

# **Positions through contextualising**

Unit 2 · Process Documentation week 1

# Form is the content

**Should type be read, or felt?**

Old question

**Can the felt be encoded into rules that others can read?**

New question

# Two foundations

## Perceptual Psychology

Does form carry meaning before convention?

Arnheim · Kandinsky · Ramachandran & Hubbard

## Codes and notation

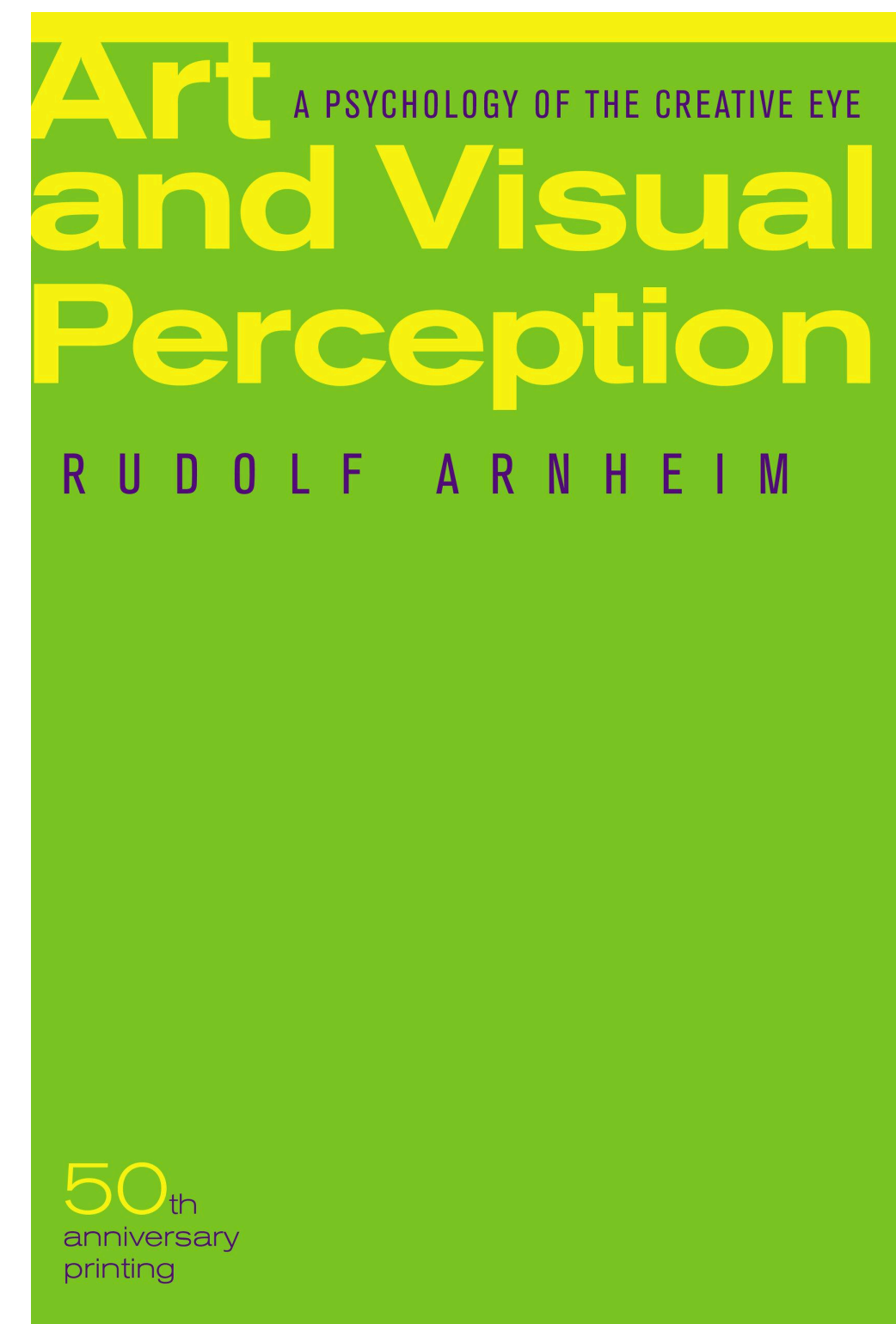
How does form become a code?

Peirce · Barthes · Eco

Text Psychology

## Rudolf Arnheim

Art and Visual Perception · 1954



### **Job**

Anchor “form is content” in academic visual theory.

