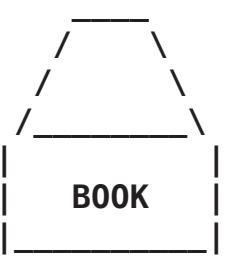
EVERY BOOK IS A HOUSE

SYNC.ED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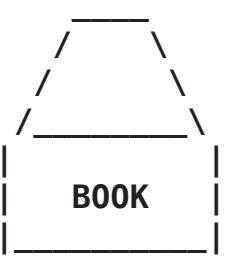
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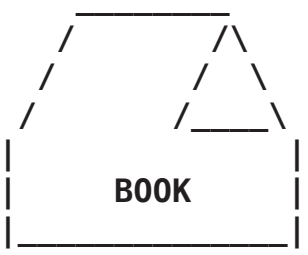
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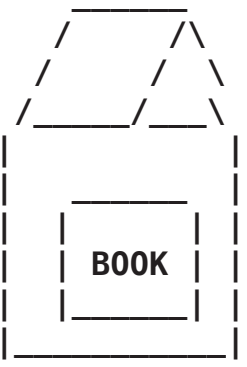
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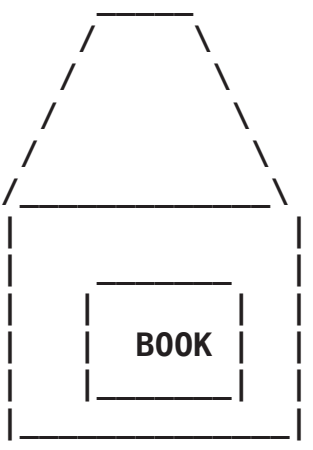
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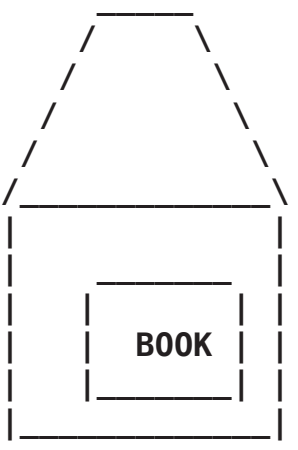
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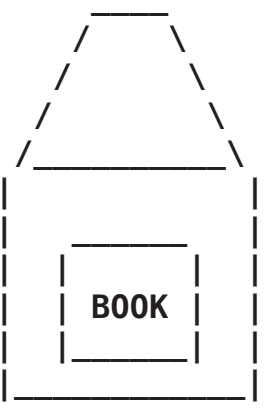
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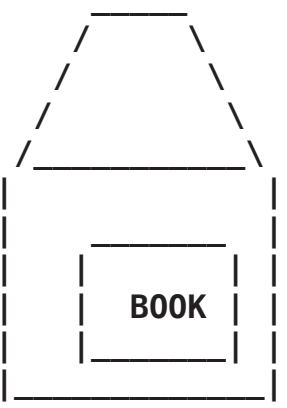
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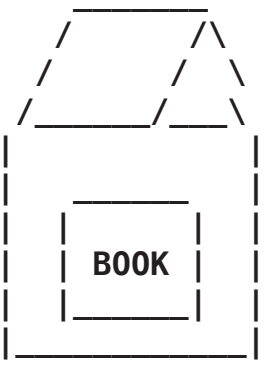
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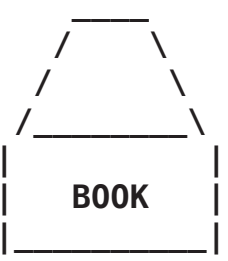
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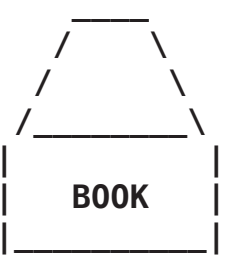
