

Vertical Group Exercises in Graphic Design

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Graphic designers traditionally have limited experience with the direct relationship between meaning and form in the language they use. In this experimental project graphic design students were encouraged to gradually refine their own individual handwritten texts from random, personal jottings into a formal graphic mode. Several students' work is illustrated and commented on.

These exercises form the preparatory stage of a graphic language "laboratory" study in the Department of Graphics at Chelsea School of Art. The word laboratory sounds ambitious, but in this first project it is the experimental attitude which defines the nature of the work rather than the equipment which is used. We began with a wish to provoke students into writing their own texts with the intention of using these to set typographic tasks based upon a handwritten groundwork. Typographers normally design using other people's words and eventually accept a situation in which they are limited to making only slight modifications in a given text even when a syntactic rephrasing could make the message more understandable. However, we found that recognizing a theme and choosing words was more valuable to our graphics course, so we decided to keep to a handwritten script.

In the West most of us suffer from an inability to see handwriting as anything but a very informal or incomplete version of a typewritten or printed message. Lettering and calligraphy which are taught in many graphic design courses frequently show such symptoms of overcompensation as a meaningless formalism, akin to ballroom dancing. A graphics course should examine and discuss the suitability of every graphic means without ignoring the function of peripheral implements and pieces of equipment. What, for example, do we have to say about the use of the ball-point pen?

We may use it for marking-up and correcting proofs, and then may find that it has other graphic uses.

This project makes use of handwriting, but the aim is not to produce “literature” only, nor a “free calligraphy” only, but to give the experience which allows a mass of words to be examined and processed according to a program. We are not interested in end-products, but in dissolving inhibitions and breaking down the idea of compartmentalized skills. As communication, speech comes first; words come in with writing. Why should graphic designers, like many specialists, be afraid of words outside their own technical type of discourse?

“Journeys demonstrate (among other things) that words are strangers to the things they name” (Amereida). In the first exercise we asked students to attempt to reverse this situation. The project was introduced verbally to a group selected from graphics students in all three years of the Diploma in Art & Design course. Each was issued a copy of the program synopsis and notes reproduced on following pages. We asked them, in their own time, when alone or late at night before going to bed, to give names to, and make up phrases about things in their vicinity. Early in the morning they were to add to or amend what they had written. The process was to continue until the student had exhausted his response to the stimulus-object.

The random notes were to cover the area of work on the paper as completely as possible and could be illegible to anyone except the student himself. This was to allow a sense of freedom until the student had accumulated a rich verbal soil as a basis for the following stages of the exercise. It was stressed at the outset that participation in the project was totally voluntary; students were free to drop out at any stage, which many did. To maintain the laboratory point of view, all work in the series was done on sheets of layout paper 15 inches wide by 20 inches deep, coded with stenciled numbers in the bottom right-hand corner to correspond to the exercise in the program synopsis. The area of work was chosen by the student, but this area—drawn in pencil on the sheet—was to be kept the same, in size and position, throughout the series. The decimal system of numbering the exercises set a limit of nine sheets for each stage in the series; when this limit was reached a move had to be made to the next stage.

The title Vertical Group was originally chosen because the students were drawn from each year, worked without hierarchy, and attended weekly group tutorials to discuss their work progress and problems in the project. Later the system was replaced by individual tutorials as the working pace of students varied and fluctuated according to the demands on student's time made by other projects in the graphics course. It is hoped that some of the first- and second-year students who participated last year will continue with the project during the remainder of their course. The work illustrated shows a part of the work carried out from October 1966 to June 1967. An unexpected result of the exercise has been the stimulus given to students to follow some experiments of their own invention outside the program but organized within the same methodical pattern. The examples on pages 407-8 are a part of a set of experiments made by a first-year student during the summer vacation.

