Visual Language Basics & Spatial Order
George Legrady

Winter 2008

Language & Syntax

JGXT YQAL
ANAGRAM

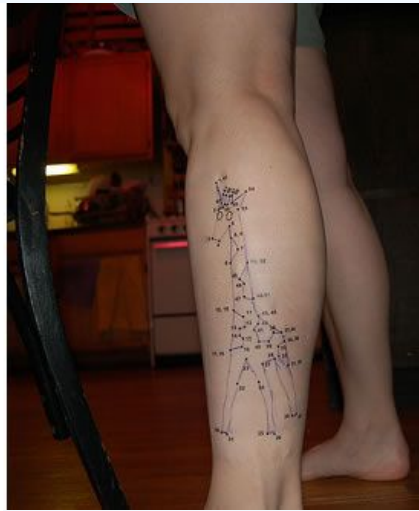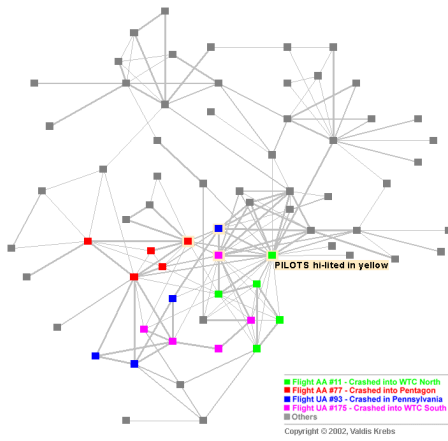| |
|---|
| **DOG HOUND CANINE** |

WHAT'S UP DOC?
ARE YOU THERE?

- **Language** consists of <u>discreet units</u>, organized according to <u>rule-based</u> structures

- **Text basic unit**: the **char**, a symbolic, abstract system, represents designated sounds

- Combination of chars and their sounds, organized into **words** (cultural & learned)

- **Syntax**: The organization of elements according to sets of rules defined through usage

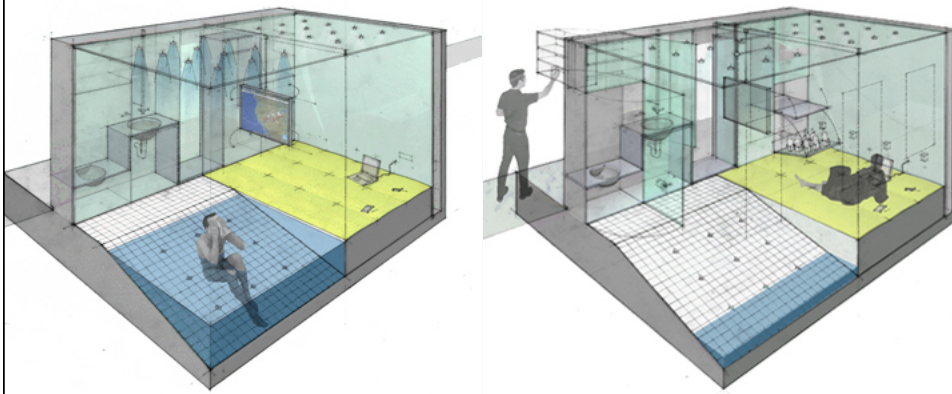- **Verbal literacy**: One learns the common syntax to establish <u>limits</u> of construction
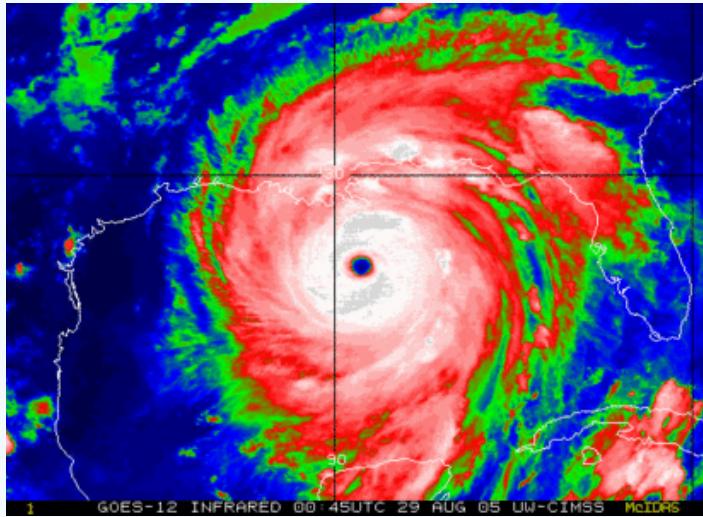
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1.Visual Basic Literacy: Basic Units(Dondis)