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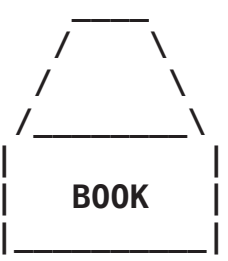
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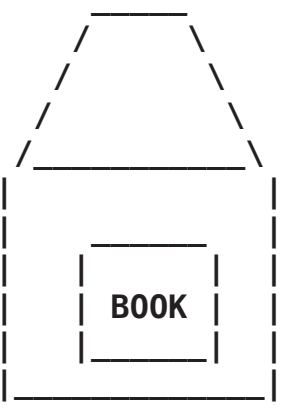
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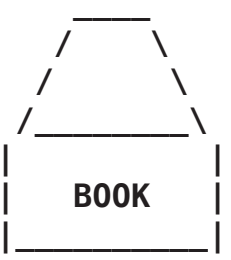
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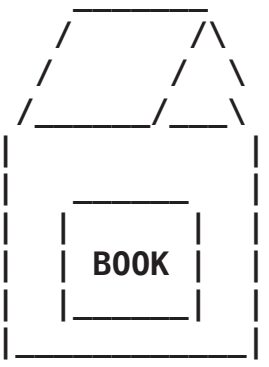
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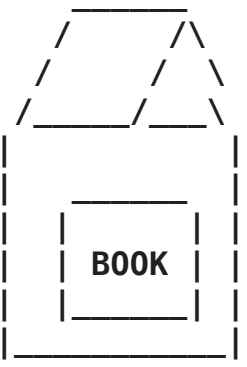
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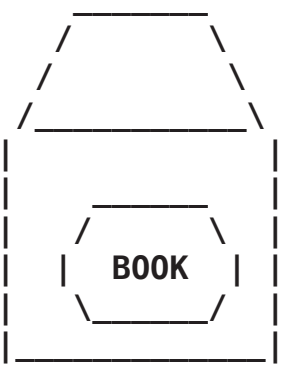
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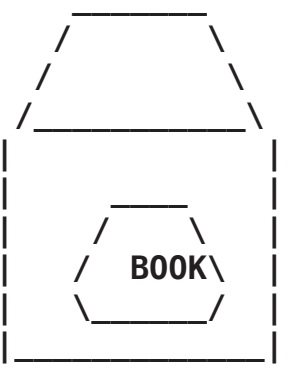
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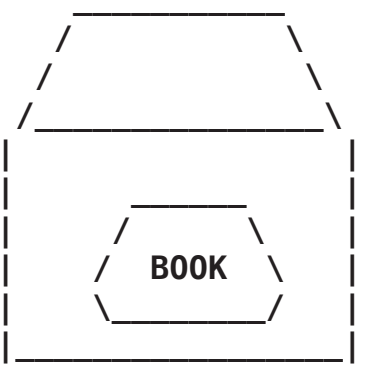
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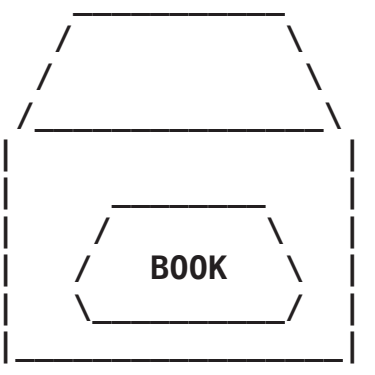
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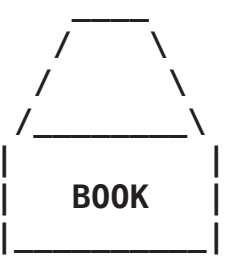