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Project Synopsis

- 1.00 handwritten
 - .10 repeated random observation
 - .20 selective observation
 - .30 continuous prose
 - .40 given number of words
 - .50 analysis/listing
 - .60 naming/titling
 - .70 ambiguities
 - .80 word substitution
 - .90 commentary
 - 2.00 description of given object
 - .10 seen
 - .20 measured, counted
 - .30 touch or taste
 - .40 smelled or heard
 - .50 structure, weight
 - .60 uses of
 - .70 for or against
 - .80 comparative aspects
 - .90 prose
 - 3.00 description of group of objects maintaining a representation of their spatial relationship by tabulation
 - .10 seen
 - .20 measured, counted
 - .30 touch or taste
 - .40 smelled or heard
 - .50 structure, weight
 - .60 uses of
 - .70 for or against
 - .80 comparative aspects
 - .90 prose
 - 4.00 observer as object
 - .10 describe all other objects in selected group
 - .20 repeat from viewpoint of each object in turn
 - .30
 - .40
 - .50
 - .60
 - .70
 - .80
 - .90
- JC

Notes

- 1.10 observations to be written/overwritten to saturation point on sheets of same format (20" x 15") within uniform chosen area
- .20 approaching results of 1.10 objectively and extracting, verbatim, evidence of any apparent themes; e.g., subject content, phonetic, etc.
- .30 making a prose piece out of the selected words and/or phrases which, by its composition, should illustrate the reason for the selection
- .40 progressive editing, maintaining prose form
- .50 breakdown of prose into simplified grammatical analysis
- .60 arbitrary analysis; e.g., relating to sizes, functions, alliteration, etc.
- .70 rearrangement of selected words to find new way of communicating their meaning; by repetition, grouping, etc.

Stacked
 Slices, FRAGILITY
 Layered
 damp minute
 1c pain, coupé,
 c'est
 gus,
 gorie,
 amicable
 man pas agréable
 the bread -
 tender also at the
 edges,
 Cracked +
 scaly
 constructed of wire, tense, taut, around, soggy, dormant Bread
 + cellophane, unweighted
 dull
 dull
 of stare
 of cellophane
 too metallic to rise & disintegrate
 slow agony
 enderdown clouds of cellophane
 Bubble clouds of gas/flame
 dull stupidity
 starch
 folds
 Cellophane
 spirals
 highlights mosaics
 particles
 minuscule within
 the Breadcrumbs
 the
 the viscosity
 cellophane
 delicate
 drooping from the
 skin, membrane
 Squaled bread
 infinity
 intimacy
 intimacy of
 delicacy
 tenderness
 only in
 ravenous
 subtle
 Fragility
 skirting cellophane
 Vegetable/mineral fragile
 strained
 lethargy gross
 mouthful matter/tense
 Sensitive
 subtle
 sliced coupé

1.12

Breadcrumbs
 Stragony
 Wobbling
 Tension
 Taut
 Unweighted mineral
 too metallic to rise & disintegrate
 damp/moist | Soggy coarse
 vegetable dull & stupidity starch
 Enderdown clouds
 Bubbles clouds of gas/flame
 particles
 SQUAND
 mosaics
 Highlights
 tenderness
 Delicate
 wire
 static folds/mercury
 Dormant
 temblor - Stacked - Coupé
 particles
 minuscule
 1 coupé
 matter
 Bread/pain

1.20

Figure 2. Sarah Norton. Subject: a cellophane-wrapped, sliced loaf of bread.

1.12—random observation. 1.20—selective observation. 1.30—continuous prose.

Description of given object. Subject: a two-shilling piece. 2.13—seen.

Moving drifts in
subtle swirling clouds
to metallic to rise
& disintegrate

this also

WIRE

↳ also broken

Stacked and
dull

Layered

Layered

↳ Layered

↳ it is
Permanent

1.30

hard scratching surround
of the low suggested
image.

DEPTH

to infinity

AD FINITUM. ∞

a circular container for a molten
block, slab of mellow, beautiful,
subtle translucent
crystal, moonstone

tightly embodied, encased,

glimmering radiating

subtly all-knowing, all seeing,

round

circular

sphere?

globe?

Sun.

Earth

perfection.

↳ static through lack of progression

a revolution

as a wheel-

a ring

a band. steel, ticked, serrated.

tractor tyres.

