

*TRANSPORTABLE LECTERN
INFORMATION AND USER GUIDE*



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INTRODUCTION

How are traditional forms of human organisation being shaped by current technological advance? How might this enable a re-evaluation of the way in which social and political activity is conducted? *L1 Transportable Lecterns* are open source, cardboard, flat-pack lecterns providing a cheap and recyclable method of public address to those who might desire it. Adopting the aesthetic, rhetoric and packaging design of global distribution companies, the near-platonic form of the lectern acts as an enduring symbol of public address, associated with the birth of western democracy. Here however, it is contextualised within contemporary conditions of production and consumption. Whilst the tools may be democratised, the environment in which they have been created and are used might undermine their emancipatory potential.

THE LECTERN

The press conference room, public address podium or publicity backdrop represents the pinnacle of contemporary hyper-banality. Skeuomorphs abound, garish style and soulless design seems to swirl together in some kind of globalised nightmare of mediagenic 'slickness'. As near-platonic stock-image forms, they are the epitome of non-space. No more is this apparent than in the context of politics and the manner in which mainstream political activity visually manifests itself.

There is a flattening of discourse, a smooth linguistic conjunction of the political and the corporate, narcissistic individualism and public address—as if no space is left for any other form of interaction and organisation. Whilst these spaces are often meant to represent the public expression of political values or act as chambers for discourse, it seems that their ultra-cliché status does not afford true cognitive reflection. The very nature of such spaces standardises the social bond, forming scripted, socialized zones.

When reflecting on the perceived implications of advertising in the 1960s, Jean Baudrillard succinctly articulated an interesting and perhaps disturbing quality of this system of communication. Even though resisting advertising in the imperative may have been—and surely now is—easier and easier, at the same time we have become far more susceptible to advertising in the indicative. On a secondary level, advertising presents itself as the clear expression of a culture. On a broader but more fundamental level it has become the basis on which our individual and collective psyches are now attuned. To this end and in the contemporary context, this commodified expression and understanding of culture and self could be said to have taken on ever-corporatised forms. The distinctions between spheres become increasingly consumed by the over-arching aesthetic, rhetoric and mentality of corporate enterprise.

In the lead up to the Iraq war of 2003, the then US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, gave an address to the United Nations Security Council justifying US military intervention. One of the points of contention throughout Powell's February 5th UN address was the claim that a tapestry reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica*, hanging in the UN building, was covered up. Some commentators at the time stated the decision to cover the politically charged artwork was owing to the nature of the talks. Attempting to justify a war with one of the most potent pieces of anti-war art behind was perhaps considered too

UN Security Council 2003





problematic. For many this was seen as the reason for its covering. However, others refuted this, claiming the reason it was covered had nothing to do with the supposed reaction such a contrast of imagery and geopolitics might spark. Instead it was claimed that the press had asked for it to be covered to ensure a good shot for their cameras. This implies that the concerns of the press were in the framing and staging of the public address, with a simple material backdrop being both easier to light and shoot, whilst also fulfilling the usual visual requirements for such an occasion. This latter account represents a far greater overall expression of a culture, as Baudrillard might suggest. The complexities of circumstances, events and discourses become quite literally flattened for the sake of efficient and effective transmission.

The multiple aspects of staging and ornament which adorn the press conference or televised political debate contribute to the visual regime of the particular occasion or ideology. They are reminiscent of the structural drapery employed in some classical Greco-Roman statues. The many folds, pleats and creases beautifully imitate the supple fabrics and materials which constitute the visual canon of such works of art. Often considered for its purely aesthetic qualities, in many instances the flowing fabric actually acts as an integral part of the statues structural integrity. There is a wonderful duplicity in such a technique.

The substance with no load-bearing capability in real terms is masterfully transformed into a vital component upholding the rest of the sculpture. The elements of staging which are employed in the realm of contemporary public address serve a similar function, but act to bolster the legitimacy of the speaker. Often without any inherently practical purpose, the staging becomes integral to the structural integrity of the message and its transmission. It suggests a slick corporatised professionalism which has come to be the visual benchmark of power and leadership.

Whilst style and ornament changes between context, one particular component of public address is near-ubiquitous—the lectern. Acting as a fetishized totem of authority, this object has come to denote the power and importance which public speakers seek, becoming a visual short hand which charges any situation. Applied to any context, the lectern is an inverse framing device, instantly prefiguring discourse. We already know what sort of message will be conveyed in seeing the situated object. When positioned in front of shipping containers, we inevitably assume that trade, local heavy industry and global marketplaces will be discussed. When in the back garden of an unassuming suburban house, the emphasis is perhaps placed on domesticity and authenticity.

