

Positions through Contextualising: *Annotated Bibliography*

Maurer, L. et al. (2013) *Conditional Design Workbook*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

In many ways, the arguments put forward in the Conditional Design Workbook align with the concepts I am exploring in my work. Throughout the text, the authors explore the idea of emphasising process over product, and using design methods to create systems which govern results that are proof of a specific process. Throughout *Positions of Contextualising*, I have planned for my project to be very process and labour driven. My outcomes are derived from systems which ultimately lead to my subjective design decisions being “distributed throughout” (pp. 5) my practice, rather than allowing me total aesthetic control. For example, in order to produce a letterpress print, I translated my subject matter — *Word & Thread*, a poem by Cecilia Vicuña — through a logic system which produced a set of symbols that I rearranged to re-translate the poem through the medium of letterpress. The resulting print has been governed by the process which, though chosen by me, is a conveyor belt for design. The logic system is the factory producing the parts, and I am on the assembly line piecing it all together.

Drucker, J. (2014) *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Drucker’s assessment of textual interpretation correlates with the way I have been exploring variable modes of reading and translation in regard to text and language. Her argument that different formats — particularly in terms of screen reading, windows or pop-ups — “render the interpretive act [of reading] itself more visible” (pp. 191) articulates, in a sense, what I am trying to achieve with my re-interpretation of texts and languages through different logic systems, into different media. Such ideas around the malleability of interpretation and creating different modes through which we can understand and read texts is particularly interesting in the context of my practice, which processes a given text into multiple forms through which it can be read. For example, by generating a set of symbols from a chosen text, I translated this through letterpress, and intend to now use the letterpress print as a pattern to weave from, thus creating multiple access points, or modes for reading the results. This method of continuous translation that is “always in process, always interpretive” (pp. 191), alludes to the work of the hand — in reference to hand-based crafts or practices, like letterpress and weaving — and the idea of human processing, or *slow logic*. The intersection, and indeed tension, between human processing / slow logic, and the high-speed computer processors that we encounter today, is something my project aims to expound upon.

Vicuña, C., Alcalá, R. (1996) *Palabra e Hilo / Word and Thread*. Edinburgh: Morning Star Publications.

Cecilia Vicuña’s book *Word and Thread*, and the titular poem it includes, has been a key text in the progression of my project. Primarily, its existence as a textual, poetic interpretation of weaving practice and its interrelation with language aligns with my enquiry that concerns how weaving, language, and codes are inextricably linked. The poem sees words as thread, and poets as weavers, and embodies weaving practice through the form of the publication; a line of yarn connects the pages and the words as you progress through the book. This yarn, and the text it is intertwined with, both physically and semantically embody the notion of *strings* — referred to here in the context of data processing, meaning a collections or sequences of data. This linguistic connection lead me to think about using the poem as a data set to encode and visualise via the Huffman system of coding;

becoming the basis of my experiments. I was intrigued how I could translate the latin characters into symbols, which could then ultimately lead back to textile; visualising the poem in variable modes, and quite literally using language to weave from, as Vicuña's poem muses on. Such a process also relates back to the etymological origin of the word text, which comes from the latin *texere*, meaning *to weave*.

Vesters, C. (2021) *The Veranda of Floating Threads*. Amsterdam: The Palace of Typographic Masonry.

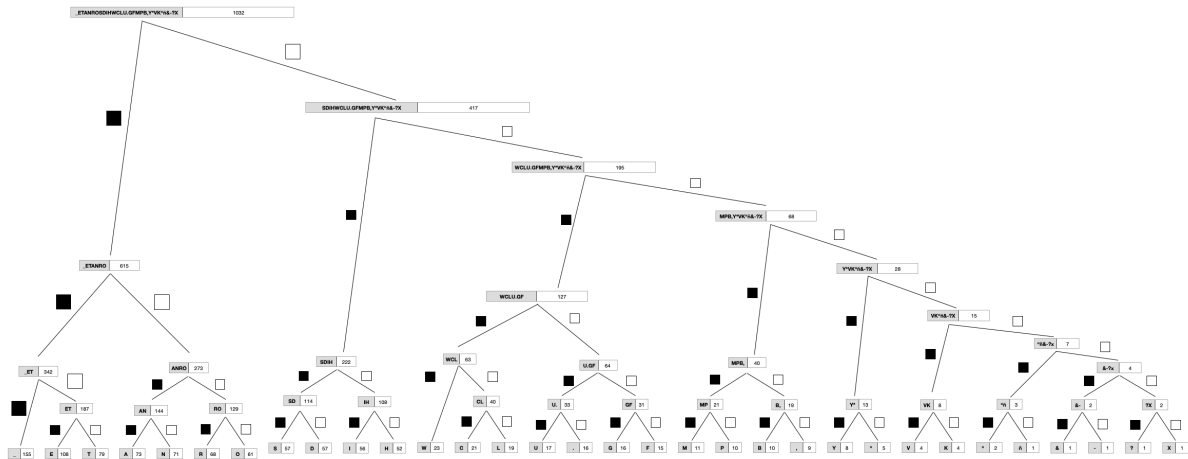
The Veranda of Floating Threads is a publication that explores the relationship of weaving and coding in its form, methods of production, and content. Using the Huffman coding system, RNDR, a graphic design studio, collaborated with Christel Vesters, who authored the publication, to create translated version of her essays on *Kente* — traditional woven textiles of the Asante and Ewe peoples in Ghana. The result is a series of fold-out sheets of colourful code that resembles Kente textiles and the essays they stem from; assimilating language, weaving and data processing within one publication. Coming across the Huffman system as a method of (en)coding was pivotal in progressing my experiments from purely text-based into the visual dimension as, in contrast to other codes like ASCII or binary, the system can use symbols and images to encode and compress text. Using this as a jumping off point, I was able to translate a text of my choosing using the same system; which also opened up the possibility of then extending into the physical realm to explore letterpress and weaving. It also shaped my ideas around draft notation for weaving, and how code — or something encoded — could form a pattern from which textile could be made.