2.13

	ONE	containing,
	single	dots, multiple.
	only	Scratches, multitude
	monotony	
	unily	letters - several
	entire	head - no
	sole	flowers,
	isolated	pattern - chaos, intricacy
		interweaving
		highlights sunspots.
		scratches, ricks, crosses.
loneliness		

2.20

dentel		
meshed		
uneven.		
<hr/>		
Grit		Embossed
Gravel		pitted
Grating		indented & knobby
pebbled		
rock marked		flat
		slab

2.30

Figure 3. Sarah Norton. Description of a given object. Subject: a two-shilling piece. 2.20—measured, counted. 2.30—touch or taste. 2.40—smelled or heard. 2.50—structure, weight.

Sharp —
Thin
Thin
fall.

metall.
keen cloyng Dirt

2.40

unmanufactured
silver Ore, Earth product,
Slice, or layer, shittan
Disc
entire, perfect, symmetry
Circular, disc, round,
circumferencid.

Heavy
fractional weight,
substantial,
Sinkable

2.50

composite of collective objects,
 representative of multiple.
 in place of two durability.
 reassure
 bribe
 tempt
 entice

Obtain
 purchase
 procure
 buy
 acquire.

Exchange, barter,
 transact.

Exchange.
 replace.

Tokens
 forfeit,
 penalty,
 Tax
 Tarrif

2.60

Unification,
 combination,
 of variety.

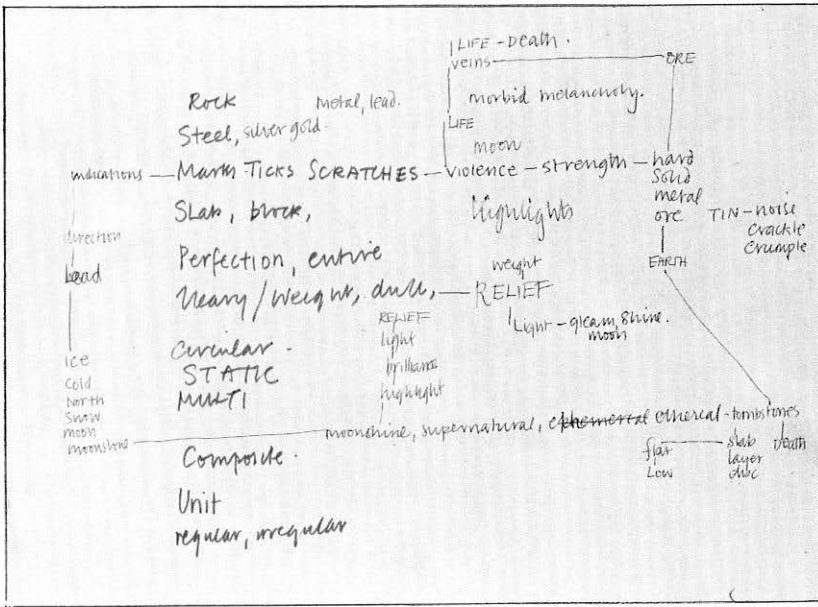
~~Unification~~

Practical
 Space-saving,
 convenient.
 fraction of unit

design, details, scratches,
 pedantic meandre

2.70

Figure 4. Sarah Norton. Description of given object. Subject: a two-shilling piece. 2.60—uses of. 2.70—for or against. 2.80—comparative aspects. 2.90—prose.



2.80

What is light suddenly becomes morbid + dark, an interchange of gas + slate.
 distortions lead to ellipses + ovals.

hard metal, earth metal, mined; the earth. A tomb in the earth. An equation of life + death, violence, strength + eternal impassivity. Violence is also life, + heat, + heaven is cold, + death. Silver + moonlight are precursors. Money is commonplace + life.
 Renet is light hearted, + light is brilliant, gleaming.
 what is white is dull slate, brilliance in light, sunshine, or moonshine, when is the supernatural

2.90

1.11-1.80.