Depiction of a Roman Rostra



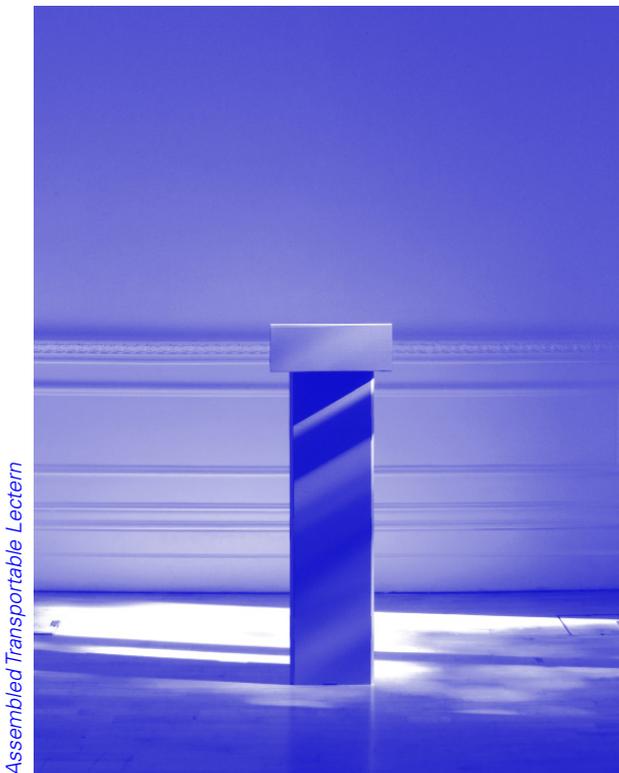
The lectern or rostrum is a communications device with a distinct heritage. Historically, it has sat at the heart of public speaking, and thus democracy. Inevitably its roots are in conflict. The rostrum can be traced back ancient Rome, the term coming from the term 'beak', which itself also referred to the bow of ships. When victorious, the Roman navy would take the bows of their enemies ships as trophies, displaying them atop the Forums in which civic activity would occur. Since then the lectern or rostrum has featured predominately throughout religion and politics. The rostrum sat, quite literally, at the heart of the European Enlightenment, being the place from which Robespierre and countless others addressed the French Assembly. The point I'm attempting to make, with this woefully potted history of the lectern is that in some shape or form, it has existed as a fundamental communications device throughout the history of Western democracy and modern political activity. As a mainstay of the organisation and address of the masses, there is something in its ubiquity which is of importance. The obvious requires continued interrogation, for all too often it is precisely where greatest attention must be focussed in order to make apparent the subtlest of activity.

"Basta con i balconi!" Translated as "enough with the balconies!" The anti-fascist slogan of mid-twentieth century Italy directly addressed the medium through which so many fascist leaders, most notably Mussolini, presented themselves to the public. Prior to any live mass visual communications technologies, the stadium, podium, rostrum and particularly balcony provided the best means of visually addressing a large number of people. The fascists of twentieth century Europe were particularly adept at employing such methods of communication, to the extent that they have become something of a visual cliché. In decrying the balcony, the anti-fascists signalled their disdain for the communications medium, coming to represent all that was wrong with the ideology they opposed. Perhaps this is the case now, to a lesser but almost more systemic degree? Might the very mediums through which contemporary social and political discourses are occurring—as expressions of particular ideology—need to be examined and maybe even disassembled?

The lectern places one person at the centre, establishing a particular power dynamic. Attempts have been made to negate such forms of communication in favour of supposedly more horizontal approaches, in line with particular ideology. Most recently, the Occupy movement would employ the human microphone technique

as a way of conveying discourse through a large number of people simultaneously. Each person listening and then repeating, on mass, the information in order to pass it further through a crowd. This method embodied the movements desire to deconstruct capitalist principles of power, organisation and communication. In this instance, emphasis is placed on the mass themselves, no one voice or person is placed visually or verbally above any other. There is a holistic sense of engagement and active participation in the discussion at hand. Although fraught with inconsistency and a particularly time-consuming means of communication, the human microphone is perhaps of most interest in that it expresses the ideology of the cause. Excusing the ever so hackneyed of McLuhanisms, the medium itself is actually what is important, not the content.

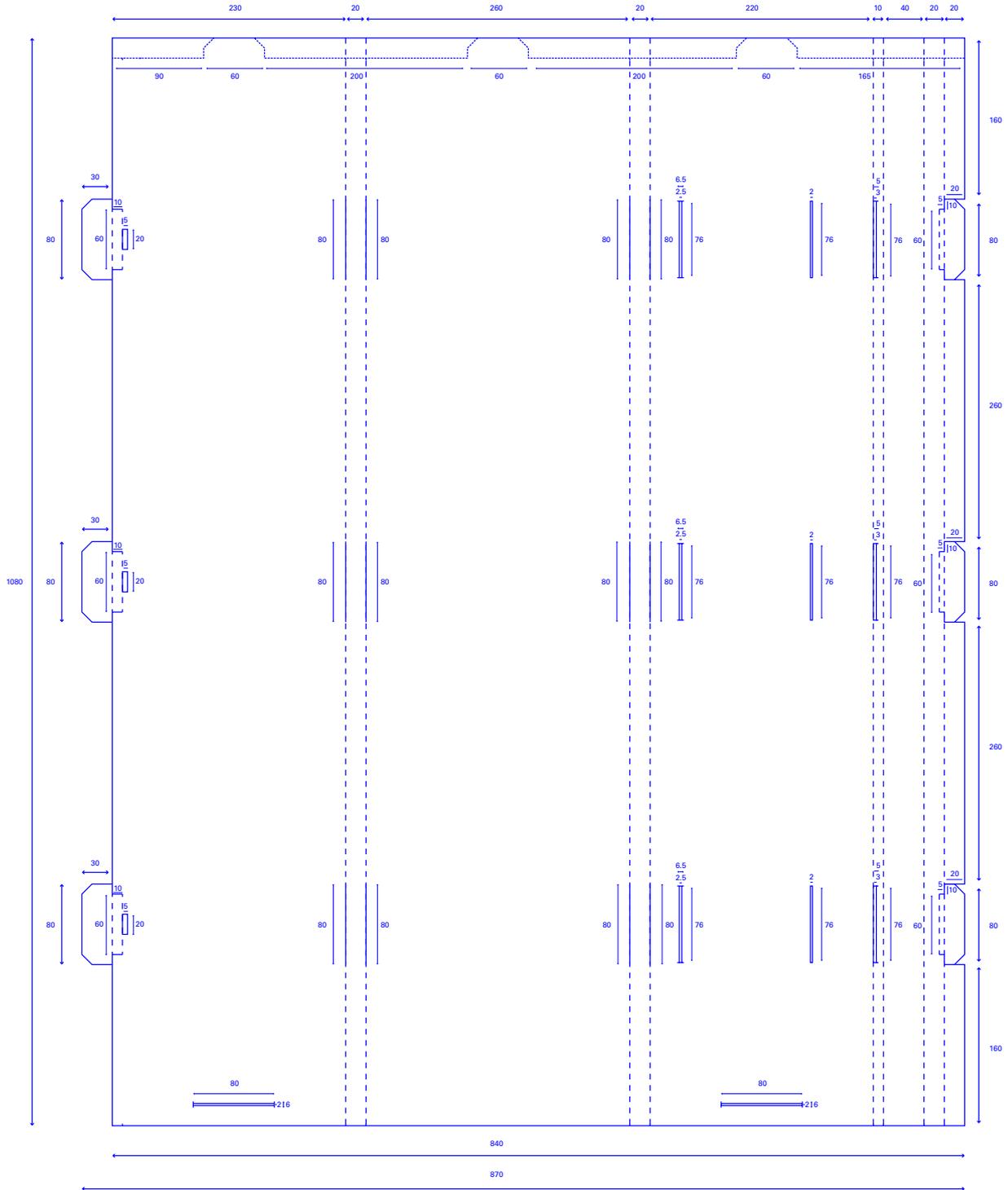
What if the lectern itself is placed under scrutiny? How might this communications device be subverted to at once critique its use and provide a democratised variant which may itself be co-opted or employed in any manner that befits the user? What might it mean if instead of the single or sparingly applied lectern, every person in a discussion were to have one? More than a gestural subversion of the inherent visual and discursive power of the object, to 'open source' the lectern, transforming it into a critical design object, may open up the potential affordances of the structure. Accelerating its ubiquity to the point of ridiculousness. By offering such a device out, surely the subsequent uses and misuses become something in themselves. In actuality, the notion of misuse is nothing of the sort. The further such an object can be defamiliarised, redefined and repurposed, then the more intriguing the outcome may actually be.