Froshaug, A. (1964) *Typographic Norms*. Birmingham, England: The Kynoch Press

Anthony Froshaug's *Typographic Norms* is a publication which distills the Anglo-American and Didot typographic standards used in letterpress printing and type foundries. The process of letterpress is reduced to its bones; spacing, leading, and [type] body sizes splay across fold out pages using an abstract, minimal aesthetic, with red and black being the only two colours used across the book. This encryption of a process lead me to think about the modularity of letterpress as an inherently language-based printmaking method; with individual pieces of type sitting in relation to individual *bits* — i.e. units — of data: modular language [code] represented by a modular process. I was interested in how I could use letterpress as a way of exploring human processing, or data processing on a human scale. Expanding on the idea of *digitality* that I began exploring in Positions through

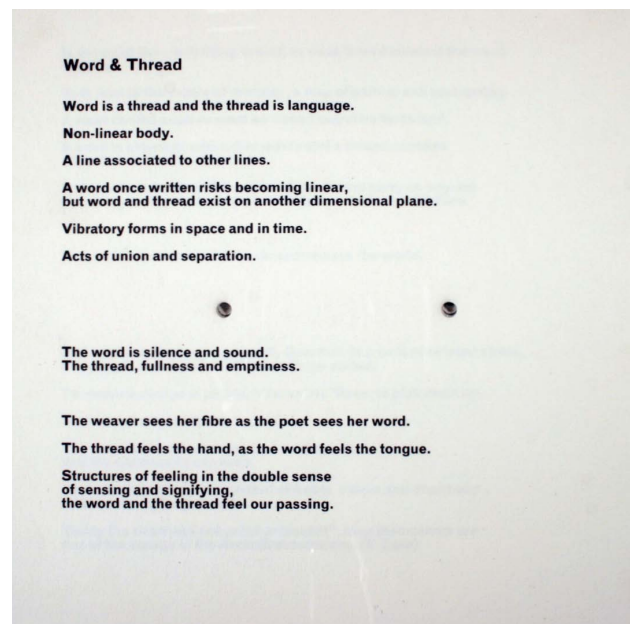
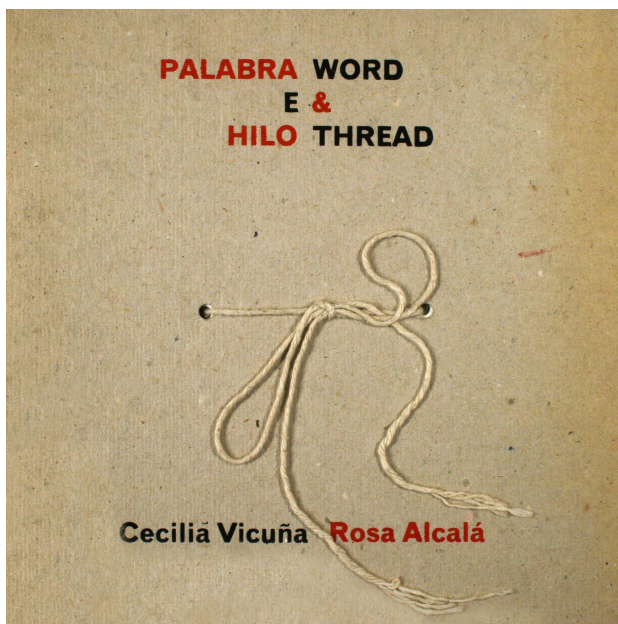
Iterating — one which explored the term *digital* as an approach; a systematising of any action, screen-based or not, to regulate results in some quantifiable way — I began to see letterpress as a vehicle to process digitally, using physical means. Considering the word's etymology too — *digital* stemming from the latin *digitus, digitalis* meaning *finger* or *toe* — I wanted to test the boundaries of the physical and the digital, with my work sitting at the intersection of both.



