

NOTA BENE:

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Word AS Image

UNIT QUESTION:

How can the graphic medium enhance and enrich the verbal message?

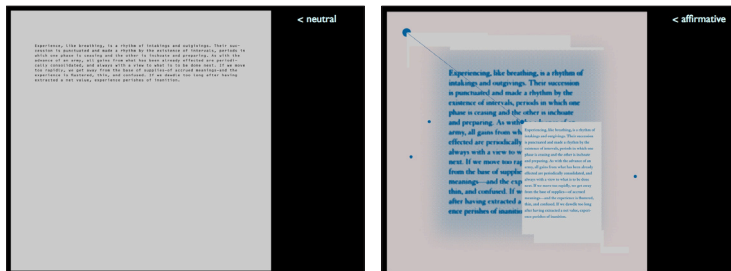
In this unit's assignment I want to make a point about the need for graphic designers to become very conscious of the integral nature of the potential of the Word AS Image.

It's much easier for us, as designers and as interpreters, to separate the word as it's own domain of verbal representation—but when—ever words are visually presented — in print or otherwise — we can never really escape the fact that words first make a visual impact on our eyes and are visually mediated which determines how we begin to engage with them in processing their representational potential.

I'll use the work of one of my favorite artists, Jenny Holzer (1996), as an example. She is mainly focused on the presentation of words and their verbal meaning. She places these words in environments, which of course have an enormous impact on how we engage with them—but still, it is about the words she selects, their verbal potency, and the language they are presented in. And another work by Jenny Holzer: her installation in the Guggenheim.

In typography we learn the very basic principles of how the visual language of type— that is, form, space and structure—become the essential and integral means to help us engage with text, in the experience we have to read the words and texts presented to us. In this example a text is merely placed inside a space, and has already some line spacing, but not other visual elements to help us distinguish more of the parts from the whole.

Typography exhibits this basic perceptual facilitation, as it should; but the more we see the possibilities these can afford in relation to legibility and expression, typography then also becomes way to related visual form to the content of the text itself. And when the latter is done correctly it begins to serve a voice for a purposeful means to communicate, as it should! For: how we experience texts (and objects, for that matter) depends on careful attention was given by the designer to the perceptual aspects of parts and their wholes: this attention truly reflects what one will most likely get out of the reading of the text.



To illustrate what I mean here is an example from my Textperience course. This first layout is a typographic layout and design that is strictly based on an attitude of extreme neutrality (no subjective decisions of feelings, sensibilities, personal preferences whatsoever) with all aspects pushed to an extreme sense of objectivity!

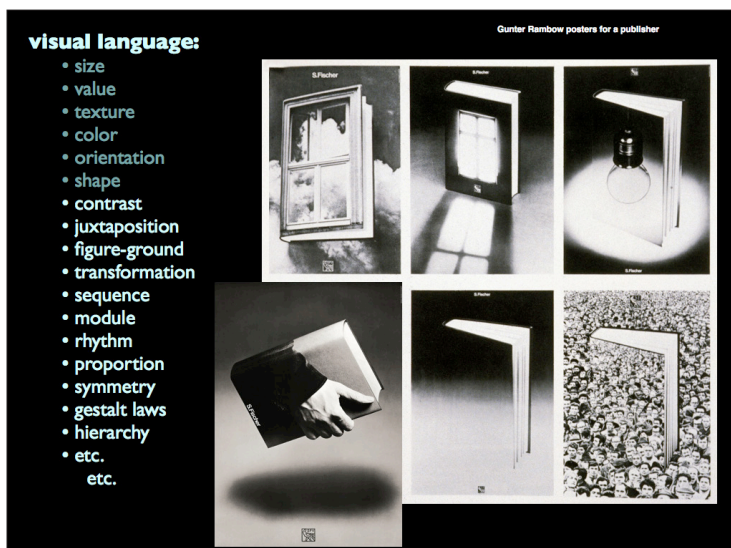
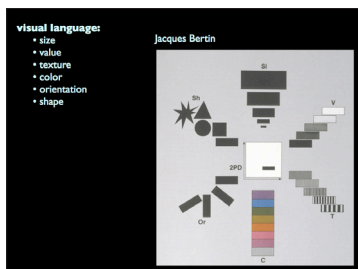
When the designer's feelings, preferences etc. enter into the process the inevitable "voice" starts to appear by virtue of the designer's attitude toward form, structure and materials to work with. (examples: Wes Adams 2009)



This "voice" (reflections of preferences) can, for example, reflect the designer's critical or affirmative confirmation of the content of the text, which then affects an expressive voice of the visual "language", which entails a system of parts especially concerned with the perceptual and interpretive capacities of the reader.

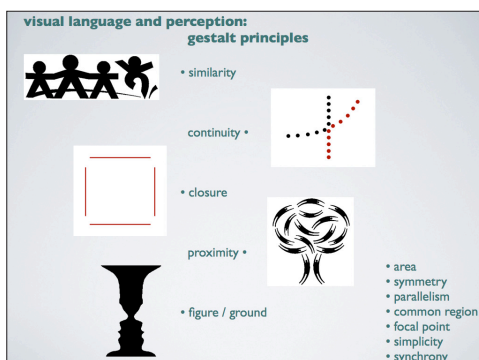
For now I merely want to state some basic aspects that involve this systems of parts.

For example, Jacques Bertin, a French cartographer and theorist, was especially known for his book *Semiologie Graphique* about information design. For this comprehensive study he noted in his book this basic list for visual form and structure, which, as he declared, the basis for the system or language of the visual: size, value, texture, color, orientation, and shape.