- **Dot**: Minimal unit, pointer, marker of space
- **Line:** Joins dots, articulator of space
- **Shape**: Line describes and encloses space
- **Direction**: Thrust of movement
- **Tone**: The intensity of lightness or darkness
- **Color**: Associative and symbolic meanings
- **Texture**: Quality of touching, looks/feels like
- **Scale**: Relative proportion & measurement
- **Dimensions**: 2D, 3D spatial illusion
- **Motion**: Visual elements guiding the viewer

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Dot: Minimal unit, pointer, marker of space

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Line: Joins dots, articulator of space

PILOTS hi-lited in yellow

Flight AA #11 - Crashed into WTC North
Flight AA #77 - Crashed into Pentagon
Flight UA #93 - Crashed in Pennsylvania
Flight UA #175 - Crashed into WTC South
Others

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Shape: Line describes and encloses space

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Direction: Thrust of Movement

Tone: The intensity of lightness/darkness

Color: Associative & Symbolic Meaning

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Texture: Quality of Touching looks/feels like
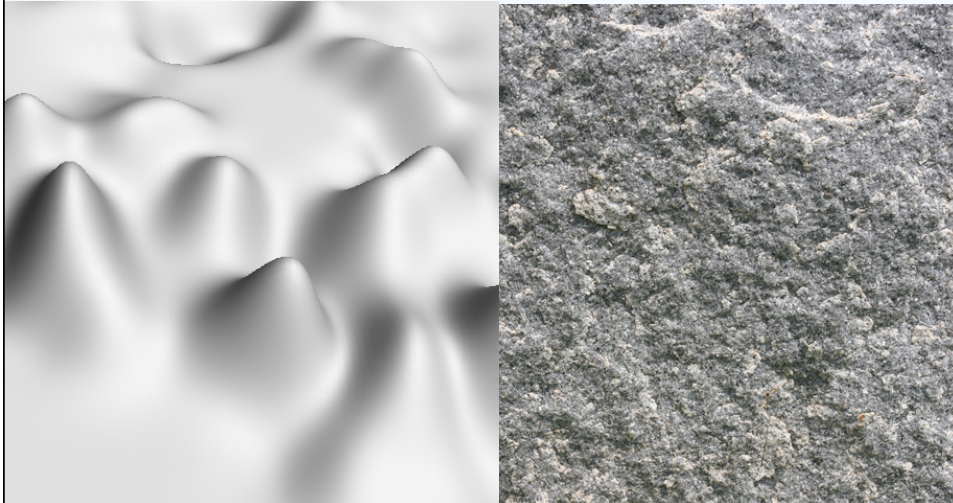
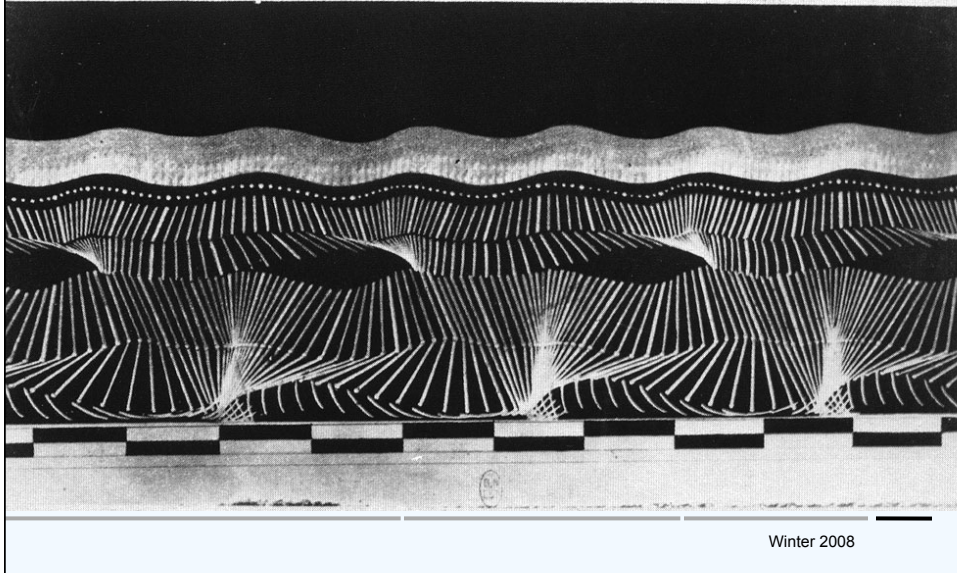Winter 2008