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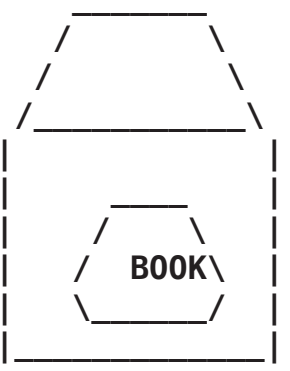
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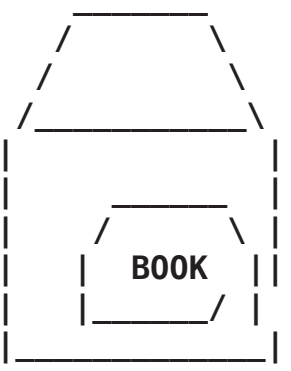
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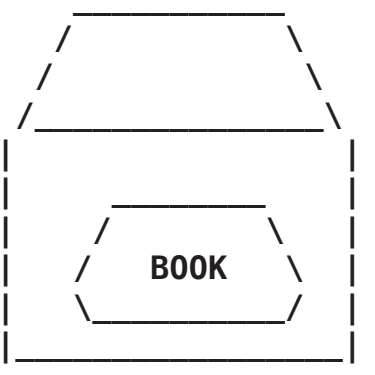
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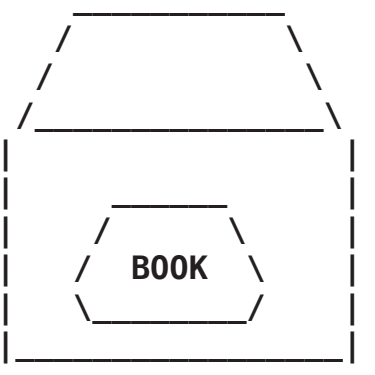
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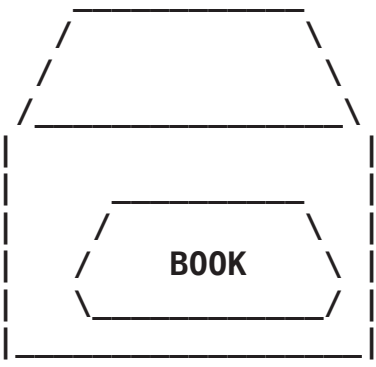
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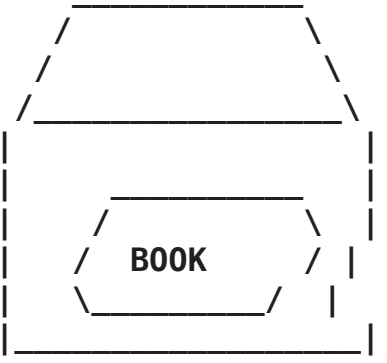
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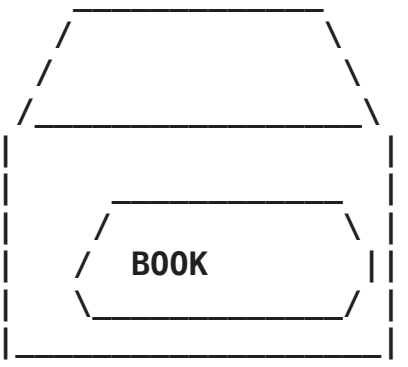
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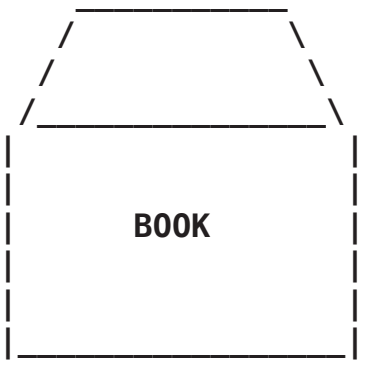
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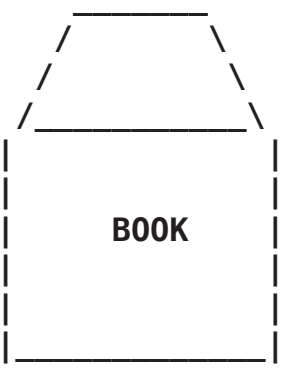
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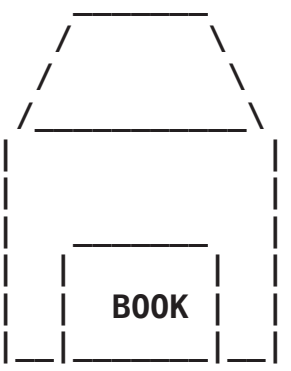
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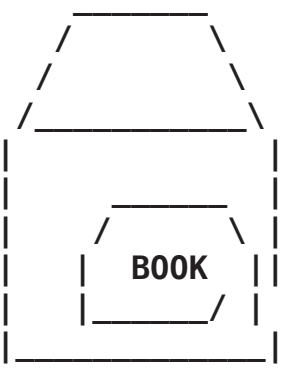