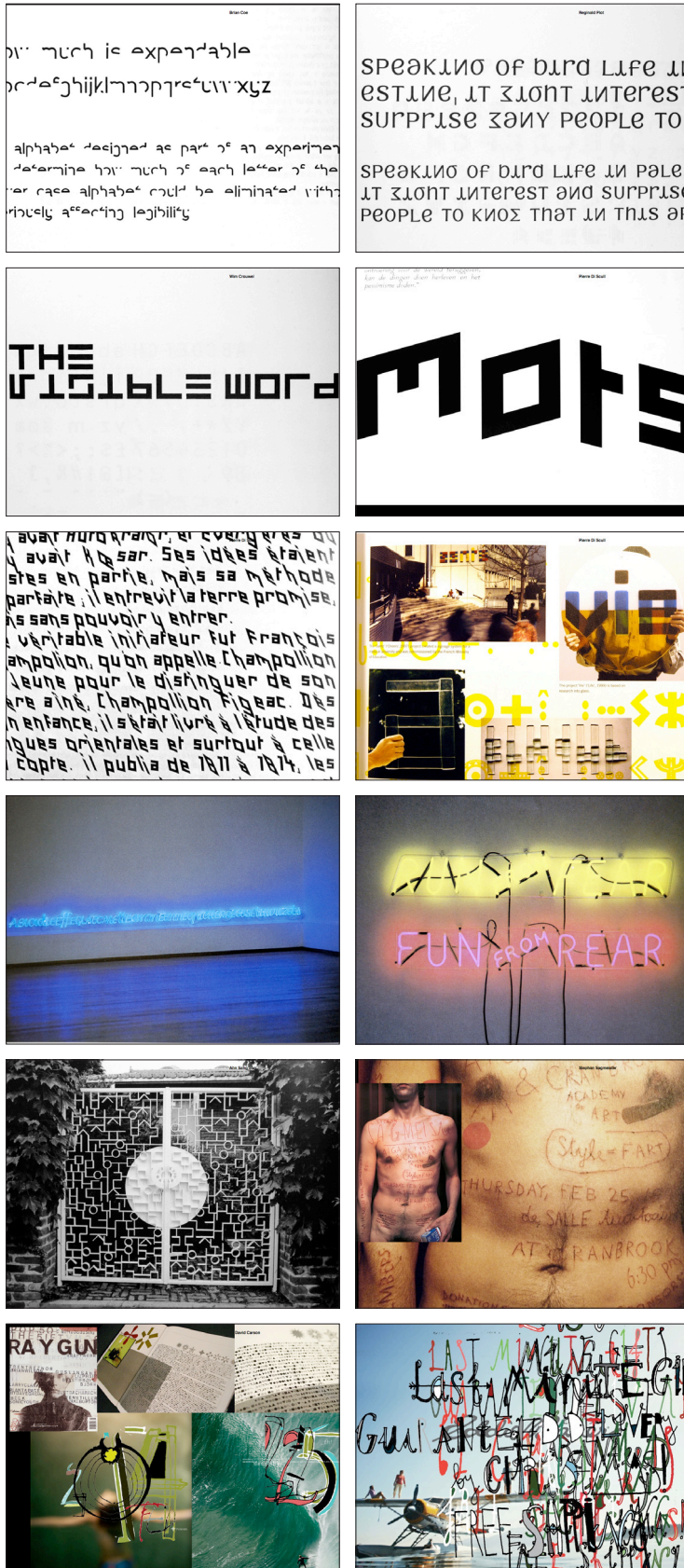


That seems wonderfully simple, and covers much of what we are working with. But, once you start working with thesis basics and more and more, then we become aware of more subtle aspects of this system, that brings us to expand the basics with words that identify more ways that describe the subtleties in this language and how they operate in turn for their function in meaning. For example, Paul Rand, one of my teachers at Yale, when asked what graphic design means his response was: "CONTRAST."

Examples of the visual language uses like in these posters for a Publisher by the German designer Gunter Rambow, make this expansion of Jacques Bertin's basics necessary, as the list of words shows— which includes the so-called "gestalt laws." When we consider these so-called Gestalt laws or Principles (which Gestalt psychologists identified by regarding how we perceive things and how our mind tends to construct, organize, stabilize and yet vary perception according to so-called grouping laws) we discover even more relational complexities...such as as similarity, continuity, closure, proximity, figure/ground, area, symmetry, focal point, etc.



But, our time being limited and our focus should be on the topic of our assignment, I do not want to preoccupy your time and efforts to study these kinds of things in any depth—I merely want to suggest you look into gestalt theory (available on the web) so it becomes part of your general awareness—and while you continue to make visual work intuitively and generally attend to parts and wholes and their dynamics for interaction.