Scale: Relative proportion & measurement
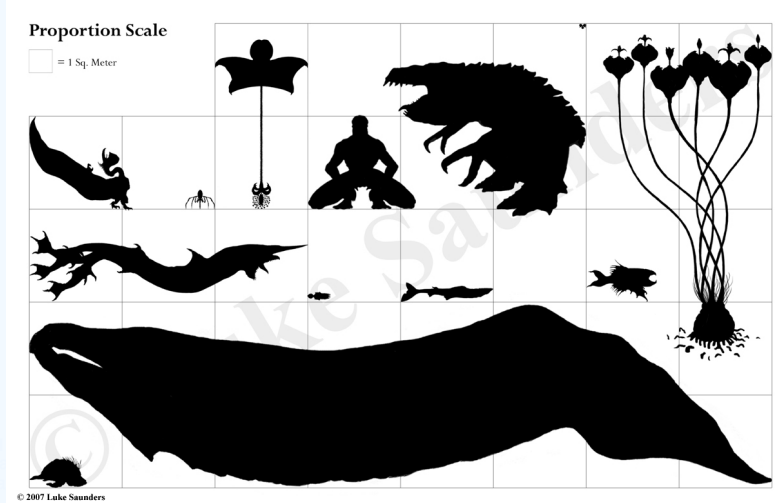
Dimensions: 2D, 3D spatial illusion
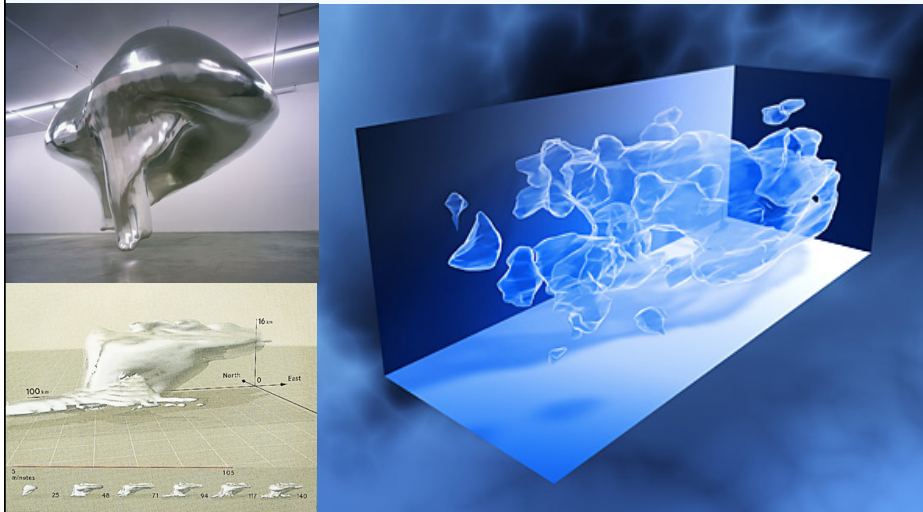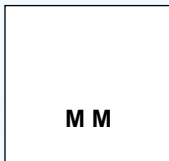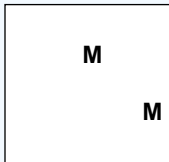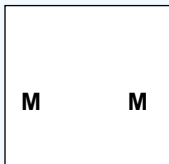
Motion: Visual elements guiding the viewer