Commentary

1.11, initially set out to record my immediate thoughts at a particular time. It is purely random and is overwritten and corrected according to the themes passing through my mind. After this stage has been satisfactorily completed, that is I was satisfied that the thoughts were abundant enough, upon examination certain elements existed between certain areas of the thoughts. A theme or link was formed between themes that in certain stages of environment at the time of writing had led to similar thoughts, although at different times. For instance 1.22 + 1.23 (Selection Analysis) were based upon the recurrence in certain lines of certain ideas. The base of themes was an immediate object as was the glass ash tray, thus a link, whilst Salvador Jido's film etc. was a memory of an event. Whilst linking these elements together the piece was also given a logical progression; the actual order related to the components. It is here that the piece begins to form a poetical image and stage 1.30 continues this by arranging the selected words, phrases and sentences into continuous prose. Certain words are added here of course, to enable the piece to read as prose. Departing from the poetic style of the piece 1.61 is a careful cutting and delineation of its structure into a given number of words, in this case 150. The subdivisions are only representative of its word counting incidentally, and are not important to the visual aspect. When I reach 1.50, the entire "unfixed whole" of the piece has become completely broken and the words are arranged in grammatical order so that all the previous themes have been destroyed and their elements mixed together. A list is now the only reference on which to fix the scene and words are carefully selected from the lists for personal qualities of preference or dislike for example 1.61. The latter is merely a blown up copy of 1.50, overwriting words for the former reasons. Colour was used as a guide here partly to differentiate between the qualities I wished to express. Thus by now the whole system of random thoughts, by writing (of the speed of writing is adequate to express thoughts) has been broken and arranged into different elements. 1.71 and 1.80 are merely further examples of placing themes or different elements of the piece. 1.71 is a rearrangement of the former words but leading to the same meaning. Words are added here again to enable this to be more successful. 1.80 changes the actual words into words of the same meaning, again keeping the mood of the piece but exploring a different route to achieve this.

2.3.4.5.

This was an extension from 1.11 in which the actual stroke of the writer's word was explored. 2. was a blown up copy of a marked area on 1.11, (blue square) and this was carefully written over so that the words were exceptionally large giving the effect of a point and yet the system of "writing quickly" was still evident. The Nos. 3, 4, 5, were continuations of this until the whole was broken down to two large lines which have an outline, possibly one characteristic of my writing. By doing this the visual aspect of writing becomes more and more apparent and the individual character of one person's writing so can be explored by this method. Unfortunately the elements of the actual line outline become progressively more difficult to reproduce with a copy gets larger.

Figure 8. Nick Cudworth. 1.90—commentary; a report by the student on the evolution of his piece of writing within the framework of the exercise. 1.91—commentary; supplements 1.90 and is an analysis of the derivation of recurrent themes in the random work.

Explanatory

Re-tracing themes; based from Selective section.
(in selective order)

Tissues 2 ply Culloden Moor. : At this stage I was examining certain
Tarn O'Shanter dejects including a box of Scott Glen tissues
for men. The first theme has various tributes
all of which however were caused by the presence
of this deject.

Glass thumb, nub. end
like a large sweet to be
sucked and powder gilt
fingernails. The second of the dejects; a large glass ash tray
shaped like a Murray-mint. The various relations
derive from the contents; the fingernails relate to
my sudden awareness, at this time, of my badly-
bitten fingernails.

How about a day, boys.
What's the time
Richmond walks need stripping

These were actual questions asked by my
Welsh of late. The last was a statement I
made concerned with travelling down to Sunny to
help my friend rebuild his house.

Radio 390 Dept. 1 Bristol
Kynham. Associated
Rudolfsson. Samuel.
Cidur from Somerset
Solovior, fields film
Rak Hudson.

These were all written unconsciously as I was guided
by the sound of Radio Luxembourg on the radio.

Can you play the blues.
Hamp. Jackie. King Lear 3/4.
I name reasonably happy on today
Smoke gets up your nose
Begin de Bequins Brain Mills
(Concerned about women Ophelia
Deane's sticking tops
Nicholas shows technique
ability. George & Linda

An extract from an Alfred Hitchcock film directed by
Solovior Dali in which Rach Hudson played a
man terrified of fields, in any form. Derived from the
shape form bedspread which was exactly the same
as the one used in the film. Cannot remember the name of the
film.
Events and memories during the day before I wrote down the
ideas. Names relate to students at the College.