BBC Bitesize (2025) *Huffman coding and Huffman trees — Fundamentals of data.*
Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zd88jty/revision/10>
[Accessed: 15 May 2025]

The Huffman system of code is a basic form of compression in which ‘strings’ of data — e.g. text, sentences — are grouped and sorted by the number of times they appear in a data set and assigned values — e.g. binary, images or symbols — accordingly. This is worked out through diagramming to produce a Huffman Tree, which visualises said data set as numbers on branches, along which the values sit. Learning about this process was important to the progression of my project as it moved my exploration into code from text into image, as well as pushing me to become a human processor. Since the process is essentially a series of sums that sit along a diagram, it was relatively simple to work out, and I as the designer could assign values to the characters I was encoding — essentially, I could create my own alphabet. This not only allowed me to effectively begin to illustrate my data, but potentially process it further by creating images that could be used as draft notation or patterns for textile work, as previously discussed. Additionally I found it interesting that, in order to be compressed, the data had to be diagrammed in a specific way, producing a visual byproduct through the process. Such diagrams are also almost identical to Syntax Trees, another form of data visualisation (if language is data) that is specific to the field of linguistics, which represent recurring constructs — i.e. nouns, adjectives — in texts. Again, the expanding connections I am making between data, language and (methods of) processing warrant further exploration on a human, craft based scale.

Extended Critical Analyses



Vicuña, C., Alcalá, R. (1996) *Palabra e Hilo / Word and Thread*. Edinburgh: Morning Star Publications.

Throughout *Word and Thread*, Vicuña discusses the idea that “the weaver sees her fiber as the poet sees her word”, exploring the notion that “word is thread and the thread is language”. It is, therefore, a poetic exploration of the intertwined relationship between language and weaving. Through her words, she sees fibres as the syntactic threads that build languages and community, through dialogue, oral tradition, and tactile connection. Within the work, thread and language pull Vicuña back to her heritage — to her ancestors — with the way in which the roots of words are woven into native weaving practices being discussed in the poem.

The typography and design of the text upholds the positions of the author in different ways. Practically, the book was typeset by one of the last remaining monotype casting houses in Edinburgh, most likely using a monotype keyboard, which is an automated system for casting hot metal into type without the need for setting individual letters. Interestingly, this process uses a similar system of automation to the Jacquard loom, whereby holes are punched into a card which provides the machine (or the foundry) instructions for casting the type. As well as this perhaps unintentional link to Jacquard punch cards, letterpress work provides a sensorial difference to readers compared to other methods of printmaking, instilling a tactile element to the typography that is able to be sensed while reading.

The formal qualities of the book are tactile themselves: a length of string tied through holes punched in the book forces the reader to physically undo the book and engage with text and textile both at the same time. The experiences are enmeshed as one; thread and word experienced as part of one whole, as the author discusses.

Punched holes that support the thread work to divide the poem into sections, whereby the author discusses her relationship to language and thread both in relation to her practice and in general terms. These sections build a clear picture of how thread and language are entangled with one another, particularly when considering the development and etymologies of words in ancient and contemporary cultures. She uses the relational examples of the Quechuan word *pallay* meaning to raise or pick up woven fibres, and the Latin word *legere*, meaning to read, but also to pick up, gather collect (pp. 3). Such terms call to mind the simultaneous activities of research and weaving; to

gather sources / threads, to collect information / fibres. Writing & weaving are thus the parallel processes that blend them together, building a body of work from disparate strands.

Vicuña's text draws on the traditional tenets of graphic communication design as a typeset, bound publication. Her writing is designed as such to communicate a specific heritages, stories, and unraveling connections to others through the medium of a poem in a book. It does however, ask the reader to connect with the text through the tactile sense as well as the logical sense; to read and (is?) to feel. This could be said to be less common in the field of graphic communication design, with readers usually experiencing tactile elements as separate or merely complimentary to textual elements. In Vicuña's work, the two are inextricably linked; reinforcing and relating to her words around language and thread; "word is thread and the thread is language" (pp. 1) and "the encounter of finger and thread is torque and dialogue" (pp. 4), for example.