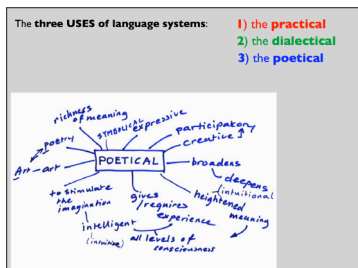
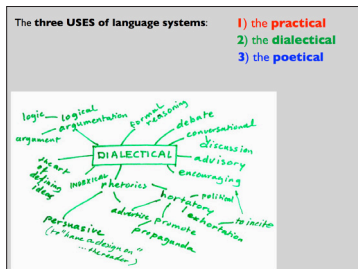
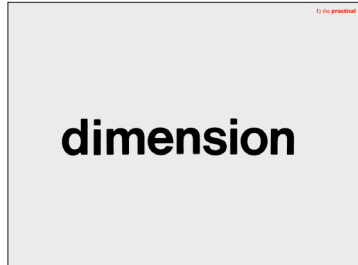
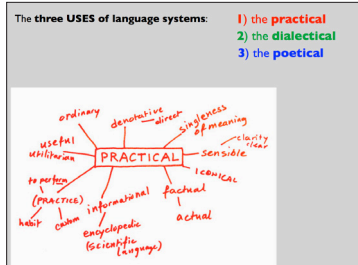
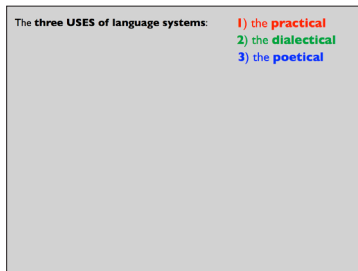
In that way we can study typography from perceptual perspectives and how gestalt principles reflect in relating parts to wholes. For example, how type/font design can become an integral part of the experience to read texts. Here Brian Coe experimented with how much of the lower case letters could be deleted without obstructing legibility.

And in this type design by Reginald Plot the “Q” is eliminated, since he deemed the “Q” superfluous in the English language. Dutch designer Wim Crouwel designed a font for the very early stages of computers by avoiding curves. Pierre Di Scull, French typographer played with a number of different means to see the function of type in reading from different points of view with materials, media and forms to accent the experience we can have with reading.

Also Mauricio Nannucci here, and his Phonetic Alphabet (1967-68). And other artists and designers, like Bruce Nauman, 1972, Korean designer Ahn Sang Soo, and Stephan Sagmeister.

David Carson, the so-called Godfather of Grunge, and of Ray Gun magazine fame from the early 1990s, used a technique of ripping, shredding, and remaking letters—all of which were also considered rather disorienting. But that is what he played with purposely—for example, when he once disliked a Ray Gun article on Bryan Ferry, he decided to set the entire spread in Zapf Dingbats. (The bottom two images are from work David Carson did in 2014 for a calendar.)

However, while from a graphic designer’s perspective these experiments with typography appear fun and energizing, my main criticism is that their content for form is trivialized, and often even absent of content. So YOU don’t succumb to this kind of trivializing of the visual language and mere decorative use for its phenomenon as surface treatment, I will now share with you a way to use the visual language toward a more purposeful sense of communication.



One of my main theoretical models for the use of language I developed during my time at RISD, is this:

to note three basic “uses” of “visual systems” or language, which we can easily apply to the visual language—if we consider the visual as a “system of parts that belong to a whole.” These three distinctions enable us consider visual form, structures and space to give voice to ideas, be that in support of parts and their interaction with other parts, or ideas these carry themselves.

I named these: the practical, the dialectical, and the poetical.

By practical is meant the use of language to communicate information with a singleness of meaning, which is characteristic of immediate information that is denotative, useful, sensible, factual (for example, a dictionary text serves that purpose). As we engage ourselves with the world this first level need for perception is almost simplistic as it helps us break down complexity, and as we begin to perceive possible relationships (that will eventually lead to complexity).

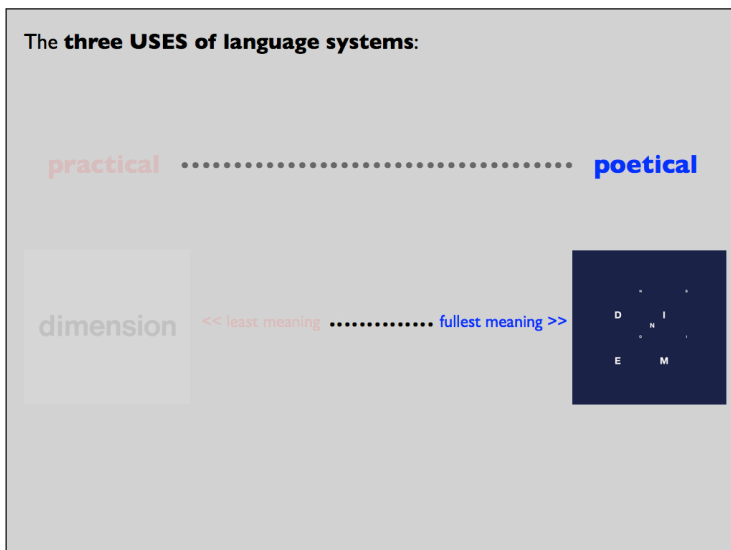
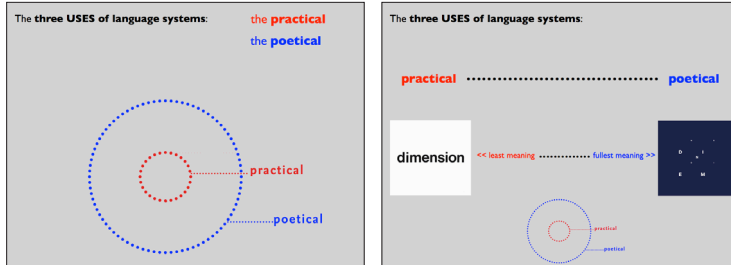
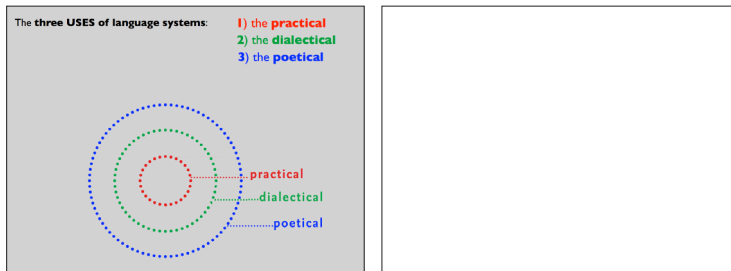
Here is an example of that in the visual presentation of the verbal idea in the form of the word “dimension.” Its simplicity and directness is not unlike the works I showed you for Jenny Holzer.

