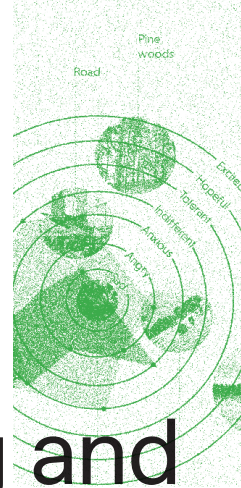


How can we visually uncover new ways of reading, understanding and translating the essence of an idea or narrative through the use of systematic, non-textual visual grammars?



In a way, my current line of enquiry is about visually rewriting/transforming the key elements of a piece of information through a systematic iterative approach. This raises questions such as: What are the limits of visual representation? Does focusing on one single aspect of the data set affect the integrity of the information? Should textual elements aid with the interpretation of purely visual forms? Is there a visual grammar beginning to emerge by repetition and development of the systematic iterative process at play?

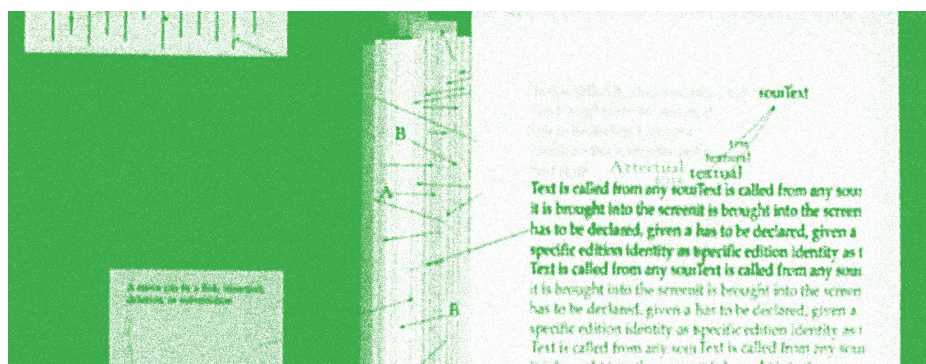
The essence of this enquiry is related to the creation of a receptive iterative system (the morphological box), which can be customised and flexibly adapted to create new sets of visual responses based on a given input (In this case, *The Outing*, by Lydia Davis). This renewed attention to non-textual narratives leads us to delve deeper into the relevance of visual language and its connection to systematic creativity. Looking to develop visual elements that can facilitate the discovery, comprehension, and communication of previously hidden narratives, as well as unearthing concepts that would otherwise be lost among a sea of information.

Drucker, J. (2014) “Designing graphic interpretation,” in *Graphesis: Visual forms of knowledge production*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 180–192.

The concept of ‘visual interpretation’ is highly linked to cognition and the way we experience, read and acquire information. In ‘*Graphesis: Visual forms of knowledge production*’, the author explores the idea of non-linear visual interpretations, and the use of graphic communication design to translate data in space, rather than being constrained to a linear established format. By spatialising arguments, we can dissect a piece of information from different angles, revealing not only novel ways of understanding and seeing it, but also creating opportunities for researching layers of information which are not evident in plain sight.

“Reading graphic environments in analogue or digital space and spatialising arguments through graphical means are two aspects of graphic interpretation” (Drucker, 2014)

Whereas Drucker’s argument focuses mainly on design for digital platforms, I think the principles discussed in the text can be extended to analogous interpretations of information beyond the interface. Although it is true that digital environments provide vast possibilities for reorganising, presenting and interacting with layers of data, the challenge of applying these concepts to printed artefacts expands on the importance of materiality and presence when deciphering visual narratives.



Crouwel, W. et al. (2015) in The debate: The legendary contest of two giants of graphic design. New York: The Monacelli Press, pp. 19–75-75.

Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn's positions are as polarising as the world we live in today. In a way, the sheer amount of data readily available to us has created an overload in the way we understand, process (or ignore) visual messages. With a vast amount of choice comes a sense of disorientation, but also a sense of responsibility for designers to push their creative practice beyond working either with sterile pragmatism, or boundless self-expression, and really engage with the tools of graphic communication design to organise, synthesise and present information that in turn captures the essence of the message for it to remain meaningful.