Vicuña's work sits in relation to my own in many ways, through conceptual, contextual and practical means. Her investigation of weaving through the use of poetry and language is particularly relevant to my project which looks at weaving and its relation to codes and languages. More specifically, my enquiry also investigates this theme through the lens of data processing and the labour underpinning the many systems behind data visualisation and craft methods (like letterpress and weaving). Her exploration of specific *bits* of language — etymologically rich words — and their contexts also provides an exciting link to my own work. In *Methods of Iterating*, my project culminated in using a typeset body of text to form the pattern for a handwoven tapestry. Intertwined with the essay and the resulting weaving was the etymology of the word *text*, coming from the latin *texere*, meaning to weave. Vicuña's poem has also been an important practical element of my project, on which I have based my own data processing methods and translated her work into symbols and visual alphabets through a set logic system. From here I am excited to translate these again into woven or stitched tapestries; returning to textile work which is ultimately imbued with textual and tactile symbolism.



Vesters, C. (2021) *The Veranda of Floating Threads*. Amsterdam: The Palace of Typographic Masonry.

The Veranda of Floating Threads is a selection of visualised essays borne from a collaboration between Christel Vesters (author) and RNDR (design studio). The project sees text transformed into colourful coded patterns that accompany the essays they depict, which have been printed and loosely collated into a publication. Throughout, the essays discuss the history, symbolism and contemporary discourse on the subject of Kente cloth — traditional woven material originating in West Africa, from the Asante and Ewe communities in Ghana. The texts break down the landscape of how the cloth is worn and its purposes, as well as the 'colonial gaze' of imperial scientists whose scientifically-

lead documentation of the cloth lead to a standardisation of the Kente weaving process. It also comments on the symbolism and syntax of Kente, remarking on the “fluidity” of assigning meaning and names to particular patterns in the cloth, and relationship this has to the processes of mechanised weaving in the West, which rely on coded patterns to form them. These texts have subsequently been rendered as “test strips” (pp. 2) using the Huffman coding system, thus expanding on the essay’s themes of language and symbolism, and forge a visual and figurative relationship to strips of Kente cloth.

The Veranda of Floating Threads takes the form of a slim publication that consists of several loose sheets folded in half, with essays printed on one side of the sheet, and the coded test strips on the reverse. When reading, the text is interrupted by these strips which therefore feel as though they are asking to be read, perhaps de-coded, despite their abstracted language. Such a layout therefore situates the reader in the realm of coded languages and the symbolism of weaving, as discussed in Vesters’ essays. The nature of the loose sheets within the book also introduces a tactile engagement with the material. If the publication was bound, for example, it would force a linear reading of the textual and visual information within. By unfurling the loose sheets, the reader can situate essay and pattern next to one another, reading the data / text in which ever order they choose. It also means the thin, glossy paper is marked by your fingers and hangs over the contours of your hands as you read. This tactile sensibility feels like an intentional an extension of the loose, pliable structure of Kente cloth, which is delicately woven with silk threads. This flexible approach to reading seems a nod to the “fluidity” (pp. 9) applied to deigning the cloth with, or without, specific symbolism or motifs in order that it couldn’t be de-coded and assigned a certain (arbitrary, read: Western, colonial) value. Similarly, the intention of the test strips is not to be decoded, since readers don’t know how each character relates to the grid-like symbols in the book. They are, however, enlivened by the hand, and shifting the sheets of paper to read the texts and the test strips calls to mind the “dazzlement” (pp. 11) produced when Kente cloth is worn in motion.

The form of this publication and the way it engages with its subject matter employs various traditional and non-traditional principles of graphic communication design, and as such provides material to inform my own project. Through its publication, it is able to be circulated, reproduced and re-printed. As discussed, however, the unfixed, non-linear nature of the loose sheets in the publication sit in contrast with other publishing traditions which, intentionally or not, often work to control the gaze of the reader. The idea of “fluidity” in graphic communication design potentially poses a challenge to the field — and provides another potential area of enquiry for me — since to design is to negate fluidity. To design (to plan, to pre-conceive) is to direct the attention of an audience in a particular way. I wonder, then, how could my emerging enquiry — which engages with logic systems and codes — embrace the fluidity imbibed in woven materials and weaving practice? As Vicuña remarks, is it possible to create a “nonlinear body” (pp. 1) of work from a practice so engaged with data structures and organisations?

Additionally, this reference has also been key in progressing my project forward as a source for practical inspiration. Through *The Veranda of Floating Threads*, I learnt about the Huffman system of coding and worked to apply this to Cecilia Vicuña’s poem, as aforementioned. The labour that this reference speaks to, and the notes on the construction of Kente cloth are also important components in informing my project. Considering the labour undergone in producing the work I have made so far, this reference pushes me to think about how this could be documented or made visible, perhaps in a similar way to Claire Williams’ project *Data Knits* (2015). Additionally, the discussion of this labour pushes me to subvert ideas around digital experiences and coding systems that typically act quickly, leading me to lean into slow logic and human processing as previously mentioned. In this way, working, acting and behaving digitally becomes a craft; thus extending my exploration into the intersection of physical and digital processing structures.