviewed therapist Yolanda Martins to get a professional perspective on my topic. I asked her about how people lose themselves and how they can find themselves again. My biggest takeaway from our conversation was that every person is born whole and they never lose the core of their selves. They might lose sight of who they are, but it is never totally lost, just buried.





I created a questionnaire asking questions about people's journeys with their sense of self and the factors that cause it to change. The responses were helpful in showing me the larger themes and connections between these different experiences. At the core of it, the factors that caused people to lose touch with themselves stemmed from fear of rejection and the desire for acceptance and love. Conversely, the thing that people most needed to connect themselves back to their authentic selves was love. This includes self love, surrounding yourself with people who you love and who love you, and doing the things that you love.

QUESTIONS ASKED:

1. List three things that define who you are.
2. When or where do you feel like the most authentic version of yourself?
3. What makes you feel like you can't be your true self? What emotions, situations or circumstances prevent you from being who you really are?
4. How do you feel when you are not your authentic self?
5. Was there a time in your life when you felt that you lost your true self? How old were you? How long did it last? What do you think caused it?
6. What did you do to reclaim yourself from that situation (if you did)? What helped you find yourself again?

View questionnaire at forms.gle/f4zgUCWQBToczJnt7

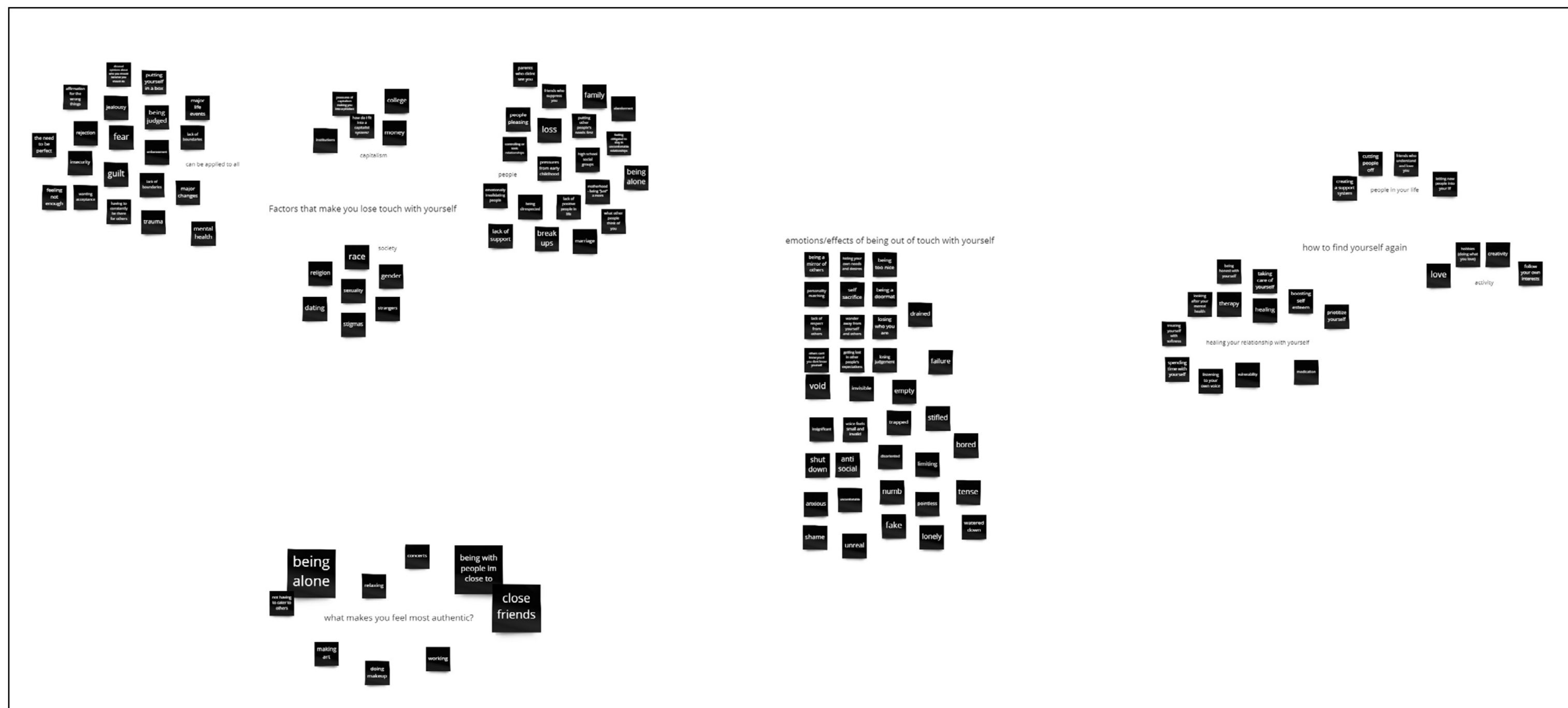




OUTREACH & FEEDBACK



TAKEAWAYS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE



View Miro board at miro.com/app/board/o9J_lspVb9k=?share_link_id=936166163524

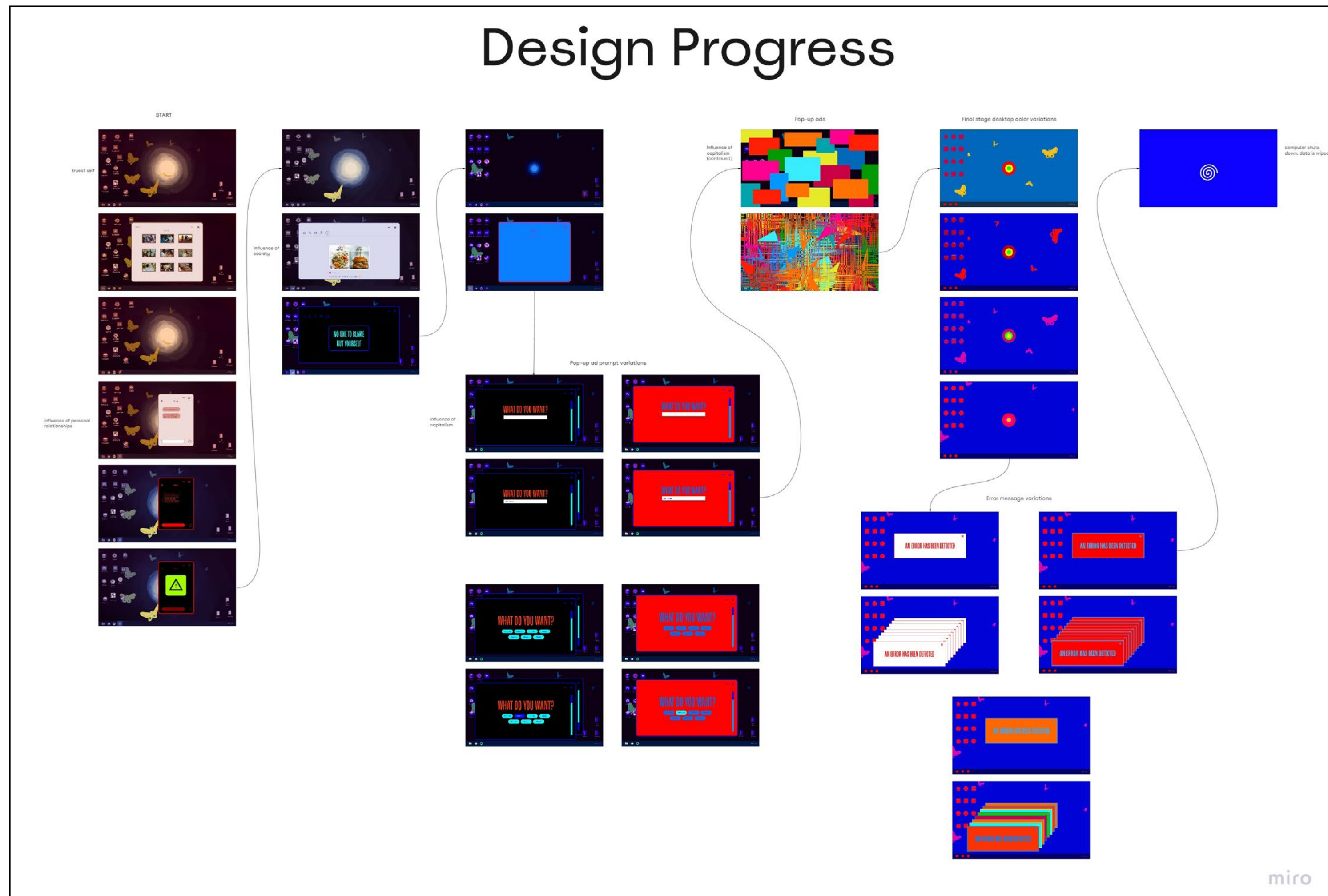
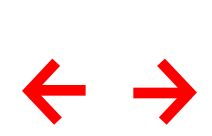