The next stage or level of use for language I call dialectical—which word even implies there are two aspects brought into a relationship. That is, dialectical means to communicate with reason and discourse, which means to see things from a particular point of view. For example such voicing can encourage, council, or persuade someone, usually with some oblique point of view, with ulterior motive and particular (vs. open) position. This is the language system typically used in advertising, propaganda, and political speeches. This intermediate use of a language to present ideas with personal views tends to limit options for so-called content and meaning. Here is a kind of simplistic example of that—again using the same word “dimension” in comparison, by choosing to focus on the part “MEN” within that word.

Poetic language is the use of language, which serves to stimulate imagination and a depth of perception. That is, it does not merely mediate a directed point of view but by its “poetic” nature evokes the potential qualities, values, and deeper and open potentials for meaning that reflect essence and vitality regarding the idea presented. In linguistics the poetic language is characterized by metaphor, symbol, and emotional expressions to stimulate a richness of meaning—but I see this go even deeper into the true sense of essence or spirit of things. The poetical truly requires us to pay attention to meaning with an open mindedness toward all aspects relational possibilities one can experience to work toward significance and essence. However, the challenge with the poetic use of language is to remain subtle enough for that experience so that meaning is not made obvious and immediate—which would bring us back to the limitations of the practical. Rather, in the poetic realm content should allow for the user’s experience to become totally engaged with what there is to be experienced so as to become also an active participant for interpretation—a true creator of the depth of meaning if you will!

So here is an illustration of this, still using the same word “dimension” (ad lib here to explain the poem of dimension”).

NOTE: document intended for my students and may not be distributed.



Unit 3 Title: Word As Image / Unit Leader: Tom Ockerse

Unit 3 Question:
How can the graphic medium *enhance and enrich* the verbal message?

Unit summary:
In our engagement with the world around us, and our resolve to "make sense" out of complexity, we take for granted the perceptual and holistic principles this interaction involves. That perception of parts and their configurations as a holistic system, or language, depends greatly on the use of so-called "gestalt" principles and how these serve the purpose to communicate.

Since graphic design presents ideas primarily via graphic means, awareness of these perceptual principles is critical for designers to help their products stimulate clarity and unity, curiosity and interest, inquiry and insight.

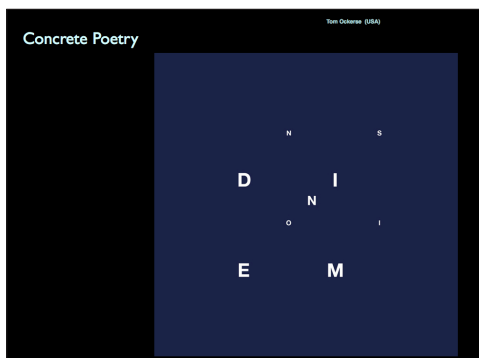
We will look into this power of graphic design to discover how an abstract (non-visual) object like a "word" (a verbal means to represent an idea) can be enriched significantly toward a deep sense of poetic insight due to its graphic/visual delivery, and thus provide a lasting impression of value for the ideas it holds.

Phase 1: Find your word:

Note: work only with this word for the next two weeks.
Continue to work in class on the next phase (below) to writetypset/draw the word.

For week 6 (October 20, 2015)
Using only the word and its letters (but do NOT add images, words, etc.)

Phase 2: experience the writing/typesetting/presenting the word:
see, feel, experience the letterforms, and tools, materials; inquire into options for "writing" (tools, methods, structures, space-time, dimensions, letterforms, qualities and gestalt principles).