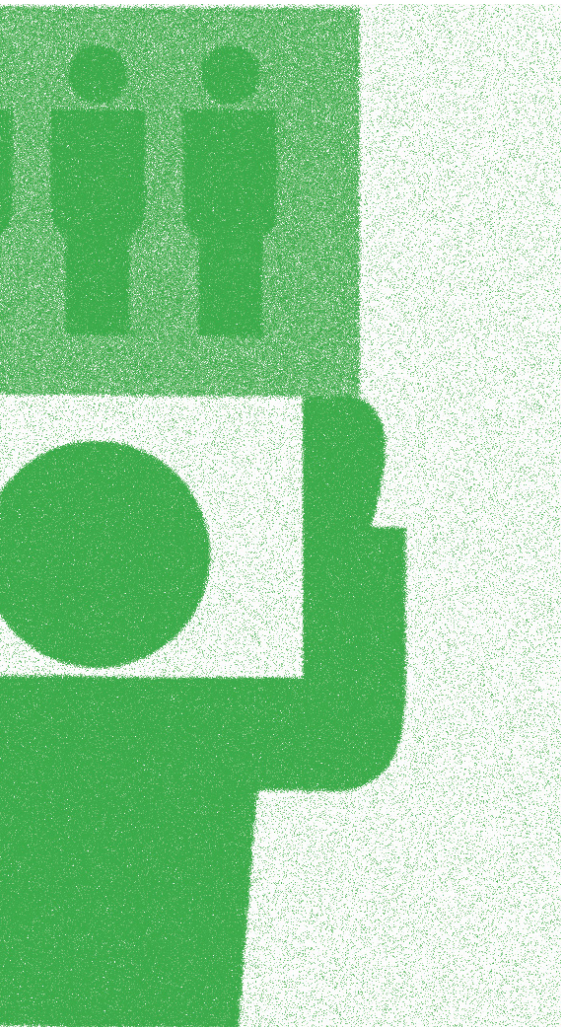
The question here is one of purpose. Crouwel and van Thorn both present strong arguments on the designer's role within the wider social context, but the crucial point here is, in my opinion, one of taking responsibility for the interpretation of information as part of the design process, as well as taking into account the context and transcendence of the message.

“The moment when visual art starts to grow dominant in applied art and design, the work seems no longer about finding an expression for the topic but rather about expressing one's self”. (Crouwel et al., 2015)

I see an emerging opportunity to bring order and clarity when conveying information, by pursuing a renewed focus in developing visual elements that can facilitate the discovery, comprehension, and communication of previously hidden layers of information through non-textual visual language.



Neurath, M. and Kinross, R. (2009) The transformer: Principles of making Isotype Charts. London: Hyphen Press.



What is transformation and why is it relevant to this enquiry? Maria Neurath's description of her involvement in the development of ISOTYPE as "The transformer" is still highly thought provoking and relevant to modern design practice. Considering transformation as the act of interpreting data into visual stories, the concept of transformation encapsulates the responsibility of the designer in translating information with the purpose of clarifying, educating, expanding and ultimately, shaping people's perception on reality.

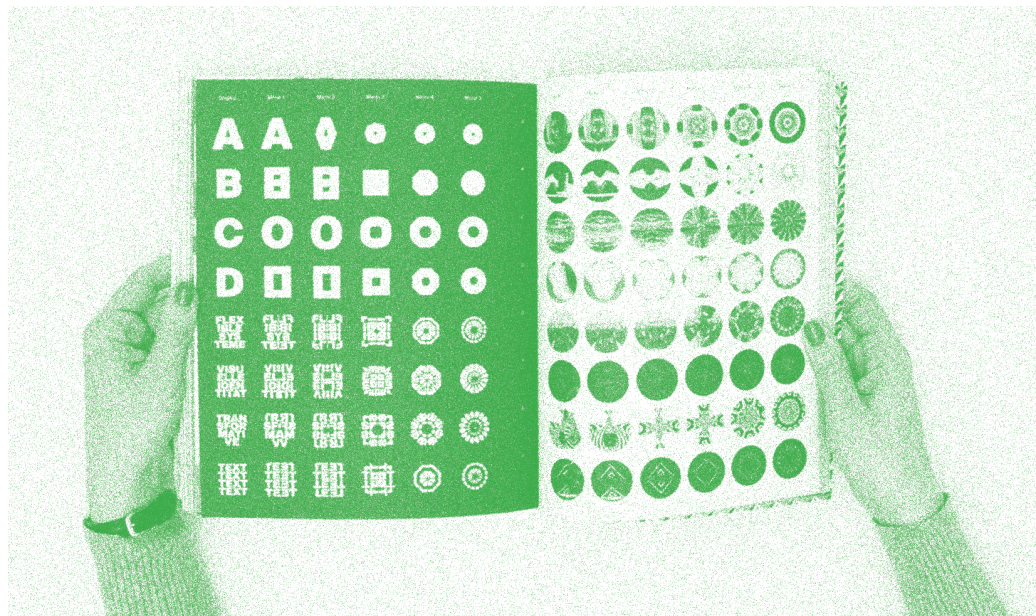
What is more interesting is the nature of the "transformation" process, in which there is a standard procedure or framework for interpreting information (correlated to the morphological box), but the input can vary and be reformulated as needed. From governmental data to museum exhibitions, Neurath's work highlights the relevance of flexible visual languages and their application to the creation of visual devises. This is highly connected to my current line or enquiry and strongly influenced by modernist ideas in pursue of systematic meaning, clarity and consistency.

As with the design of ISOTYPE charts, my enquiry aims to experiment with the principles of graphic design in the construction of visual narratives beyond textual form, looking to unearth the possibilities of visual representation according to different "domains" or elements found in a set of information or in this case a short narrative.