THESIS II MIDTERM REVIEW



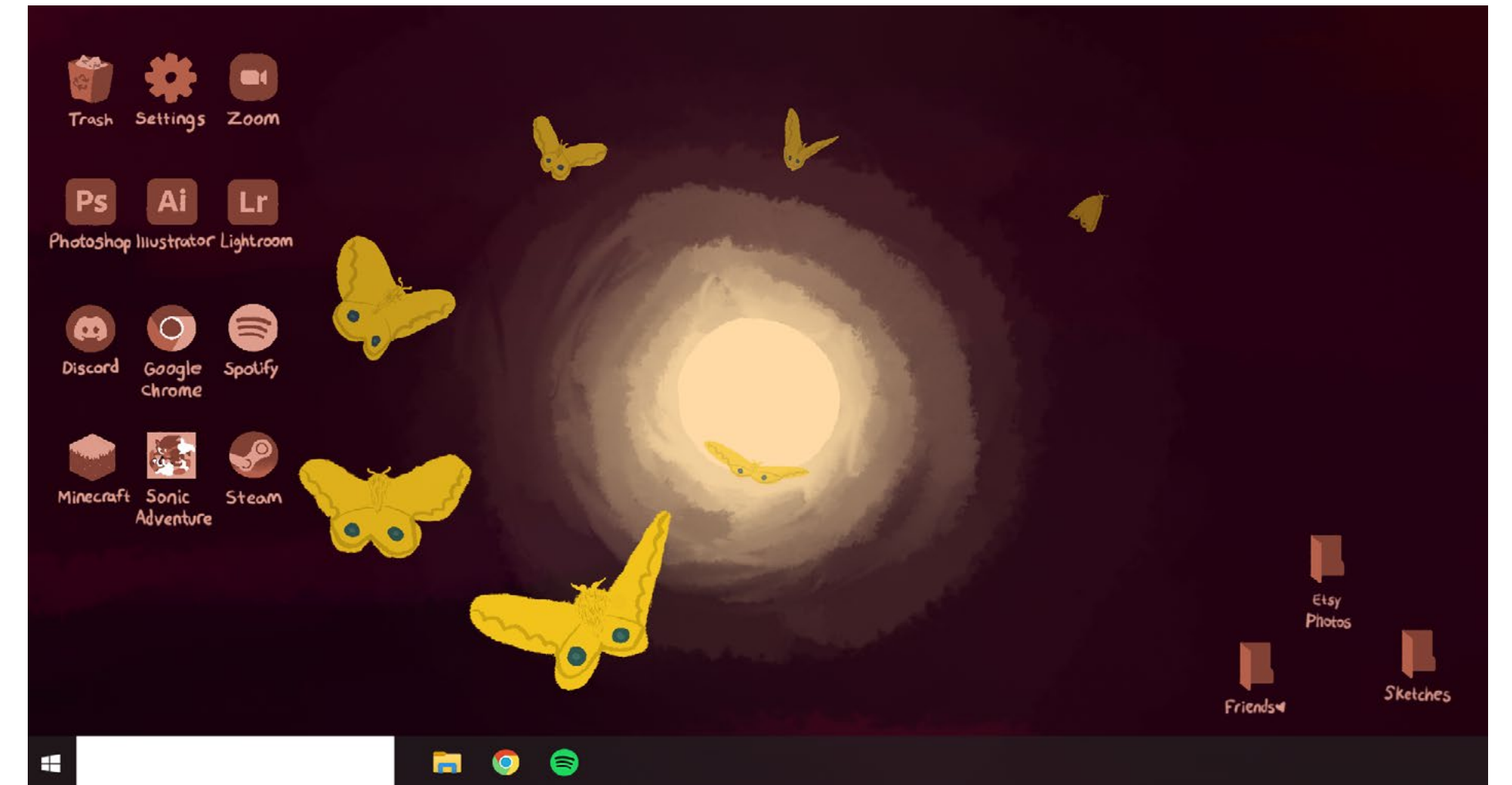
For the midterm review, I presented all my screens I had designed so far and my in-progress prototype. At this point, I was still unsure of how I would end the story. I had an idea in which the computer would detect an error, causing the screen to go black, leaving the viewer with a message like “Can you see yourself?” and a black screen that they could see their own reflection in. I asked people for their thoughts about this idea or other thoughts about how it could end. A few people said that they liked this idea because it was showing how we could disconnect from technology and walk away from the digital world. While I agree with this as a concept, this idea felt too surface level and the sentiment didn’t match up with the message I wanted to leave people with: that you can go back and find yourself and that you don’t need to abandon yourself for the sake of a false image. From here, I started thinking about how to show the user going back through the different stages of altered desktop backgrounds to return to the original state, the true self.





View Miro board at miro.com/app/board/uXjVOHTARMQ=/?share_link_id=843596851176

One of my biggest struggles early on was deciding what form my project would take. My idea in Thesis I was quite vague, even by the final review. I had a lot of trouble sticking to one idea because they all felt too flat or the form felt too limiting. It wasn't until the winter break between Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 that I scrapped my previous ideas and created something totally different with the same core concepts. By the end of that break, I had my first screen designed that I continued expanding on into my final project. Even once I had the concept for the desktop simulation, I still thought I would have been making an interactive prototype. I realized that user interaction wasn't actually necessary for this project, so I decided to turn it into a video.



The first screen I designed for INNERFACE during the winter break of 2021–2022



My other greatest obstacle was constructing how the story would end. I had the concept in mind that I wanted the user to return to the original desktop background from the beginning to show their return to their authentic self, but I was not sure how to get there. At times I felt haunted by my own work because I couldn't think of what to do with it. I spent a lot of time creating outlines, journaling, storyboarding, and talking to people about how I could conclude the story. Journaling about my project was a huge help for me, because it allowed me to write out and develop my thoughts that would have otherwise been fleeting. Seeing my thoughts written out also helped me draw more connections between my work and the philosophical and psychological concepts that influenced my work (such as Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophies on how to find yourself and Carl Jung's psychology of the conscious and unconscious mind). It also helped highlight the connections I was drawing between losing your sense of self and the intrusiveness of the digital world. Thinking about my work in relation to these large ideas helped me pave the road for the conclusion of this journey.