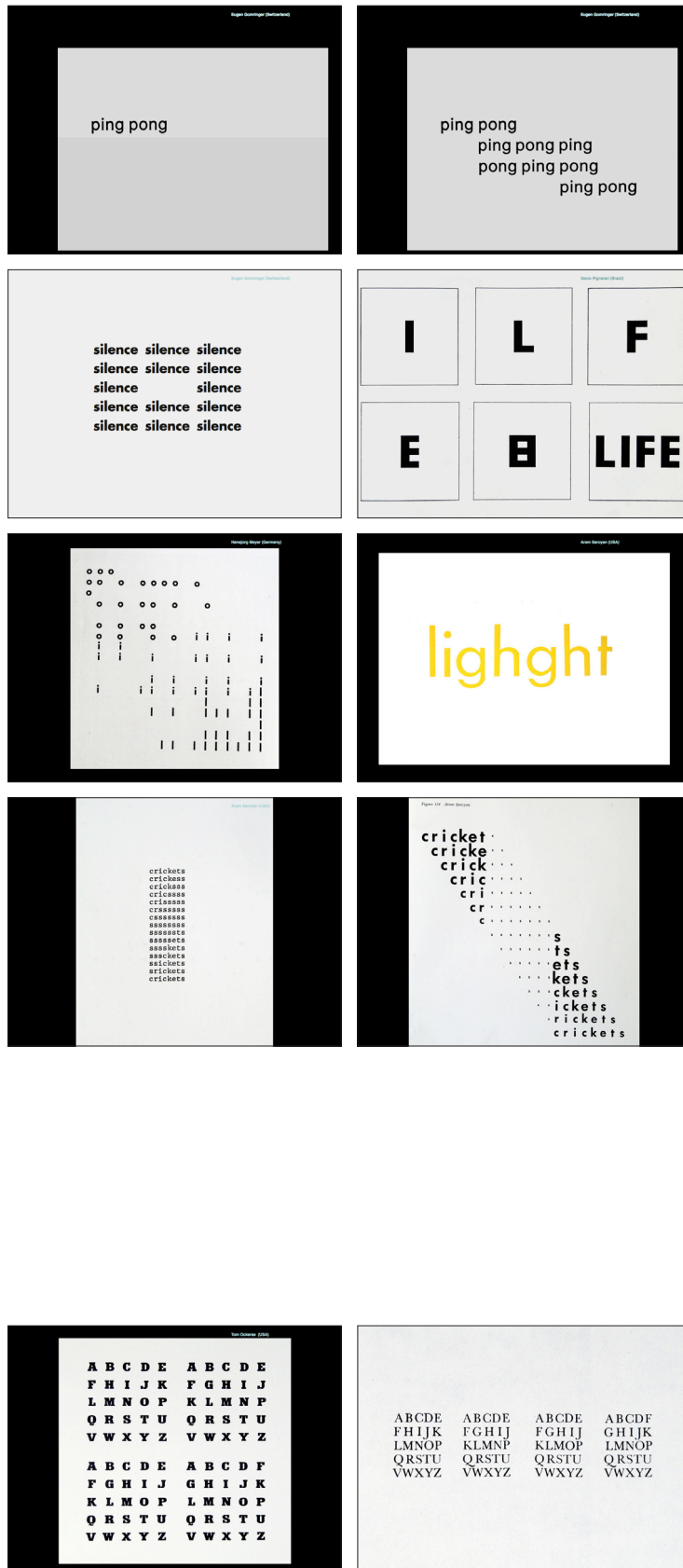
To take this theoretical model a little further, and as implied already by how I tried to characterize each aspect, we must note that these three uses, while unique in some respects, are not sharply divided, not even separate! Rather, they have a dynamic interdependent relationship of a sliding range. So, to recap what they are: the practical relates to immediate needs to distinguish parts from wholes; then the mind begins to mediate these facts with other aspects our perception via seeing or adding relationship via personal preferences; but if we feel there appears to be further attraction to discover more and we have the opportunity to gain from that engagement even more value by leading us into a deeper, inspired level of consciousness and understanding, then we find ourselves in the poetic domain of consciousness. In that way these three modes help us identify three points of view on how we might apply the "design language" to the products we create.

That's the overall picture of this model—but for our purposes I prefer to simplify this even more: it is enough that we merely generalize this sliding scale between the two extremes of the practical and the poetical. Moreover, that the purpose of this assignment is to move us well beyond the mere practical use of the visual language, and to push you inquiry more and more toward the extreme of the "poetical" use of meaning—to allow you to see the powerful potential of how parts and wholes can operate toward enrichment and depth of meaning.

As we get into the specifics for the unit assignment you will start with the practical presentation of your word—and then pour more and more meaning into you medium and means for the visual language in order to gain the fullest potential for the word's communication.

Well, let's get into the unit's briefly assignment for now, and we'll return to it at the end. Word AS Image. (read assignment).

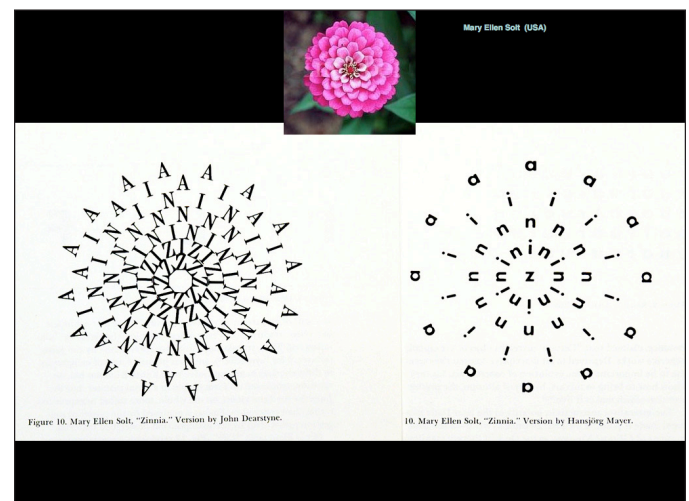
Frankly, this unit's inquiry partly reflects an interest in inquiry into the mix that also erases the edges of the conventionalisms—be that in reference to literary, visual, or performing arts—and what all inquiries in that direction had for those who wanted experiment with new ways (in this case, to make poetry). An international movement called "Concrete Poetry comes to mind. This movement stemmed partly from an interest to combine minimalism in art with literary forms of experimental poetry, and that evolved into a worldwide movement from the 1950s through the early 1980s. It definitely caught my interest around 1965 after I had met the artist Dieter Roth. Let me just share some of these works by others, as this will also illustrate what the unit's assignment is driving at.