II. Visual Language & Syntax

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M M

Visual Language & Syntax

M   M

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M M
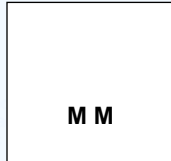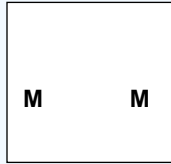
- **Visual language:** Analogous & symbolic
- **Visual Syntax**: partially perceptual, partially conventual (cultural, learned)
- Images represent. (They are abstracted information)
- Meaning is constructed (assembled parts)
- **Visual Language** therefore requires apprenticeship (What you see is what you know)
- 2 Layers: **Denotative**: (literal message), **Connotative** (implied sub-text)
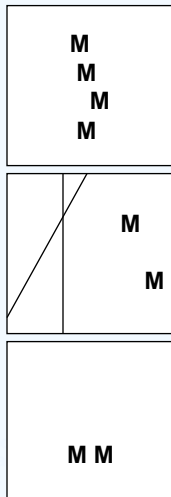
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Denotative / Connotative
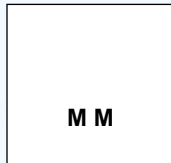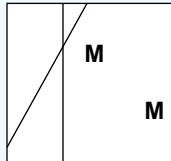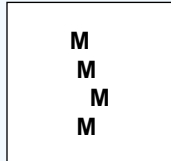

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Stylistic Choice Impacts on Meaning


III. Assembly & Construction

Weight, Im/Balance, Dis/Order, Un/Stable

- **Balance:** Physiological, psychological
  - **H-V construct:** man to his environment
- **Stress**: Unstable causes stress
  - Stabilization: relative stress/balance
- **Lower-left**: most stable
- **Harmony**: (centered), no visual surprise
  - Search for balance with off-center mark
- **Ambiguity**: may obscure intent & meaning
  - Slightly off-center mark confounds
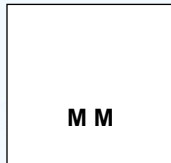- Visual elements in stress location: more weight

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Groupings
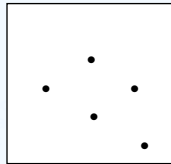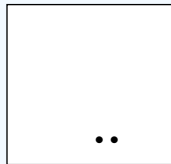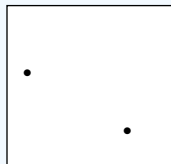
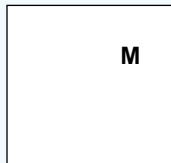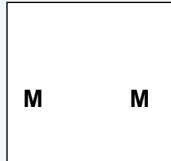- **Attraction & Grouping**: 2 dots fight for attention in their interaction
- **Distanced:** Create individual statements as they repel each other
- **Close together:** The more complicated the forms they describe - There is an attraction force
- **Perception**: dictates to make whole out of units
  - Connect the dots!!
  - Visual phenomenon for astronomical signs
- **Opposites repel, similars attract**

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Visual Organization (Macro-micro, willi kunz)

```
┌─────────────┐
│             │
│             │
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└─────────────┘
┌─────────────┐
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│             │     M
│             │
└─────────────┘
┌─────────────┐
│             │
│             │
│             │
│   M M       │
└─────────────┘
```

- **Space**: Depending on their visual placement within a given space, the **same** elements will assume **different** visual aspects of **weight** and **movement**.

- Space is visually **subdivided** by the **tension** that develops between an **element** and the **boundaries** of the space

- **Size** and **proportion** of space are determined at the beginning
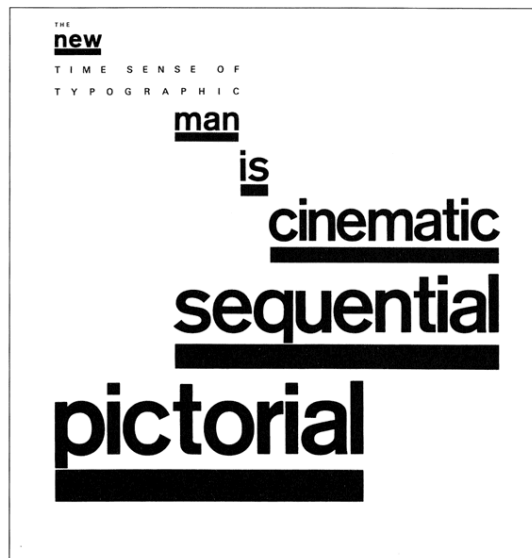
Motion, Movement Through Spatial Organization