Bloggging throughout this entire process was similarly helpful to journaling in that it let me develop some of my ideas through writing. It gave me a space to talk about the things that inspired me for this project and keep track of how those inspirations would change. It also helped me create weekly goals for myself and hold myself accountable to those goals. I used it to keep track of my design progress for myself to look back on to see my project develop.

Weekly Post #1

[1 Reply](#)

1. This week I watched a YouTube analog horror series called "Local 58" ([link to YouTube channel](#)) and I started another series called "Gemini Home Entertainment" ([link to the YouTube channel](#)). These series struck me because of the amount of graphic design involved in them, which includes logos, information screens and illustrated imagery. I was also interested in the use of horror storytelling. "Local 58" takes the approach of delivering a story through a news channel while "Gemini Home Entertainment" tells its story mainly through instructional videos. The perspective in both of these series is interesting because the viewers get to feel like they are involved in the story since there are no real characters (aside from a few monsters). I like this method of connecting with the audience. Another aspect of this genre that inspires me is how they create a world and atmosphere, which is something that I have always wanted to do with my work.

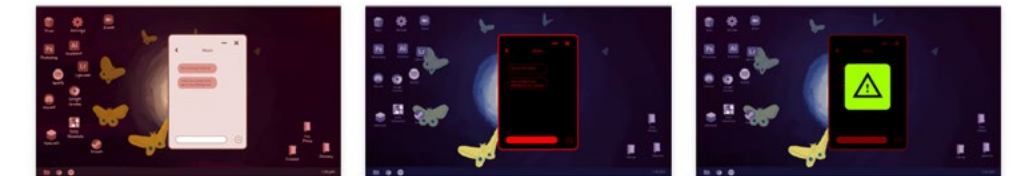
Weekly Post #4

[1 Reply](#)

1. This week I read some interesting articles about graphic design and horror. First, I read "[Hexus Press on Horror's Impact on Visual Culture](#)," which discusses the horror genre in print and graphic design. The author talks about specific works and how the horror elements function in the piece. I was specifically interested in Félix Labisse's design leant to the French literary magazine *Plexus*. This design (pictured below) expresses some of Labisse's obsessions with ideas of sex and control. He depicts an iron fist, which the author describes as "lustful" but also projecting intimidation. I found this interesting because a combination of feelings such as these can create a sense of unease, which is a subtle way horror can function. Another interesting part about this design that the author points out is that it was actually hidden beneath a jacket, adding another layer of meaning to the design and the idea of horrors lurking beneath the surface. The other article I read was about [the design of modern horror movie posters](#), which highlights how many modern horror movie posters have moved away from the typical horror aesthetics. The posters discussed in this article, such as the poster for *Midsommar*, do the opposite of what is expected of horror to subvert expectations and create a sense of subtle unease. This poster, as well as others discussed, work with the "eeriness of hyperreality" as a way to subvert expectations. This can be done by using saturated colors or bright lighting, for example. These readings this week have been insightful in how subtle unease and subverting expectations can go a long way in creating a sense of horror.



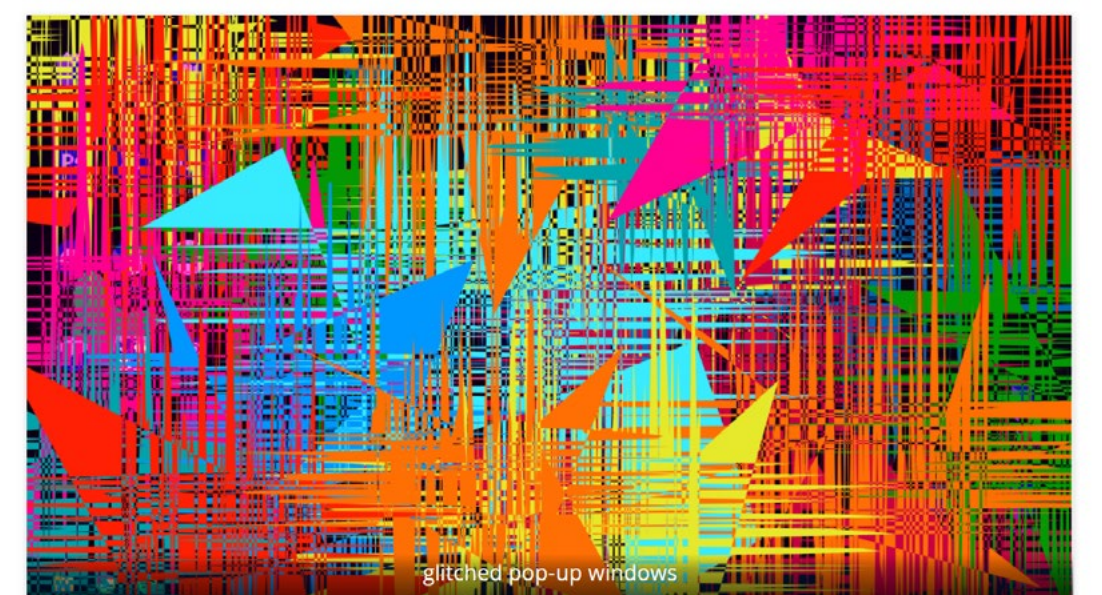
Sketches of interactable elements (text messages, social media feed, photo gallery)



Text messages with a parent to represent the influence of controlling personal relationships. Screen 1 is just the plain messages, which are invalidating to the user. Screen 2 is the dark version, which appears to show the deeper, harsher messages that the user is receiving. Then if the user tries to respond, it goes to screen 3, a warning message.