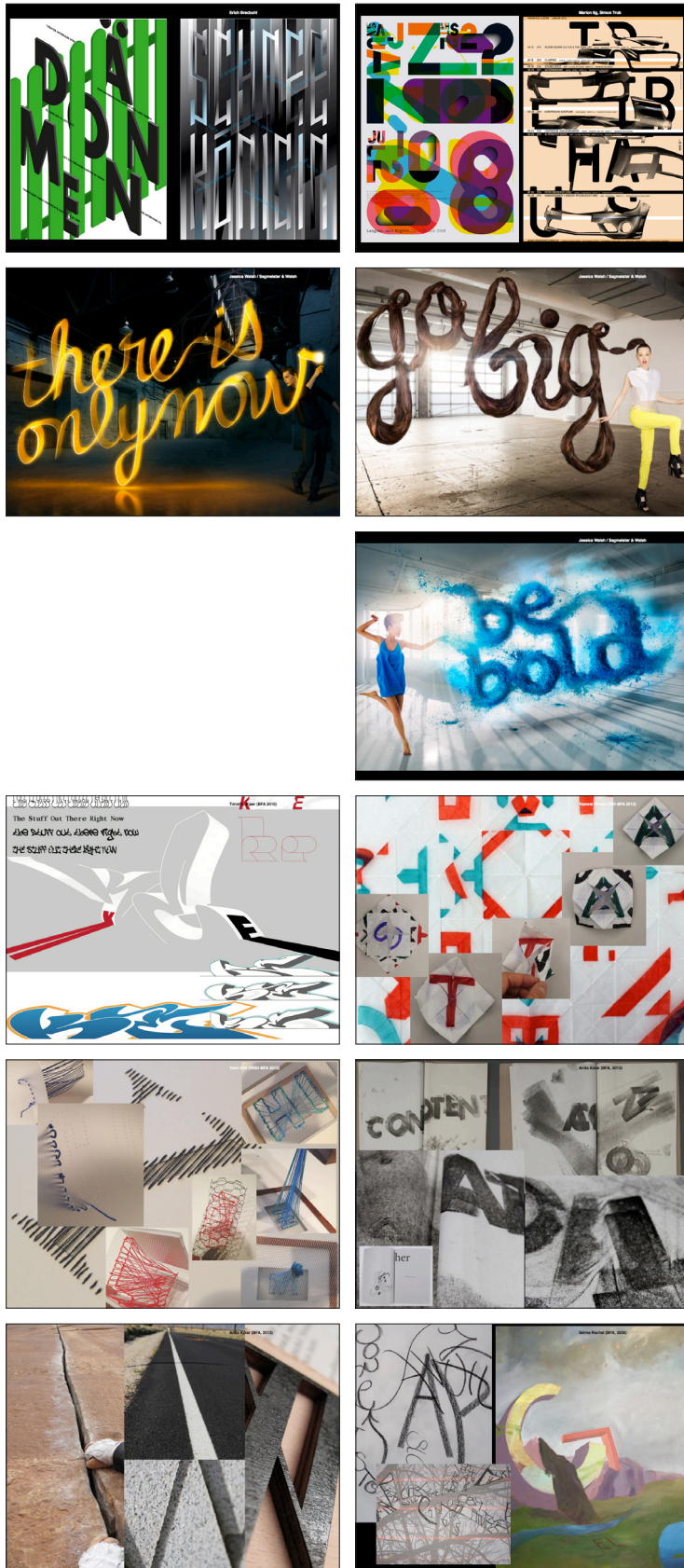
Here is an example by the Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer. There is nothing poetic about these two words “ping pong.” But when Gomringer simply repeats the words, and creates in their repetition a certain configuration, the game of ping pong comes to life as we see in this and hear it is read out loud:

Examples by Aram Saroyan’s “crickets”—via Aram’s typewriter vs. Hansjorg Mayer’s type-set interpretation. The latter represents some of the challenges of typography and designers getting their hands on visual poetry, and act on that for better or worse.

And Mry Ellen Solts’ Zinnia poem from her “flowers in concrete” series (the left version done by one of my graduate students at Indiana University, John Dearstyne, and the one on the right done (again) by Hansjorg Mayer, who, once again, restricted himself to the use of Futura Medium and only to use lowercase letters. (ad lib)



And my poem “GONE” is another example of the original, and an interpretation by someone in Holland who asked to publish this poem as part of his postcard series on concrete poetry.



But be careful that form does not merely become it's own obsession for its own sake...which is easy to do when it comes to type and fonts, shape, textures, color, etc.

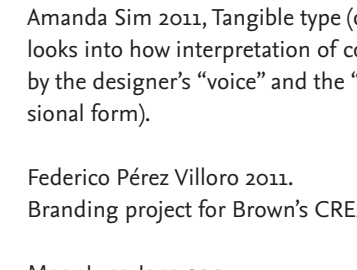
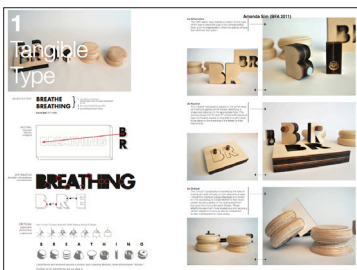
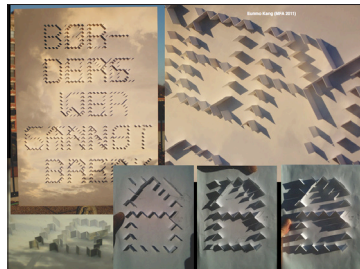
Here are such examples, of two posters by Swiss designer Erich Brechbühl.