Pygmy midget rock Spelstree
R. J. Standing still film and gam.
Old Kent Chance. Memories of last year at college. Song titles dictated and
remembered. Brian Mill's former lecturer, remarks he wrote
my report. George, my brother and his fiancée. Deane, my
former mistress. Ophelia name of one of his paintings

gymnasium

Mr. Brown had a nervous
breakdown but he's dead now,
his wife was a bitch, but wasn't a coded
tick

Remembering playing monopoly with Dave Williams during
Summer Holidays.
Memory of infant school, I was once badly injured in
the gym. Headmaster was called Brown and we
made up a rhyme about it. I have never forgotten it.

Playboy - At this point in your career do you think your pyramid of success may be cracking? ↑↑

|| The De Salvo trial and the second Coppino case || 2*

Bailey - || There are no setbacks until the record is closed. We had nothing to lose in the De Salvo case. He was not on trial as the Boston strangler. We were litigating the Massachusetts rule on insanity, which is likely to be revised and updated very soon. The verdict in that case is an appeal and I expect to win it || (reference to 2. all clauses) 1

|| As for Coppino I'm convinced his verdict will be overturned || (reference to 2.) 2

|| In any case, I consider the whole business statistics irrelevant to the ability of a trial attorney, because there are too many cases no lawyer could win - and too many no lawyer should lose || 3. (reference to his section with 2)

Playboy - || You've often said that defending a murder suspect is the highest calling in your profession. Why? || (3 from 2*)

Fidelity - || According to the Constitution, due process is meant to protect the order of importance, life and then liberty and then property. Only capital cases deal with life || 4. || (reference to 3)

Playboy - || You've also compared the criminal lawyer with the professional fighter. What do you mean by that? || 4*

Bailey - || I mean that a criminal lawyer without an aggressive, forceful personality would be horribly handicapped. There is something of the prize professional fighter in what I do, and that's one of the things our present jury system supplanted || (reference to 4. all clauses) || If you and I had a dispute 2 or 300 yrs ago we would each have brought our fists and go out and fight. The merits of either side would have nothing to do with it. Victory would depend on which brought us out a better fighter. If mine were you, I'd pay me or give up your land. Now this has been refined, and the merits of each side do count || (sub-reference to 4. all clauses) || But the criminal lawyer is still a fighter, the defendant in a courtroom is little more than a patient on an operating table without the benefit of anesthesia. He has to watch what's happening but he can't do anything about it. He hasn't the understanding of the law, the ability to try cases or any of the other skills required of his lawyer || (sub-reference to 4. all clauses) || So the lawyer is a projection of the defendant. He's doing everything the defendant would do if he were able - short of borrowing pajamas and other non-permissible tactics. And to that extent, as a lawyer, you don't say, "This is a good guy and I'm going to fight hard for him." sub-reference to 4. all clauses.

|| You're paid - hopefully though, not always - and you're a professional and your business is to fight || direct reference to 4. (Playboy).

I

At this point in your career do you think your pyramid of success may be cracking?

|| The De Salvo trial and the second Coppino case || There are no setbacks until the record is closed. We had nothing to lose in the De Salvo case. He was not on trial as the Boston strangler. We were litigating the Massachusetts rule on insanity, which is likely to be revised and updated very soon. The verdict in that case is an appeal and I expect to win it || As for Coppino I'm convinced his verdict will be overturned ||

In any case I consider the whole business statistics irrelevant to the ability of a trial attorney, because there are too many cases no lawyer could win - and too many no lawyer should lose.

You've often said that defending a murder suspect is the highest calling in your profession. Why? || According to the Constitution, due process is meant to protect the order of importance, first things first the way I look at it. Life and then liberty and then property. Only capital cases deal with life ||