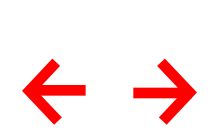


This interactable is a social media feed, representative of the impact of societal standards. The first screen would just be the normal feed, then it would transition to the dark version as you scroll in screens 2 or 3, which show the deeper messages being received

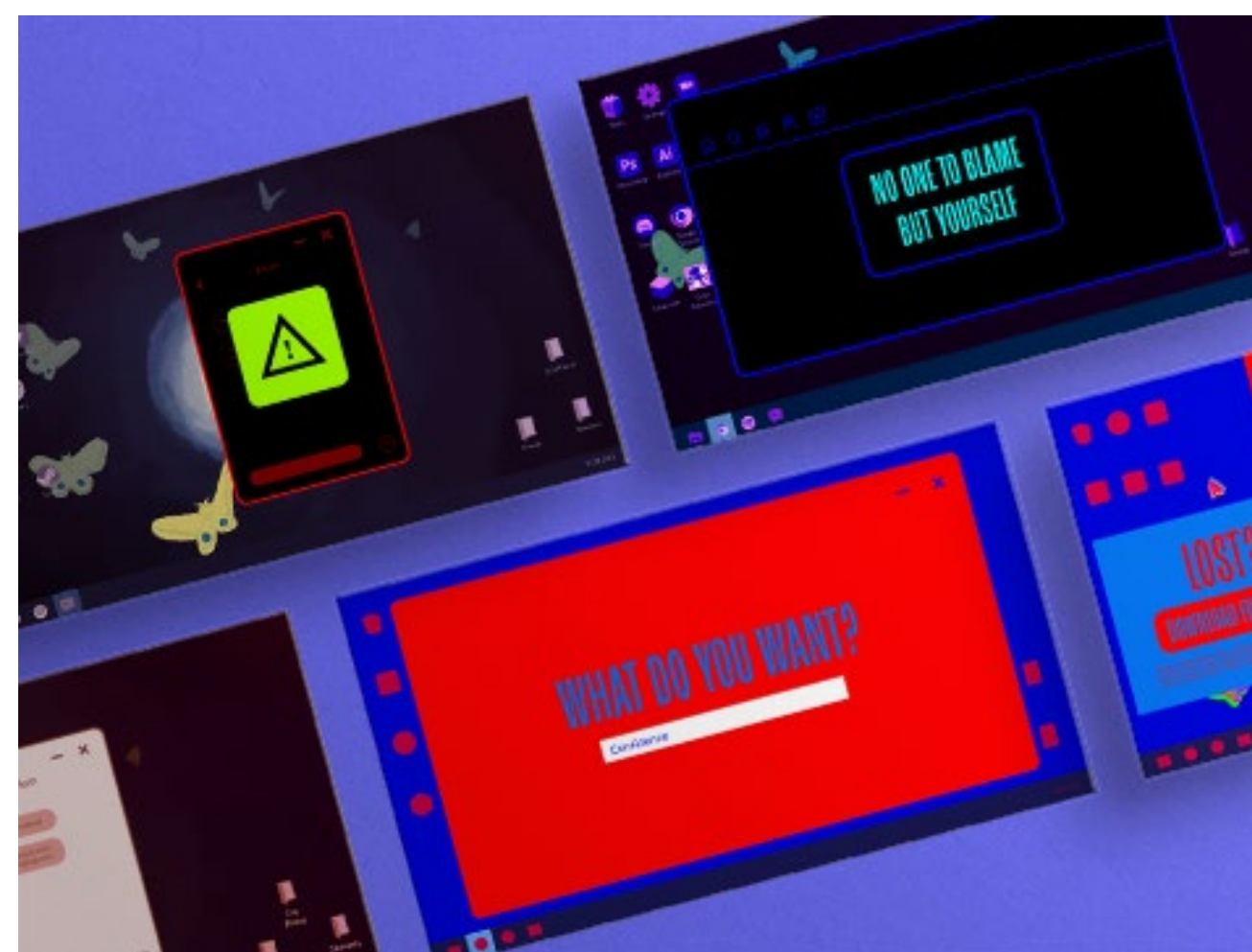
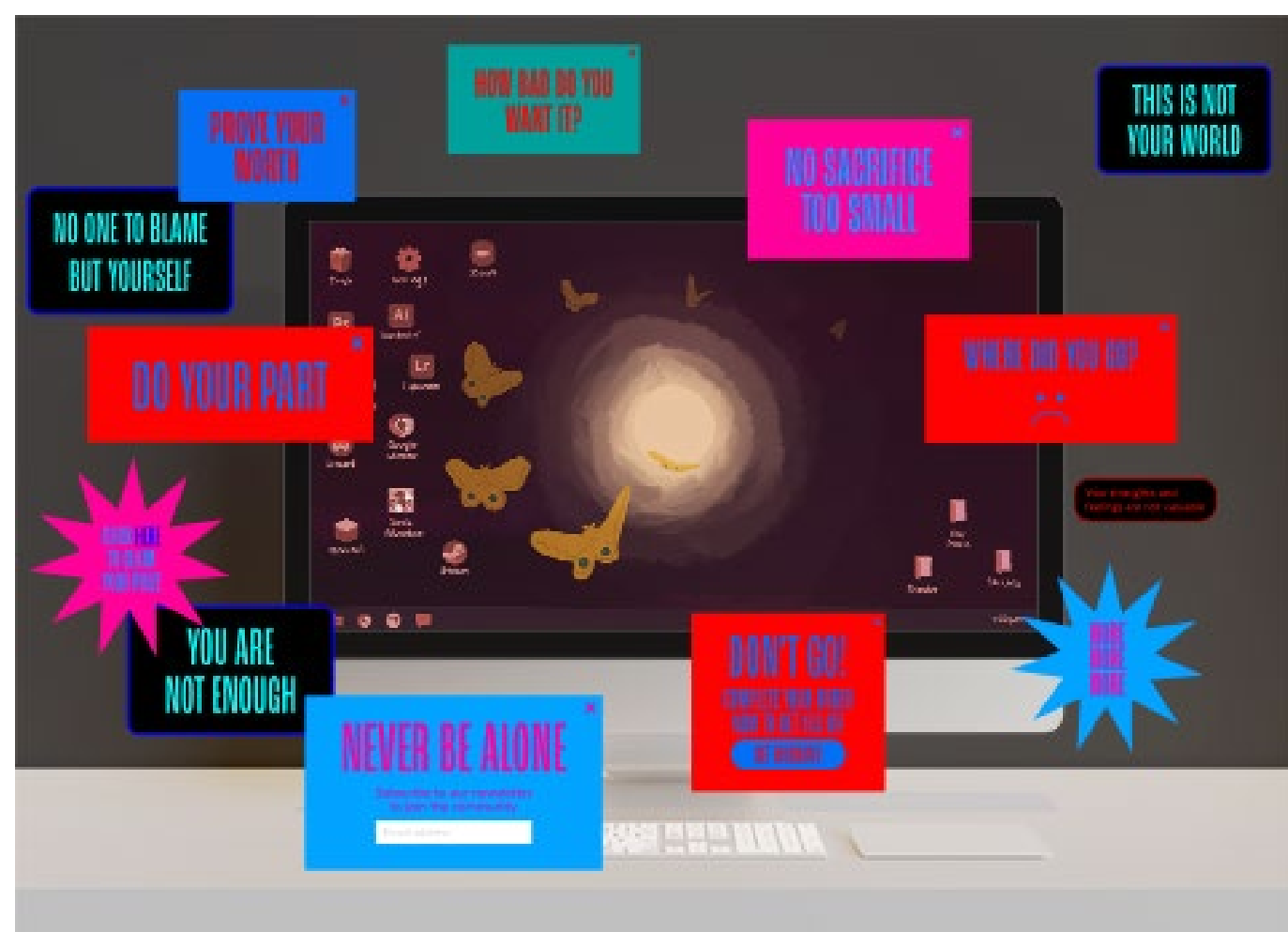
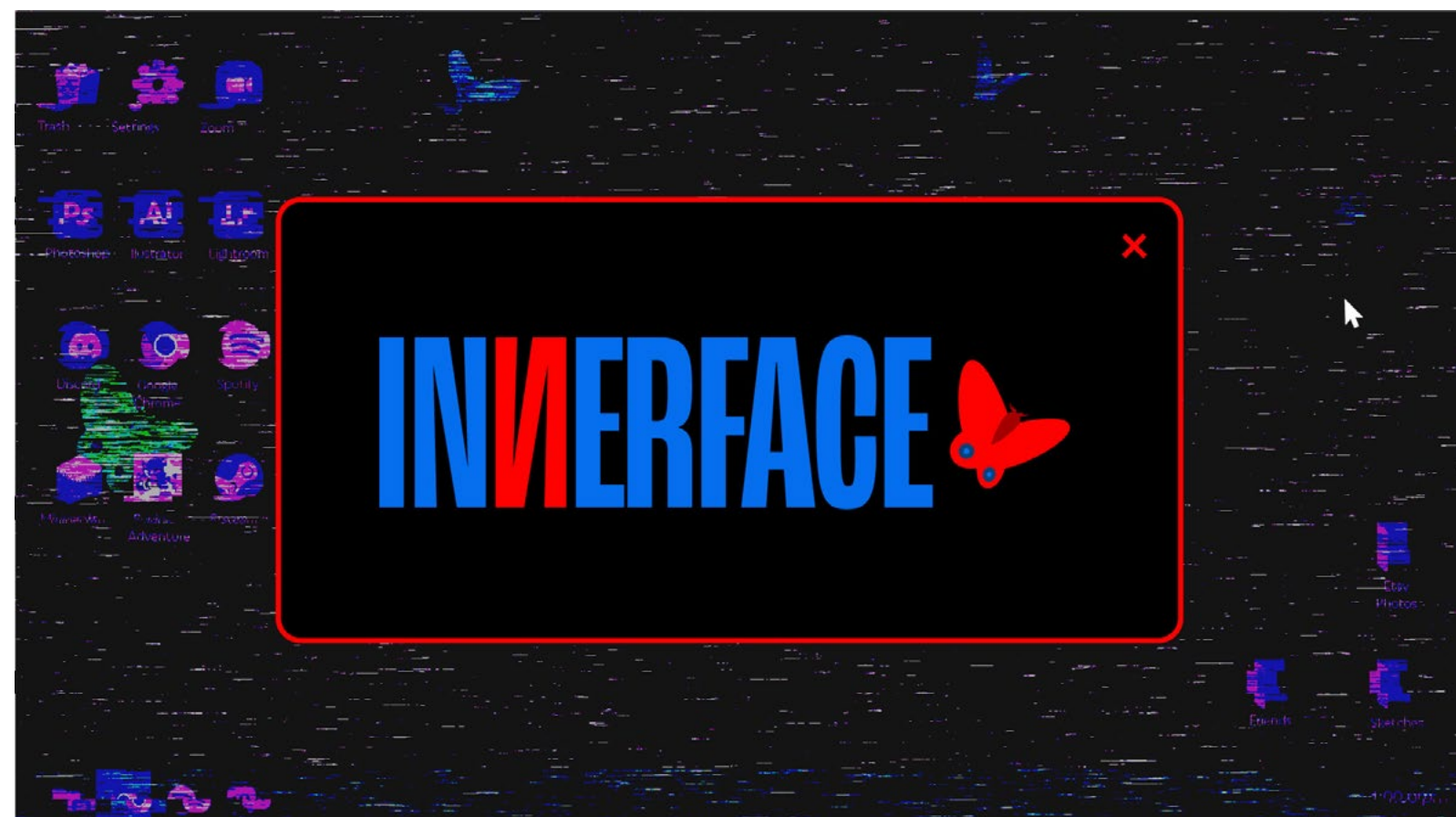