And from the Zurich based graphic design studio founded by Marlon Ilg and Simon Trüb

Also, while I very much like these creations by Jessica Wash (one of my students at RISD who graduated in 2008, and now from Sagmeister & Walsh) and as visually exciting as these are, they seem to lack a sense of a fullness and depth of meaning which their phenomenal attractiveness appear to promise—but do not play out! They clearly lack a sense of poetic depth of meaning. That is, our experience with it is limited for content, and once we pass through it's phenomenalism, and find no more value in it, we loose interest, and find its utility merely decorative at best. The commercial world promotes this kind of principle: phenomenal flash and attraction, but limited content.

Now, don't get me wrong—I truly encourage this kind of bold and fun experimentation with visual forms, structure, materials and media—but ideally it should also remain relevant to its content, and ideally offer an experience for others worth experiencing!

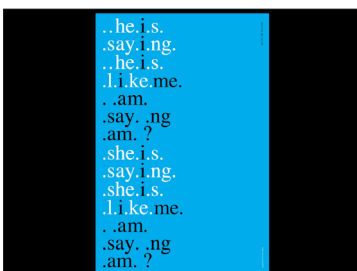
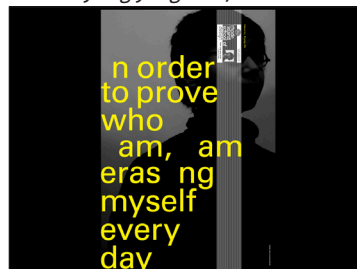
Ligature and graffiti can serve the potential for something worth experiencing — as one of my DP students Timothy Piper 2010 discovered with his graffiti font. And as Yoanna Wiman (2012) found out with her folding kit with letters that combined to make words. And what I also hope for you to stimulate in your inquiry is to use any options you may have an interest in for technique, method, forms, materials, means, tools, dimensions, etc. etc. Yoon Kim 2012 / 3-d type / string. And in the process of experimentation the work does not always need to be so poetically profound . . . fun is good, but hopefully that fun also brings about a broader or deeper sense of meaning, if we are willing to work with it.

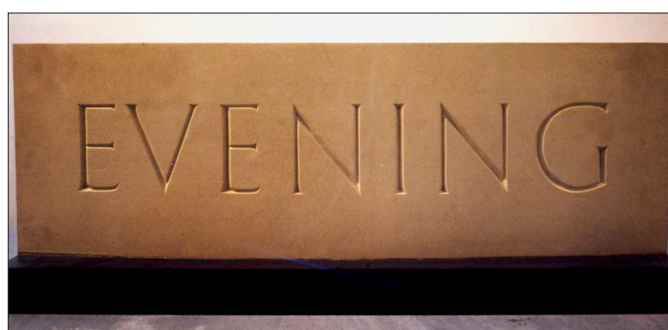
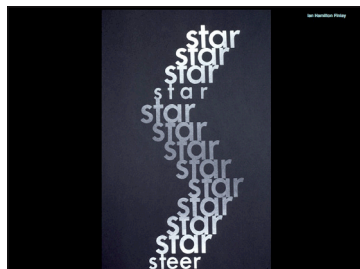
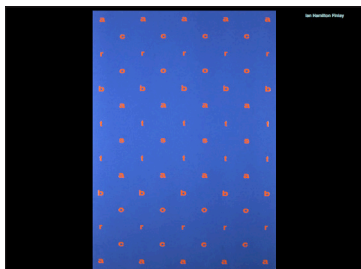
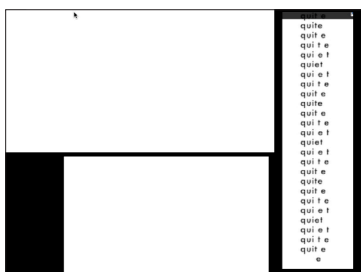
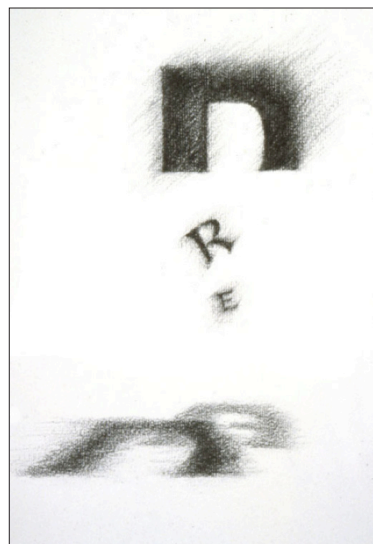
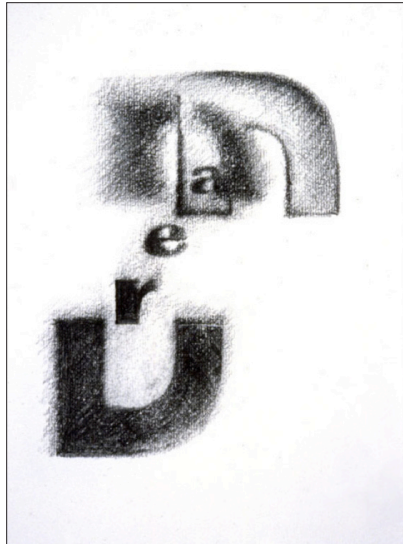
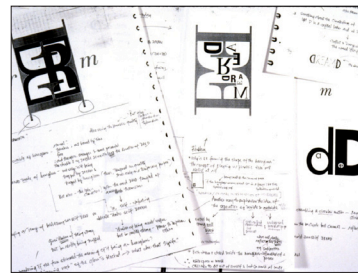
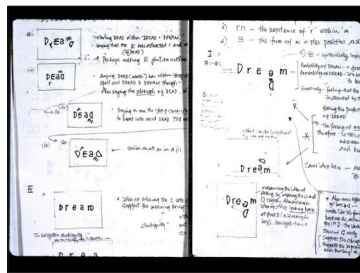
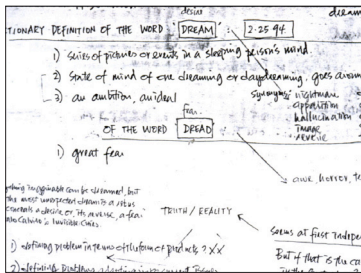