- A **space** becomes visually active when it is subdivided

- Balance is achieved through interplay of **scale**, **sequence**, and **spatial position**

- Any object placed next to each other in an image defines a **relationship** through **spatial proximity**
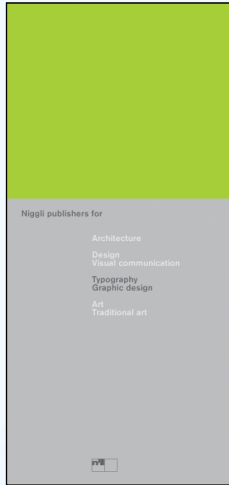
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Structure: the Grid System
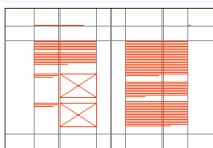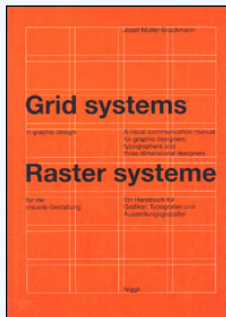
- **Modular Grids**: Modules determine the dimensions and placement of graphic and typographic elements

- All elements are **consistently** placed according to the **pre-determined structure** once it has been defined

- The grid functions as an **organizational** device, but stays **invisible**

- Structural order also requires **imagination**

- Design process: begin with **intuition** and **visual judgement,** follow with rational structure