Lorenz, M. (2022) Flexible visual systems: The Design Manual for Contemporary Visual identities. Karlsruhe, Germany: Slanted Publishers.

The idea of flexible systems seems slightly contradictory at first glance. Yet, this receptive approach to design is born in response to global design trends, and the need for cohesion in a fast-changing world. Martin Lorenz addresses the process of systematic creativity and the possibilities of breaking the cycle of trend-driven graphic identity design by proposing practical design frameworks which can be applied to identity design, as well as to other design territories. His research is highly relevant to my own practice as the idea of rigorous experimentation through a systematic approach is pivotal in the development of creative solutions.

In Flexible Visual Systems, Lorenz argues there has been a shift in the way graphic communication designers interact with their audience. What was 30 years ago a passive, one-sided exchange, has now been transformed into a dialogue where audiences like, share and influence the use and meaning of design in their lives, mainly thanks to technology, social media, and easy access to information. This highlights the importance of interpretation and how, more than ever, designers need to be conscious about the environment they are translating to and the responsibility that under-prints contemporary design practice.



Lachenmeier, N. and Hil, D. (2022) Superdot Studio.

Nicole Lachenmeier and Darjan Hil's Superdot Studio, is a unique example of a contemporary design studio working in the intersection between information design, data visualisation and commercial practice. Their practice explores different ways to visually synthesising data, as well as the creation of visual systems to aid in the development of extensive socially-focused projects for NGOs and governmental organisations. Their work draws inspiration from the concept of transformation as a fundamental element of design practice.

I find resonance with their work in the way they synthesise different kinds of information and put visual representations at the viewer's disposal, pursuing a new kind of legibility which requires both interest from the reader but also great accessibility principles applied from a design perspective. There is something really powerful about using visual communication design to visualise different variants of domains of data in a purposefully built graphic environment, as well as thinking of potential sectors in which my research can be extended and applied. In essence, this points back to the transcendence and responsibility behind the practice of graphic communication design, in the way data is transformed to inform, educate and perhaps even shape people's understanding of reality.

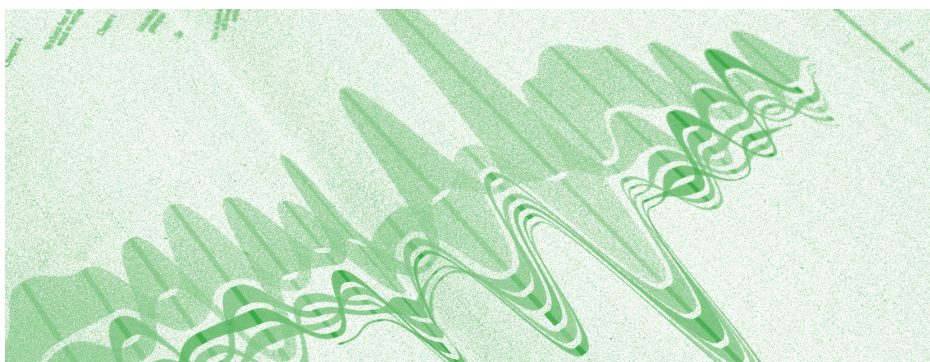


Piotrowska, H.P. (2019) Italo Calvino: If on a Winter's Night a Traveler - Data Visualisation, 2019, Buszmeni.

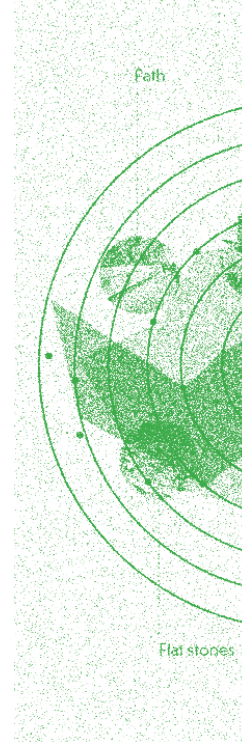
Polish designer Hanna Piotrowska visually breaks down the peculiar structure of Calvino's story, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. By using data visualisation, she explores the integrity of the text and puts to test Calvino's disorienting narrative beyond its textual form.

Piotrowska focuses on visualising different narrative domains such as the relationship between characters, dialogues, themes, as well as the semantic construction of the text itself. In contrast, my exploration of Lydia Davis' *The Outing* is underpinned by the economy of words and the things left unsaid. These key areas are unpacked visually and expanded on, as we become more aware of the nuances and particularities of the text. In both projects, there's a systematic approach evident throughout, which pushes the idea of data visualisation into new territories beyond its traditional use.

The way in which Piotrowska visually explores the main arguments of the story relates to my own exploration of "The Outing", where different interpretative opportunities arise as the morphological box helps to direct the interpretations of the story's main arguments. Although there are crucial differences between the nature of the systems applied to produce these two projects, the intention to unveil new layers of information through visualisation seems to be a common thread throughout.



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