Amanda Sim 2011, Tangible type (discursive typographic design looks into how interpretation of content and meaning is influenced by the designer's "voice" and the "dialogue" formed by three-dimensional form).

Federico Pérez Villoro 2011.
Branding project for Brown's CREATIVE MIND Institute.

MoonJung Jang 2007.





And my own Concrete Poetry — here in the format of a large painting (which I was into at that time, so as to give the experiments with the forms and content more meaningful context—in ragrd to galleries—who always said that it would be a better fit for me to see a publisher of books, while publishers said that I'd be better off to see galleries — in other words, the ideas no longer fit the conventions, which is exactly what the concrete poets were interested to tackle this conventional mind-set!).

And for the last series to introduce one of my favorite poets, Ian Hamilton Finlay, from Scotland.

Unit 3 Title: Word As Image / Unit Leader: Tom Ockerse

Unit 3 Question:
How can the graphic medium **enhance and enrich** the verbal message?

Unit summary:
In our engagement with the world around us, and our routine to "make sense" out of complexity, we take for granted the perceptual and holistic principles this interaction involves. The perception of parts and their **configurations** as a **holistic system**, or **language**, depends greatly on the use of so-called "gestalt" principles and how these serve the purpose to communicate.

Since graphic design presents ideas primarily via graphic means, awareness of these perceptual principles is critical for designers to help their products stimulate clarity and unity, curiosity and interest, inquiry and insight.

We will look into this power of graphic design to discover how an abstract (non-visual) object like a "word" (in verbal means to represent an idea) can be enriched significantly toward a deep sense of poetic insight due to its graphic/visual delivery, and thus provide a lasting impression of value for the ideas it holds.

Learning objectives:

- Develop visual sensibilities.
- Learn about "gestalt" principles and the idea of "language" as a holistic system.
- Observe the power of the visual to affect the non-visual.
- Develop mind-mapping skills.
- Become aware of the practice to design for experience.

Phase I: Find your word:
After introducing this unit each participant is given an **object** (same for all).
Return to your studio.
Work individually to **mind map your identity with the object** (what it means to you).*

After about 15 minutes of mind mapping
select a single word from your map
(subjectively, for whatever reason, or needing to connect to the object).

Mind Mapping (Tony Buzan)

Phase I: Find your word:
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After about 15 minutes of mind mapping
select a single word from your map
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(reviewed the Unit 3 Assignment and its process; during this I also explained a few notes about mind-mapping)

Some NOTES about Mind Maps, or Concept Maps)

The mind map is merely a concept map as a simple method to reveal the relational values of parts to other parts and groups as wholes. This represents a fundamental principle: meaning exists only from relationship. To center your consciousness (by noting a word/idea in the center) helps maintain an awareness of the interactive nature of parts and wholes (immediate, indirect or hypothetical relationships), vs. a linear path, wherein awareness can lose sight of source and value. The term "mind-map" was popularized by Tony Buzan (British popular psychology author and television personality *) in the late 1970s, and inspired by Alfred Korzybski's general semantics theory).

But in my view the term "mind-map" is misleading since the system does not truly "map the mind" but merely documents aspects of thoughts and insights. Long before Buzan others used the same mapping system for similar purposes (e.g., 3rd cent. Greek philosopher, Porphyry, used it to map out Aristotle's categories; Ernest E. Wood, 1930s, used it as a means to train concentration skills. Also, the semantic network was developed in the late 1950s as a theory to understand human learning and developed further by Allan M. Collins and M. Ross Quillian during the early 1960s.

Mind maps are similar in radial structure to concept maps, developed by learning experts in the 1970s, but differ in that the former are simplified by focusing around a single central key concept.

Personally I prefer to use the term concept map, but the term "mind map" has been used in such a common way that I also slip into using it more generally. (Tom Ockerse))

* Tony Buzan's specific approach, and the introduction of the term "mind map" arose during a 1974 BBC TV series he hosted, called *Use Your Head*. [3][4] In this show, and companion book series, Buzan promoted his conception of radial tree, diagramming key words in a colorful, radiant, tree-like structure.[5] Buzan says the idea was inspired by Alfred Korzybski's general semantics as popularized in science fiction novels, such as those of Robert A. Heinlein and A. E. van Vogt. He argues that while "traditional" outlines force readers to scan left to right and top to bottom, readers actually tend to scan the entire page in a non-linear fashion. Buzan's treatment also uses then-popular assumptions about the functions of cerebral hemispheres in order to explain the claimed increased effectiveness of mind mapping over other forms of note making.