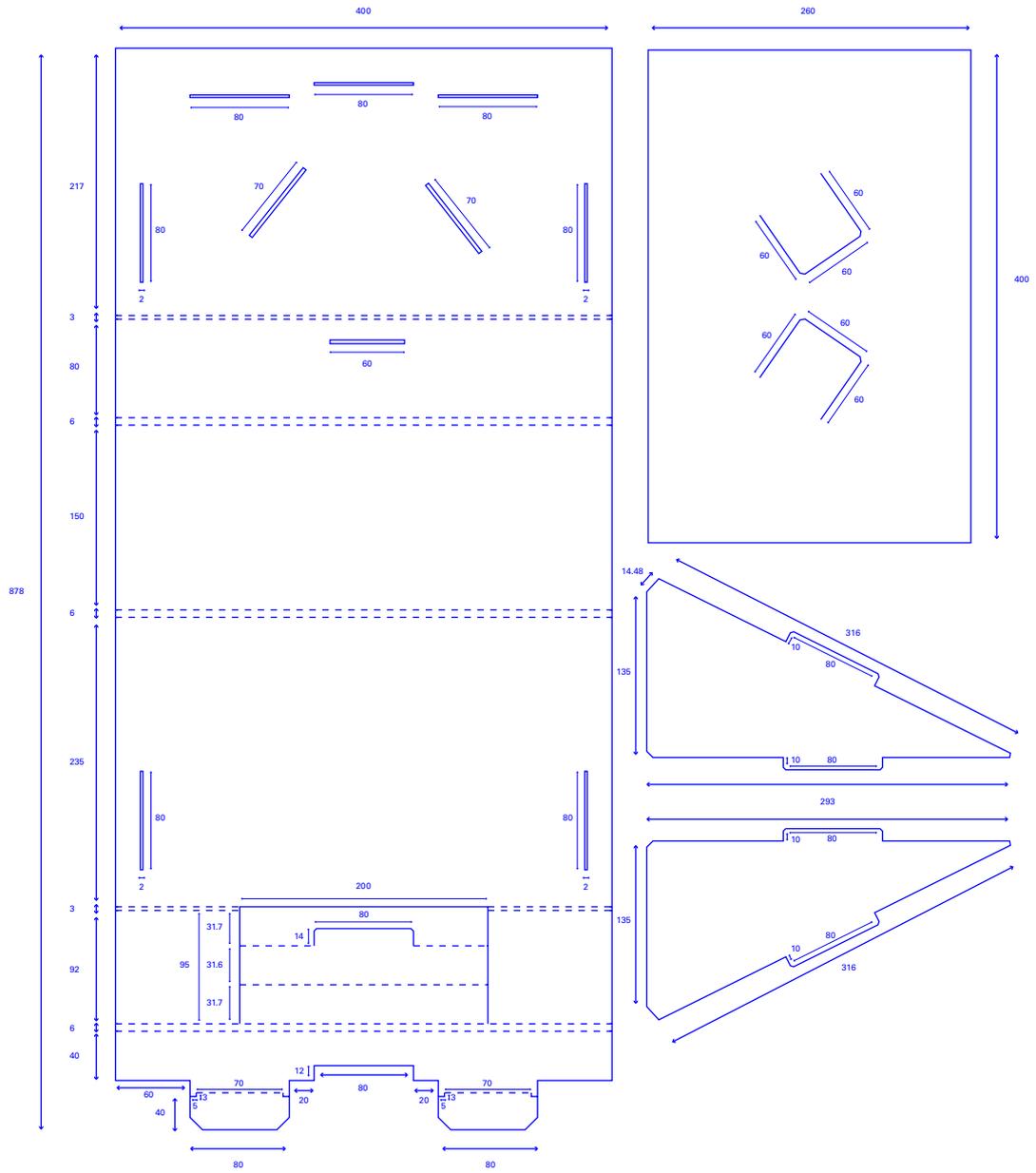
Assembled Transportable Lectern

ASSEMBLY

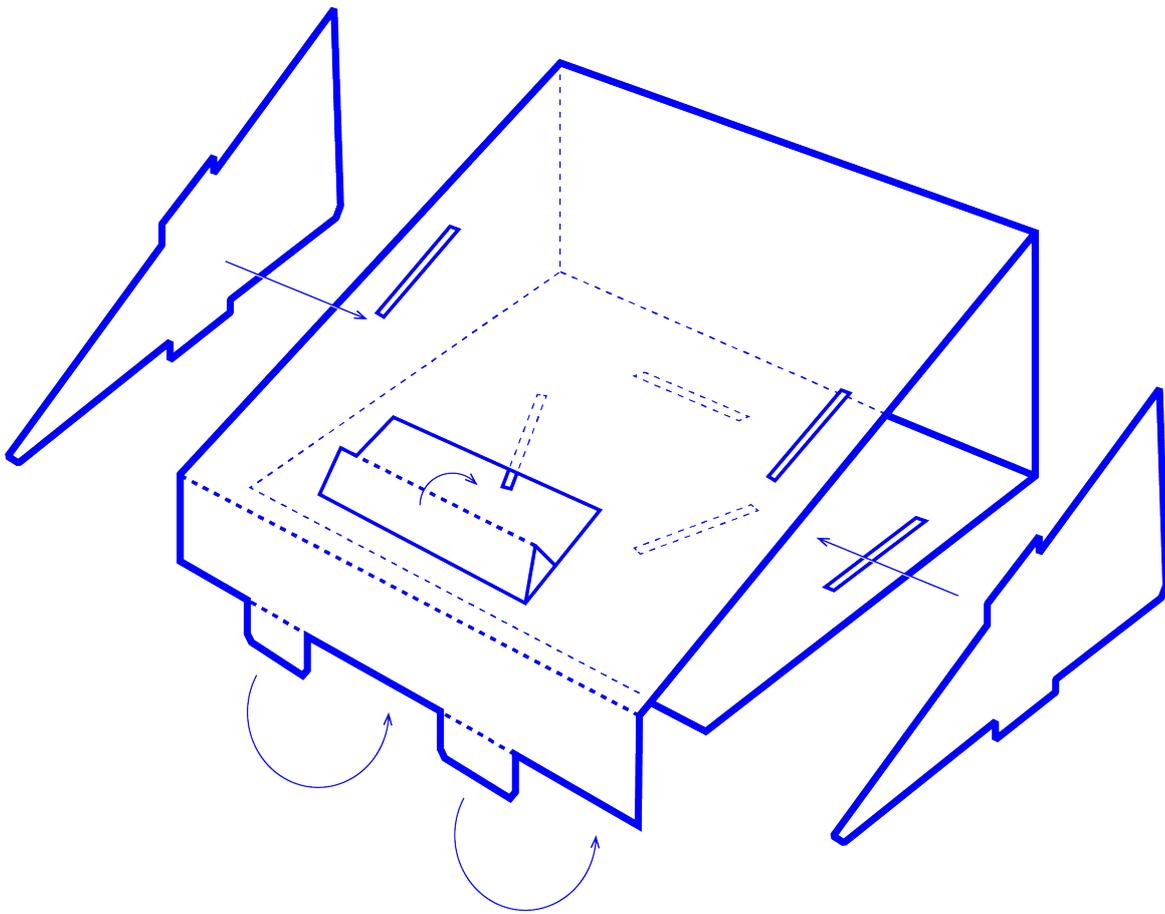