You've also compared the criminal lawyer with the professional fighter. What do you mean by that? || I mean that a criminal lawyer without an aggressive, forceful personality would be horribly handicapped. There is something of the professional fighter in what I do, and that's an effect of the system our present jury system supplanted || If you and I had a dispute 2 or 300 yrs ago we would each have brought our fists and go out and fight. The merits of either side would have nothing to do with it. Victory would depend on which brought us the better fighter. If mine were you, I'd pay me or give up your land. Now this has been refined, and the merits of each side do count || But the criminal lawyer is still a fighter || The defendant in a courtroom is little more than a patient on an operating table without the benefit of anesthesia. He has to watch what's happening but he can't do anything about it. He hasn't the understanding of the law, the ability to try cases or any of the other skills required of his lawyer || You're paid, hopefully though, not always, and your professional and your business is to fight ||

|| So the lawyer is a projection of the defendant. He's doing everything the defendant would do if he were able - short of borrowing pajamas and other non-permissible tactics. And to that extent, as a lawyer, you don't say, "This is a good guy and I'm going to fight hard for him." ||

II

Figure 10. Nick Cudworth. Dialogue into structure. I—The dialogue, taken from a magazine, is divided into groups indicated by lines that relate to points of reference. II—Arrangement of dialogue in the groups, maintaining conversational order and still including lines to indicate parts which were derived from different points in the original framework.

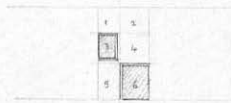
The conversation now takes the form of 5 major divisions (groups) separated in elements but joined to the "conversational block" as a whole. A form of solid (cube (equal-dimensional 3-D object)) is used for the individual dialogues. These are joined but are individual within themselves. It is necessary to establish the size of the cubes by a method of ratios. Let us say that;

- width - constant according to no. of characters participating 1 character = 1"
- height - each unit no part rep 1" e.g. Block 2 3 parts :: 3"
- depth - each sentence or phrase within the volume of the block :: Block 2 6 parts :: 6"



Now it is necessary for the cubes to be broken or segmented according to the parts they possessing entirely to the individual conversation used (and not sentences). For example let us take Block 5, initially

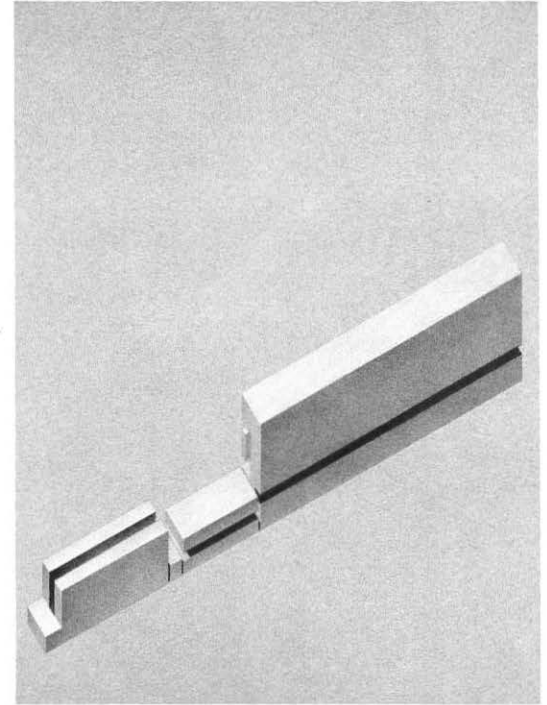
- III You ... det III part 1 ← main statement
- II I ... sup II = 2 ← reference
- II I ... det II = 3 ← indirect "
- II I ... det II = 4 ← " "
- II I ... det II = 5 ← " "
- II I ... det II = 6 ← sub-reference



The upper shape of the cube and the cuts in the block depend upon;

- a) direct reference means solidifying of appropriate sections
- b) indirect reference causes a direct split
- c) sub-reference causes a direct split
- d) unless otherwise necessary splits between each cube are limited to an 1/8"

- Block 4
- III ... det III part 1 → main statement
 - II ... det II = 2 → ref "
 - II ... det II = 3 → " "
- Block 3
- III ... det III part 1 → individual statement
- Block 2
- III ... det III part 1 → main statement but;
 - II ... det II = 2 → ref "
 - II ... det II = 3 → " "
- Block 1
- III ... det III part 1 → individual statement but
- connected



IV

III—Transposition of the dialogue into three-dimensional volume, and the ratios on which this is based. IV—Scale drawing of three-dimensional structure representing evolution of the dialogue as analysed.