INNERFACE by Michelle Grieco
Watch at youtu.be/bdkGVQb2SuY



FINAL PROJECT - THESIS WEBSITE GRAPHICS



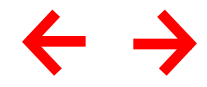




Posters



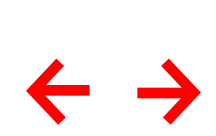
Postcards



The feedback I received at the show was positive and affirming. Many people commented on the bright colors and how they were difficult to look at. Most people seemed to relate to my concept as I explained it to them. At the show, I talked to two different people who worked in creating advertisements, and they had a personal connection to my work. They both noted how pop-up ads can be intrusive to the user. One of them almost seemed offended by my mockery of pop-up ads, stating that they try to stay away from the sinister practices of attention grabbing advertisements.

People seemed attracted to my display because of the bright colors and colorful lights. This was exactly how I wanted people to react. In the project itself, I wanted to create the feeling of intrigue through deception that leads to action as a means of producing a more favorable image. For example, the social media feed is telling you what to do and who to be in order to be likable and desirable. It is misleading in that it provides a false sense of hope that by engaging in this behavior, you will be accepted by the people around you and, therefore, happy. However, engaging in this behavior actually creates a false image of yourself and makes you feel broken, undesirable, rejected, and at fault for what the world perceives as your "flaws." I think my display at the show had a similarly deceptive effect. It seemed bright, colorful, and fun from far away, but once people got closer, they saw the darkness of these influences that cause people to forget who they are.