MIDDLE NET



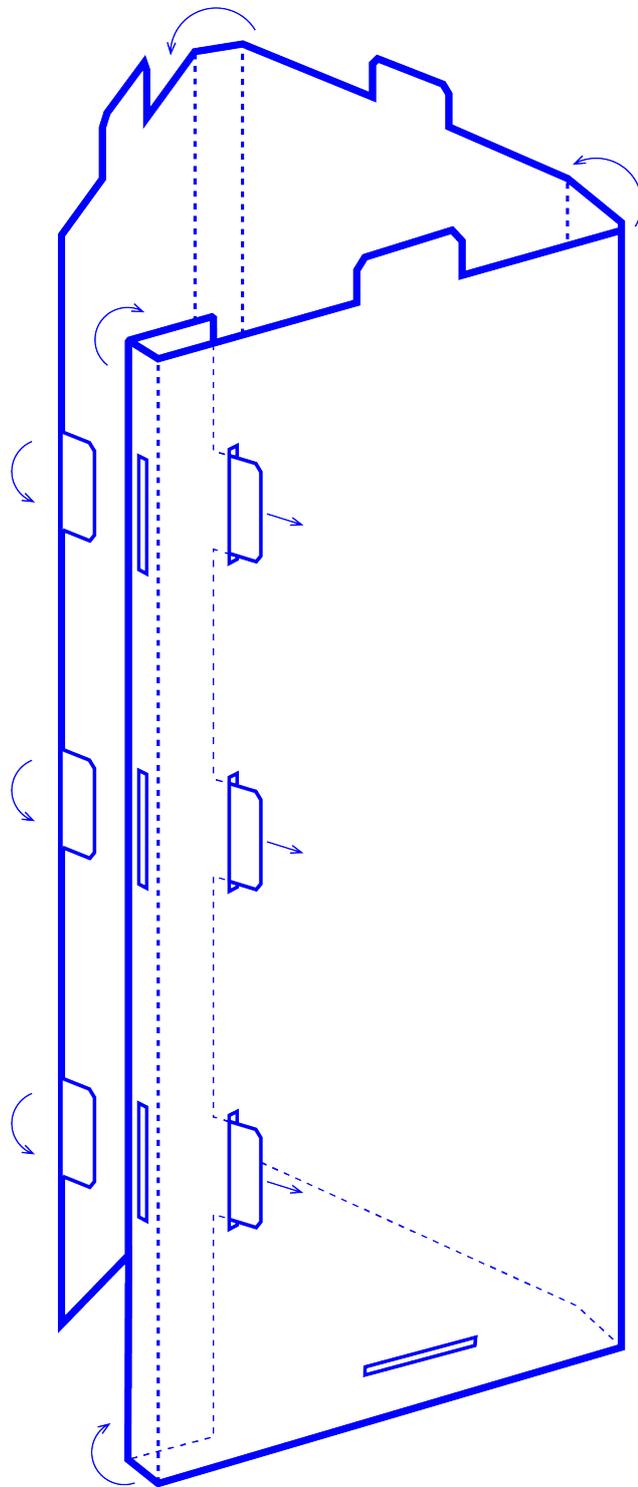
TOP AND BASE NET