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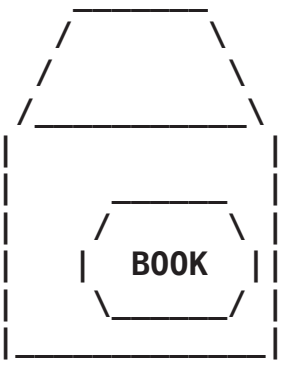
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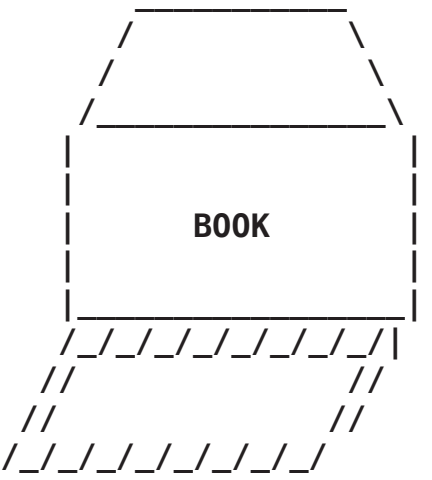
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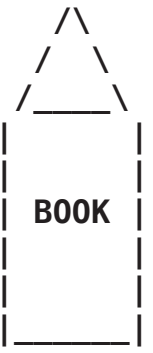
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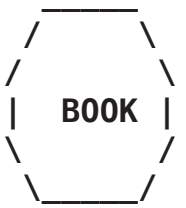
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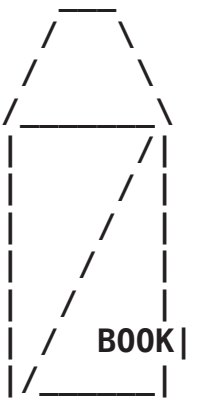
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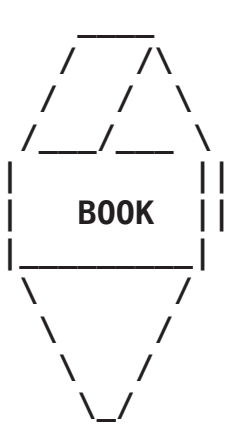
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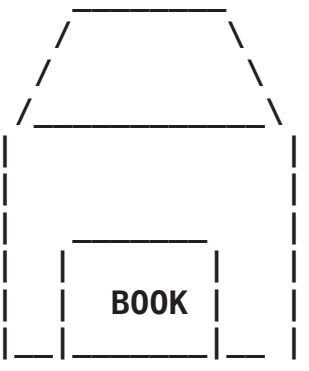
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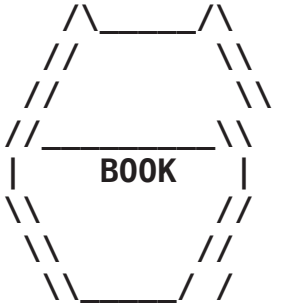
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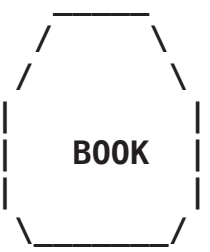
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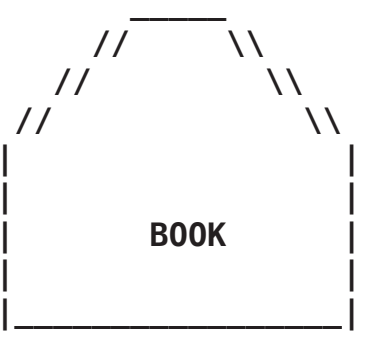
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Author's Note