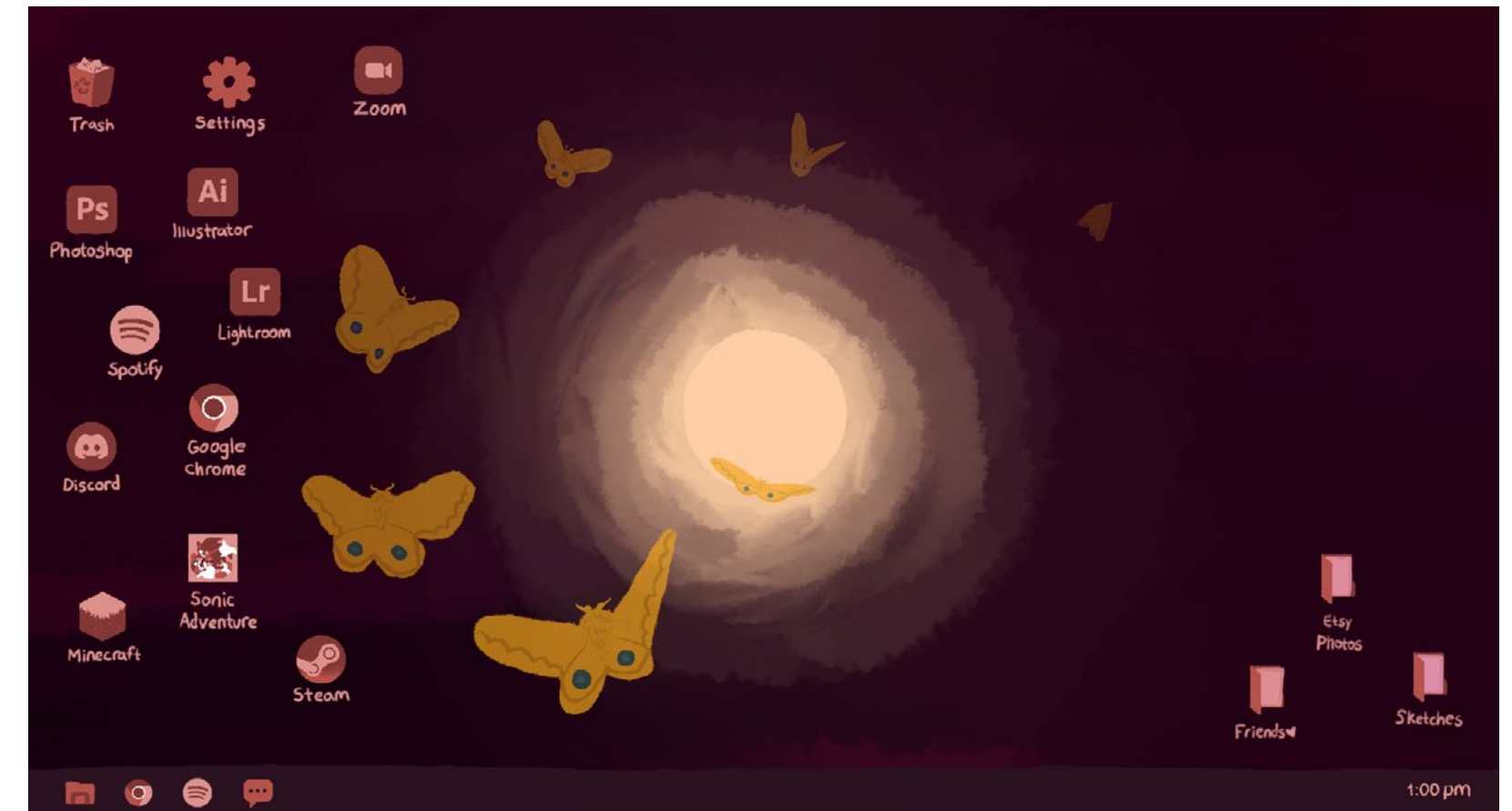


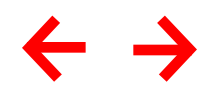


REFLECTION - ACCOMPLISHMENTS



One of the things I think I accomplished with my work was creating unease and a subtle eeriness throughout the project. It was important to me to have clear distinction between the warm, pink desktop backgrounds in the beginning and end and the cold, artificial backgrounds in the middle. These distinctions are important because they show the difference between the authentic self and the fabricated self. The feelings of unease are used to highlight these different states and show how the weakened sense of self is disorienting and uncomfortable. I believe I did a good job of encapsulating the themes and concepts that inspired me.





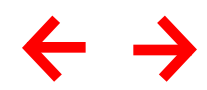
REFLECTION - IMPROVEMENTS



I think I could have done more to make the story have a better flow. Maybe I could have done something to connect the different interactable windows in a way that flowed more smoothly as opposed to just having the different windows pop up disjointedly.

Something I want to change about my project is that I want to add sound. I didn't have a lot of time to do it within the time constraints of the class, but after graduation I would like to continue working on the project. Sound could add another layer of dimension to the project that I think would elevate it.





REFLECTION - PERSONAL IMPACT



This project has had a great impact on me as an artist and a person. I have struggled a lot in the past with finding my voice in art. For a lot of my time in college, I created work that I wasn't proud of because I based it on what people expected of me or what I thought would be technically well executed and would receive a good grade. It lacked heart and I felt bored. Along with this, I have also been questioning if I even want to pursue graphic design at all. I pushed myself a lot to be vulnerable enough to pursue a project that I am passionate about and to stay truthful with myself about how I felt about the work. There is nothing I love more than getting fully immersed in my own work through research and creation, but it takes vulnerability for me to share such strong passions with other people. With this project, I was able to do a lot of the things I had been wanting to do with my art. I stuck to my passions and my artistic voice until the end and created a project that I love, and I am proud of myself for that! I think I have found a middle ground of visual art and graphic design that excites me. I also realized how much I love the topic of sense of self and how it changes. I have found a topic that I can continue exploring in my work for years to come!





THE END