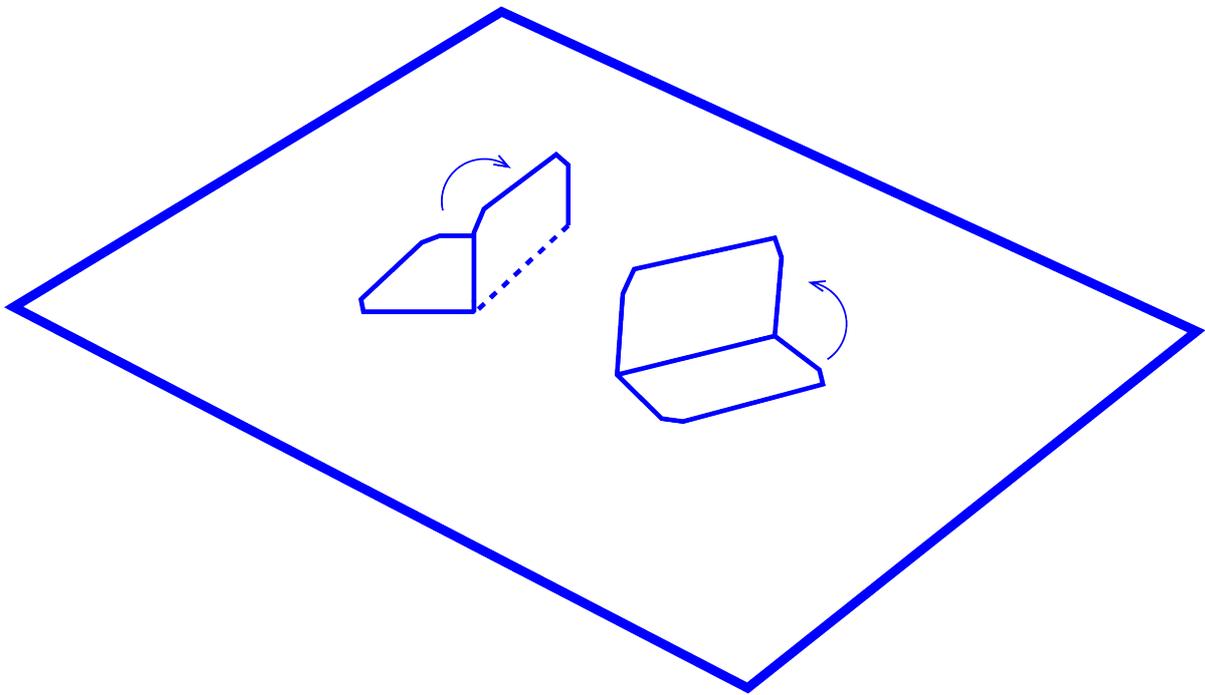
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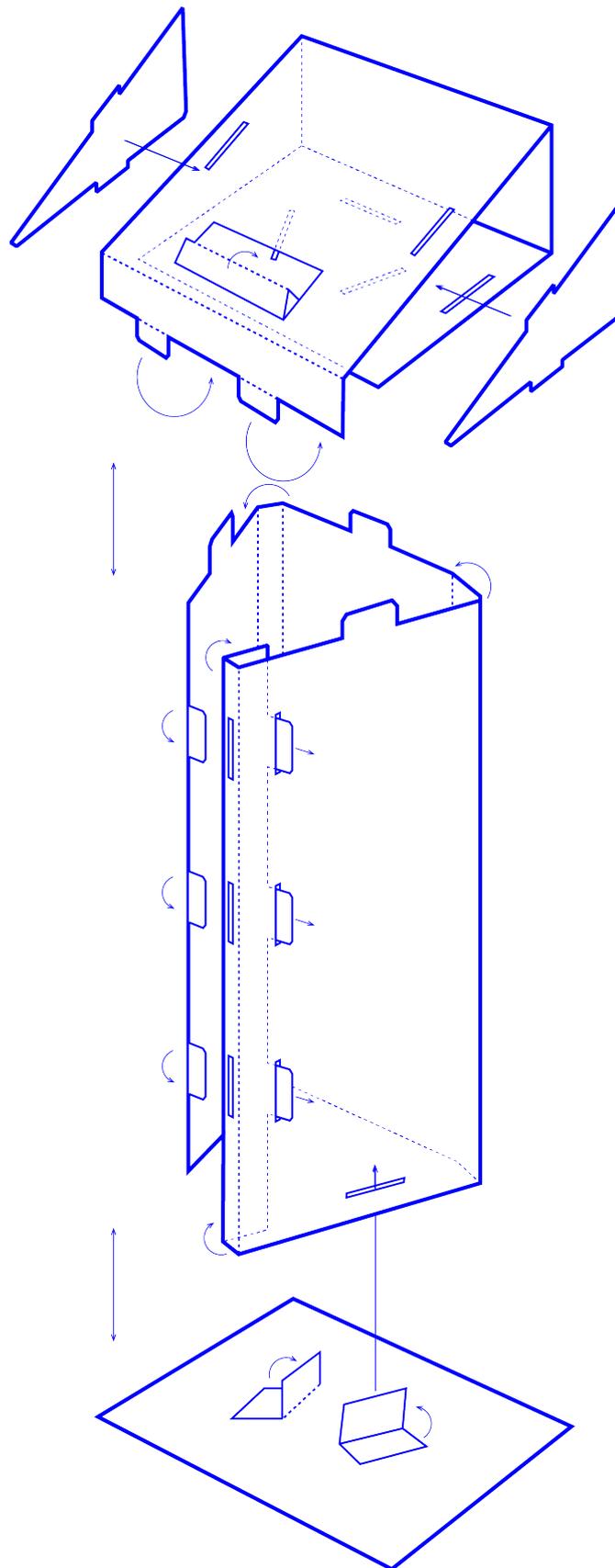