Here is how this book was conceived: After seeing a thread by Janelle Shane on Mastodon this morning about generating ASCII art with ChatGPT (discussed in more detail on her website aiweirdness.com), I logged into my OpenAI account for the first time since I used Dall-E for generating the images of the book I did with 0x0a half a year ago. I chose to ignore most of the hype around the company and felt a bit guilty using their product for my recent project. Nonetheless, this post got me excited.

I sat at my desk in a shared office and should've been working, but here I was, checking social media and loading up the ChatGPT window for the first time. I then prompted the neural net with the task to "generate different

versions of ASCII art of a book and display in markdown" and recorded the results, which eerily looked like house-like structures with windows or doors, having an all caps BOOK written across them.

Immediately, I thought of the phrase "Every Book is a House", a thought admittedly rather underwhelming in retrospect as it is a direct description of what the neural network was feeding to me. I was also reminded of the title of Danielewski's House of Leaves, but, let's be honest, I didn't think of anything too much at that point. I guess, I liked the worn out feel of the metaphor, which I am sure has been stated countless of times. And I had enough content to make a book.

After this moment of poor ingenuity, I started making assumptions about why the results were looking like houses

in the first place, which kept me occupied for a bit.

One reason could be that the beginning of spine depictions in ASCII art resemble ridges or roofs which could lead the neural net to taking the path of depicting houses after starting with the upper spine as I am sure houses are far more common objects for ASCII art across the web. The resemblance of the results might've resulted from the specific conversation path that led to this kind of depiction of books as a first result and on which further generations of depictions then were based as a response, since I didn't object them in the first place. Another reason could be a weird understanding of perspective and the neural net trying to put a sense of corporality into the depictions. At least that is what some of responses tried to tell me, when I asked the program for a

description.

After generating several versions of house-like books, which all looked rather similar, I decided to contact Hannes Bajohr to double check if there is a known bug or characteristic to ChatGPT that would lead to such results, maybe related to neural text degeneration in earlier versions of GPT. Hannes is a good source to consult on such things as he is an active participant and critical observer of AI discourse, checking most of the relevant papers. He didn't know of anything but responded by sending his results to my prompt which looked more like a beer glass with BOOK written on it, or a rather quirky house with a small garage or shed next to it. I then tried to recreate my first prompts in a new session but most of them produced forms similar to my initial run with some results being more abstract

vessel-like structures. Most of them still had BOOK written somewhere in their crude imagery like they needed some kind of semiotic reassurance.

This book collects all results of my initial session in chronological order. This didn't keep me occupied for more than 10 minutes during my workday. I created a cover in between other tasks and wrote this text during my lunch break. All in all, I don't think I worked more than an hour on the content. This, however, has been quite joyful, as mannerisms in text generation—despite all undeserved, exhaustive hype around devastatingly bad companies like OpenAI and every use of their tools inevitably feeding their biased product—tend to set me into a state of feverish excitement regardless. (Now that I think of it, this might be worth to look into as it seems to point to a certain

kind of reassuring myself of a critical, investigative media practice, which is also very much compatible with generating hype and traffic for a new media product by a company.)

Be that as it may, I will create and upload the print ready file for this book to a POD platform tomorrow during office hours and I will not invest more than 3–4 hours in total for this project. I also exported and saved the ChatGPT session history to a txt file for the sake of documentation or future unraveling, which I might link to on my website. Though, to be honest, I don't think I will open up the door to that book anytime soon. This publication might raise more questions after the fact, or it won't.

Berlin, March 3 (around 3 p.m.)

Andreas Bülhoff
Every Book is a House
sync.ed 2023