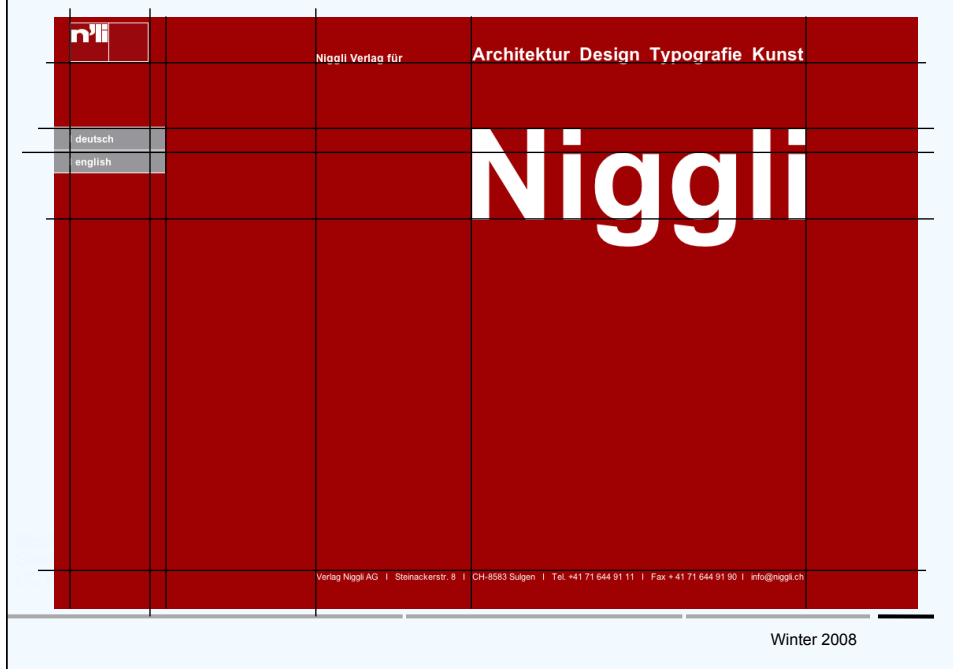Winter 2008

Spatial Organization & Hidden Modular Grid

- Development of a grid must proceed from an evaluation of all the **visual material** to be included in the design
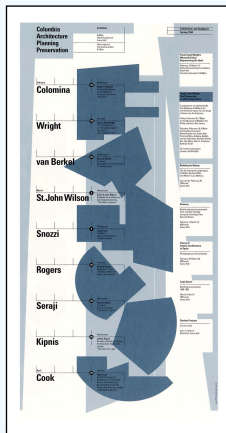
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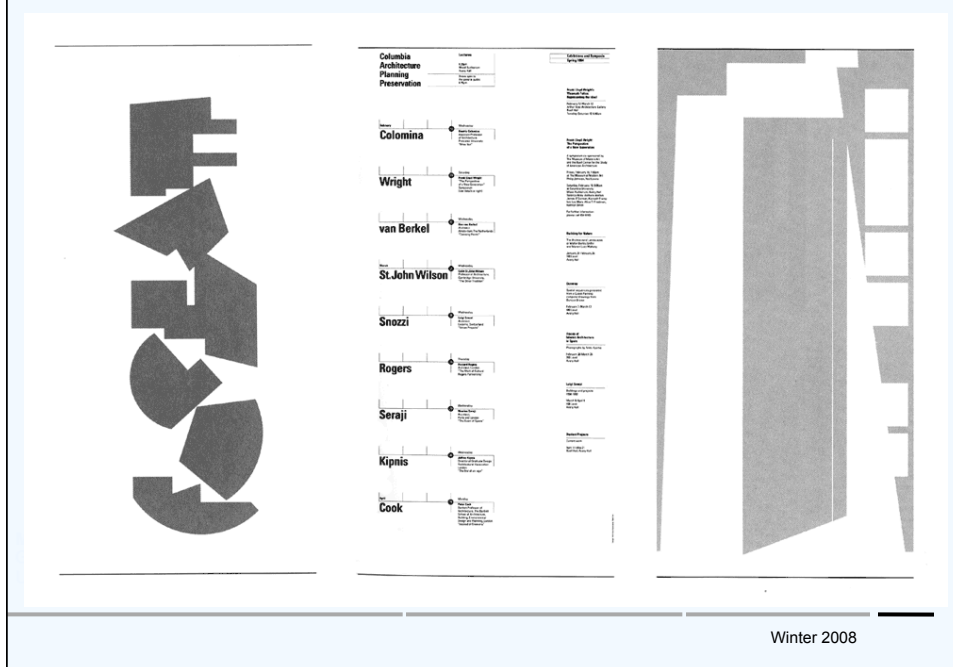
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Macro, Micro Scales

- **Macro:** Explicit and obvious, **captures** viewer's initial attention leading to the more complex micro reading

  - Primary visual elements
  - Size and proportion of space
  - Color and form

- **Micro:** Subtle, subconsciously perceptible (how the image conveys)

  - Micro is the more **significant** in the quality and expression of a visual composition
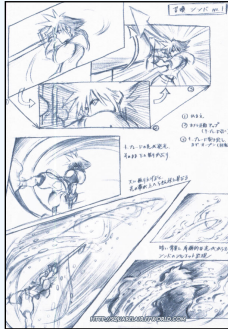
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Layers of Visual Information
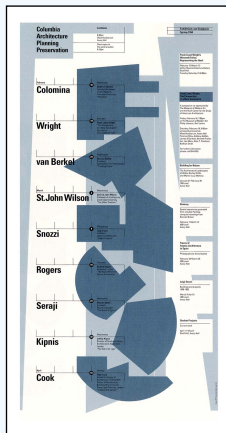
- **Foreground:** Large shapes to attract visual attention

- **Middleground:** Typographic information
  - Tight structure, **square grid with micro-details**
- **Background:** Geometric planes to support typographic information
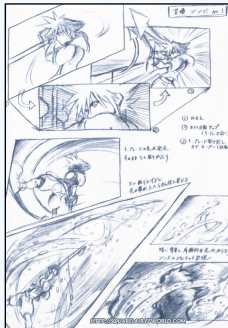
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IV. Visual Information & Narrative

- **Narrative**: To tell a story, a sequence of events

- Situation undergoes some **transition** to arrive at some **outcome**

- Textual narrative:information **ordered** in sequence and time

- In **visualization**: difference in **spatial** position to be interpreted in terms of a relational difference: hierarchy, sequence, temporal, etc.

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Bibliography

- *Design Basics*, Dondis

- *Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Edward Tufte

- *Micro-Macro*, Willi Kunz

- *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*, Joseph Müller-Brockmann

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