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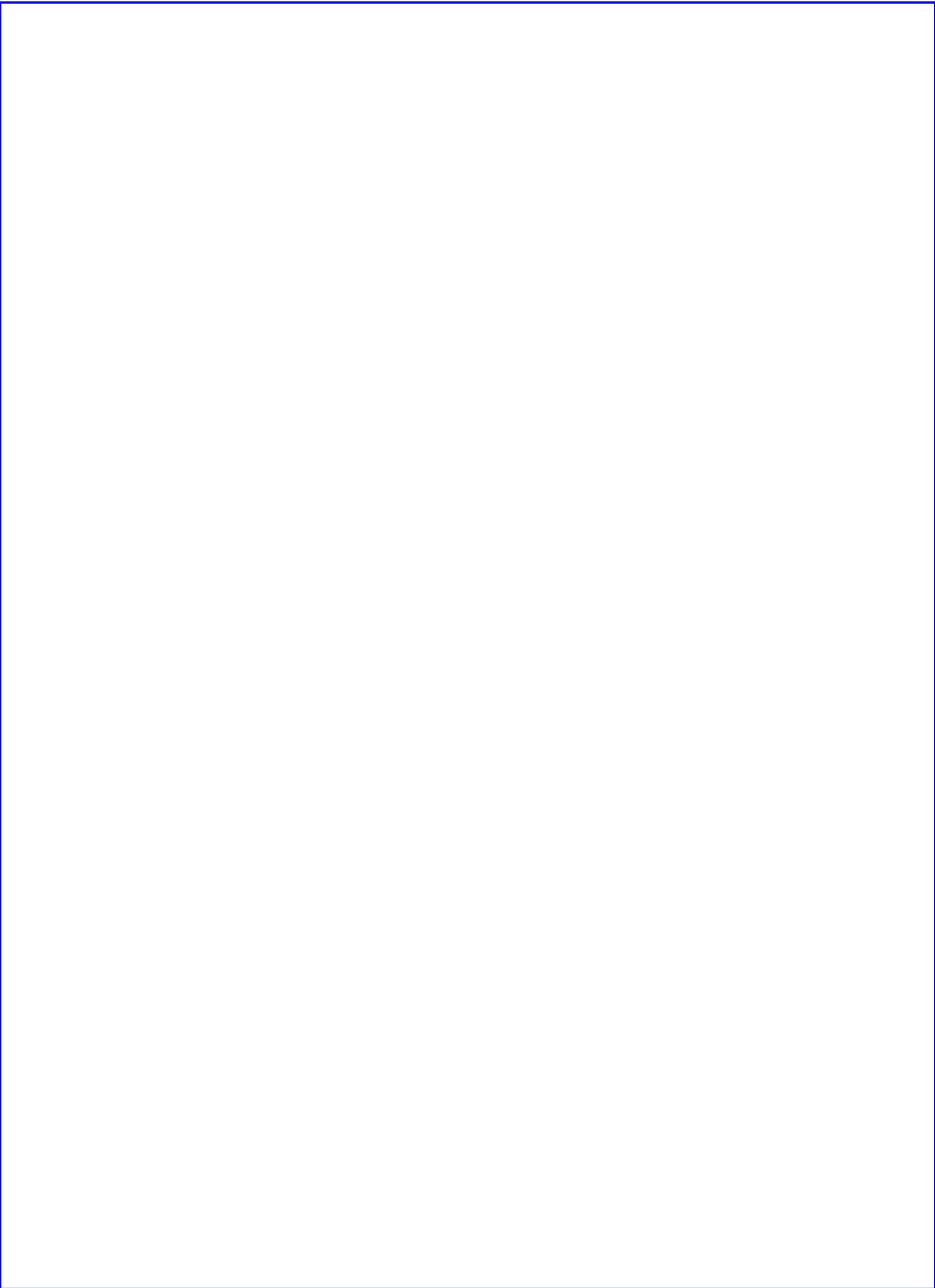
BASE

