

# VERBAL / VISUAL EQUATIONS

In language, signs are joined together to create messages. Words as verbal sign, grouped together in a linear fashion, attain their value vis-à-vis other words through opposition and contrast. Words can also evoke meaning through mental association. These associative relations are semantically derived. Since typography is both visual and verbal, it operates in a linear fashion, with words following each other in a specific sequence, or in a nonlinear manner, with elements existing in many syntactic combinations.

Language, in any of its many forms, is a self-contained system of interactive signs that communicates ideas. Just as elocution and diction enhance and clarify the meaning of our spoken words, typographic signs can be manipulated by a designer to achieve more lucid and expressive typographic communication.

Signs operate in two dimensions: syntactic and semantic. When the mind is concerned with the form of a sign, it is involved with typographic syntax. When it associates a particular meaning with a sign, it is operating

in the semantic dimension. All objects in the environment can potentially function as signs, representing any number of concepts. A smog-filled city signifying pollution, a beached whale representing extinction, and confetti implying a celebration, each functions as a sign relating a specific concept.

Signs may exist at various levels of abstraction. A simple example will illustrate this point. Let us consider something as elemental as a red dot. It is a sign only if it carries a particular meaning. It can represent any number of things: balloon, ball, or Japanese flag. The red dot can become a cherry, for example, as the mind is cued by forms more familiar to its experience.

The particular syntactic qualities associated with typographic signs determine a specific meaning. A series of repeated letters, for example, may signify motion or speed, while a small letter in a large void may signify isolation. These qualities, derived from the operating principles of visual hierarchy and ABA form, function as cues, permitting the mind to form concepts. Simple syntactic manipulations, such as the repetition of letters, or the weight change of certain letters, enable words visually to mimic verbal meaning.

excerpted from  
*Typographic Design: Form and Communication*  
by Rob Carter, Ben Day and Phillip Meggs

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BASKERVILLE

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/10.8 POINT LEADING

/LEFT ADJUSTED

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