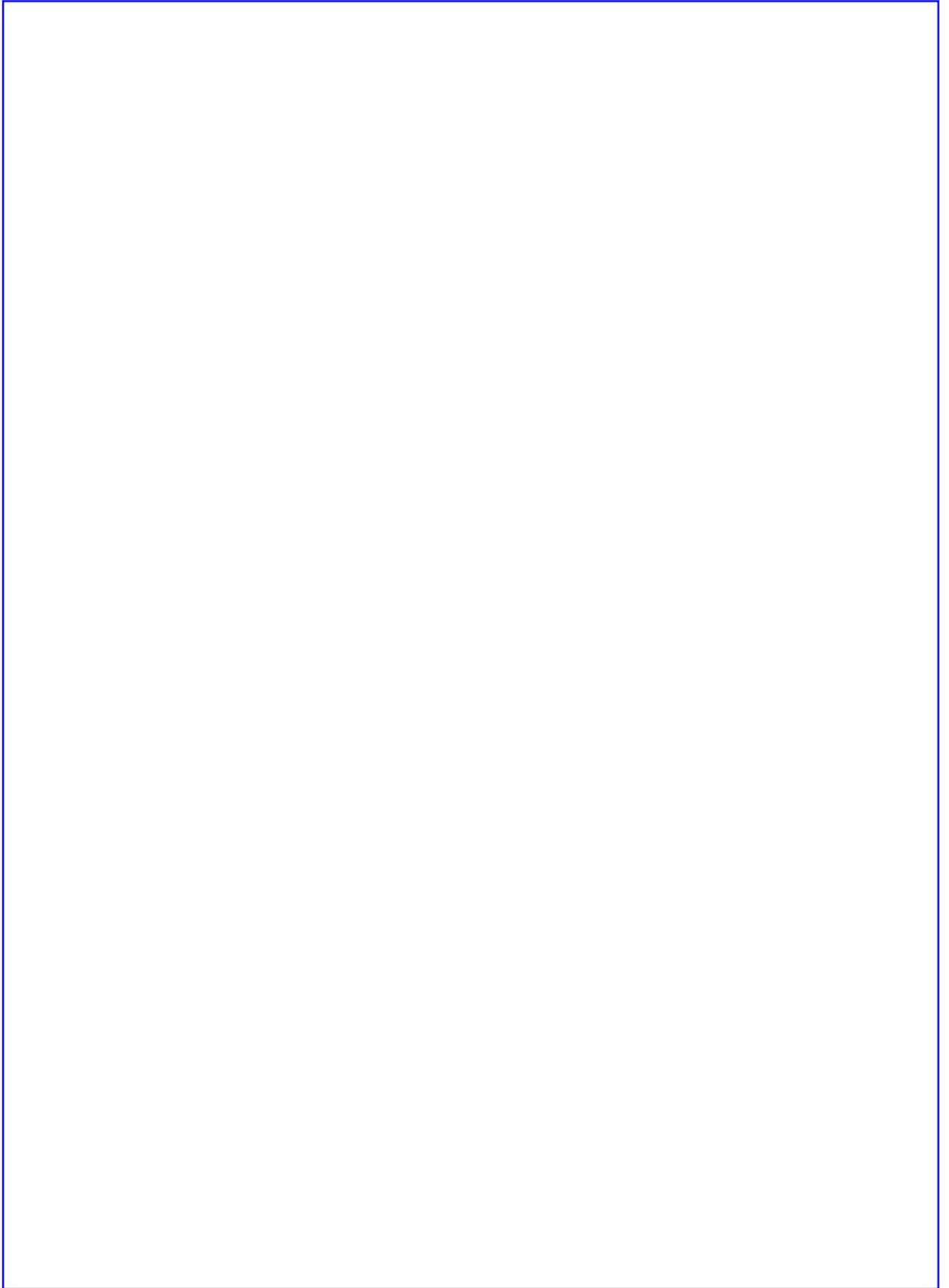


OVERVIEW

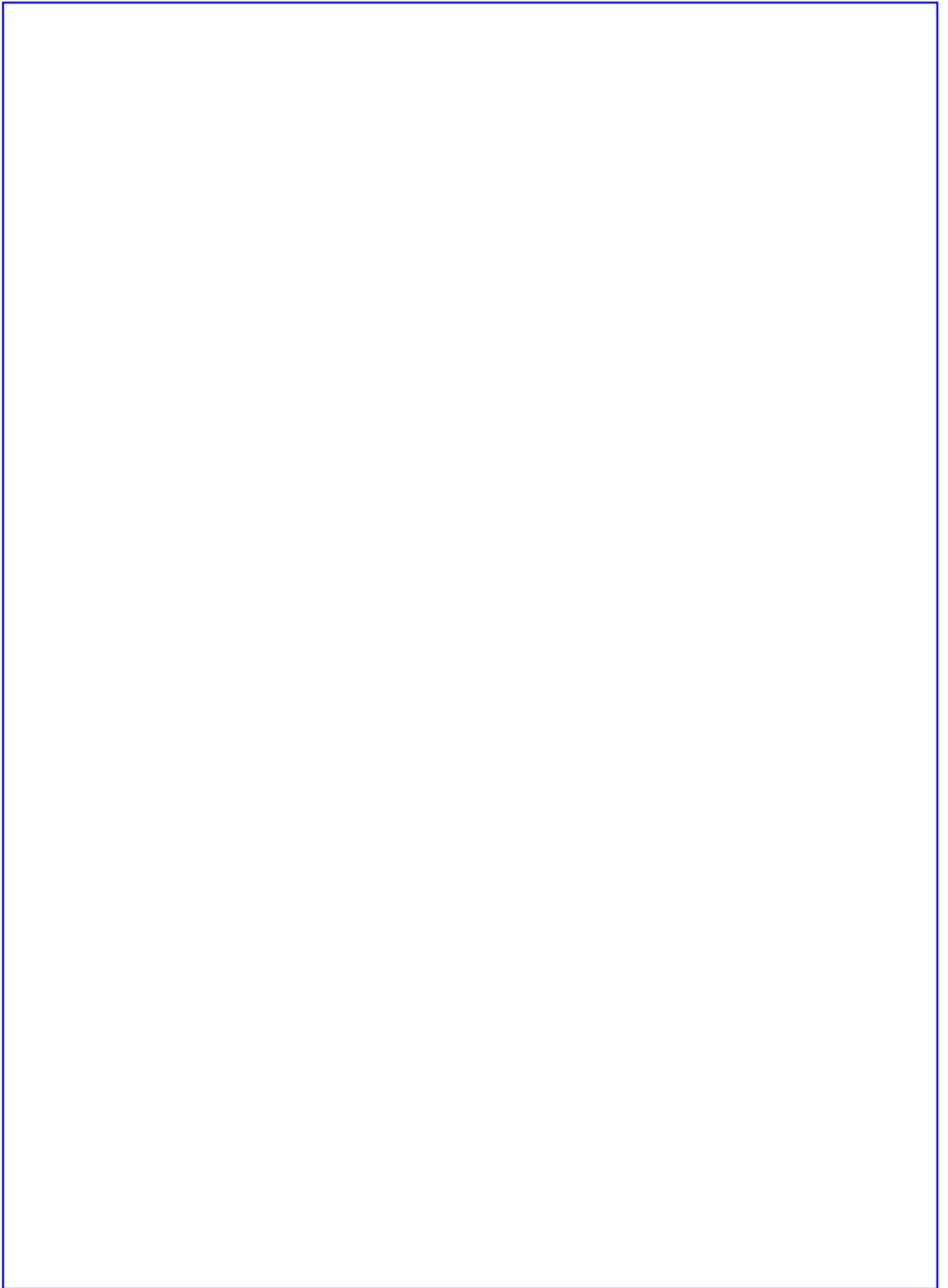


NOTES

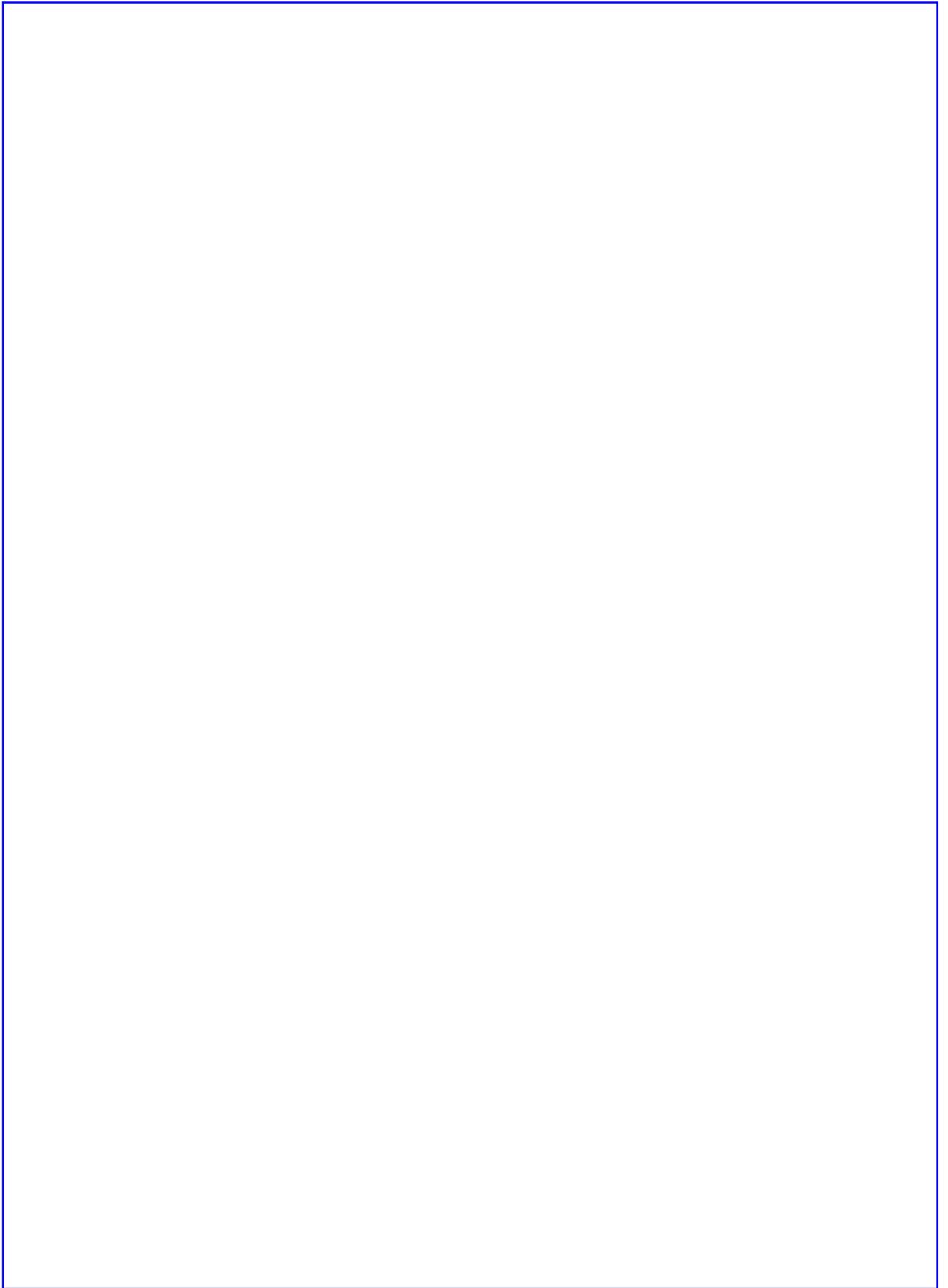












PERMISSIONS

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Benjamin Redgrove, *Discourse-On-Demand* 2017