### **Found**

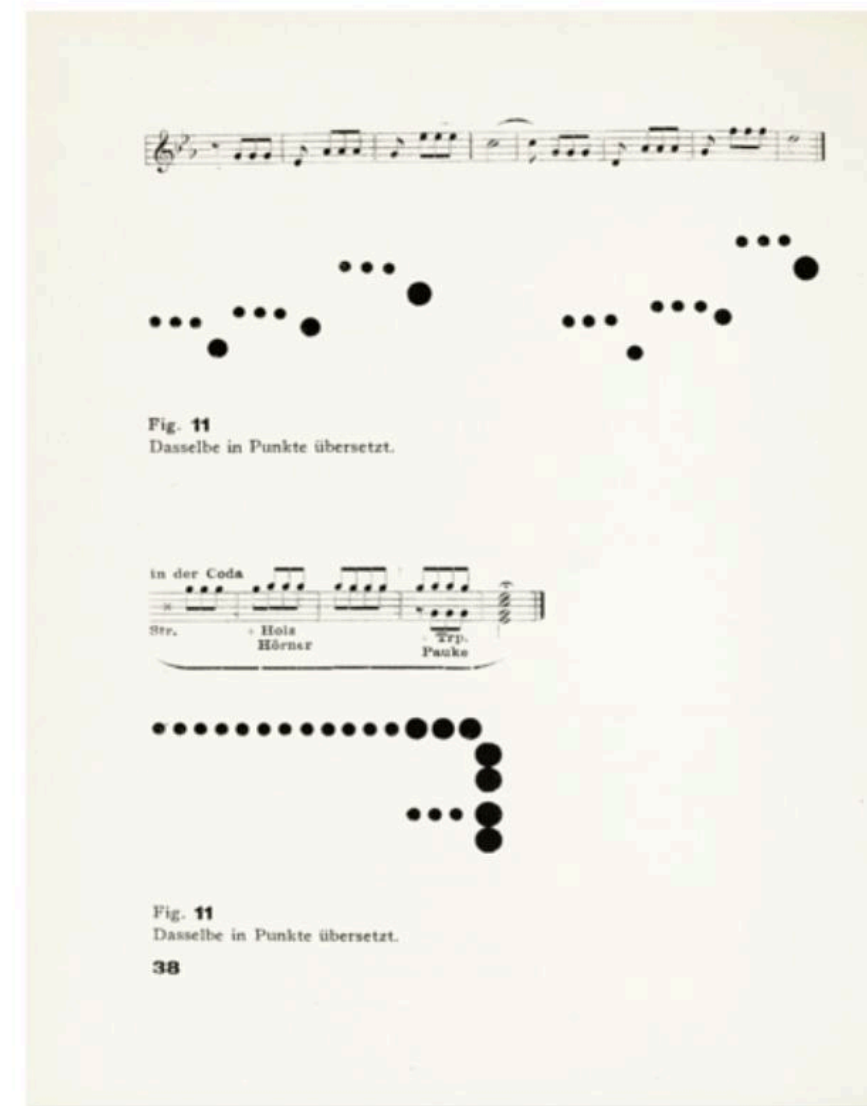
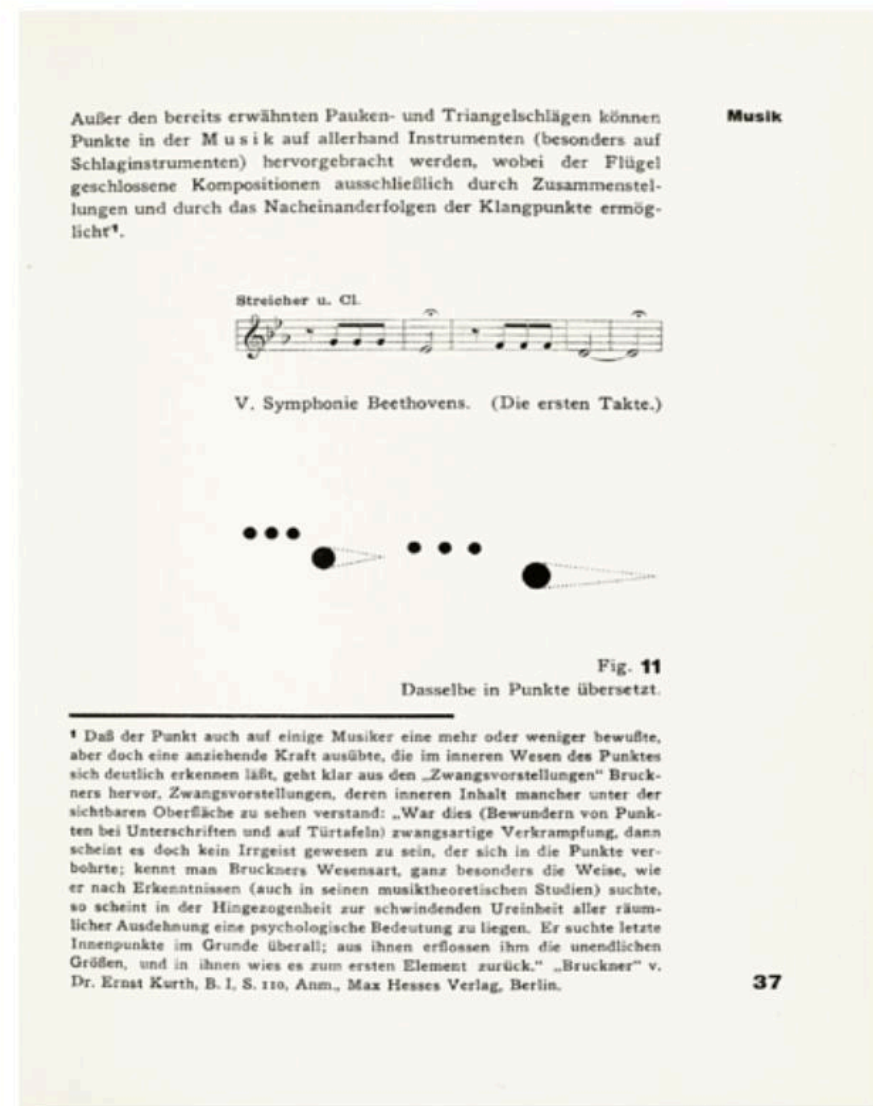
Gestalt psychology proves visual elements (line, weight, direction) carry intrinsic expressive value. For example, a rising diagonal and a falling diagonal are not emotionally equivalent.

### **For my work**

Legitimises the claim that typographic decisions are expressive before they are decorative.

# Wassily Kandinsky

Point and Line to Plane · 1926



## Job

Find a precedent for the kind of system I want to build.

## Found

Earliest systematic attempt to construct a form–emotion correspondence table. Point, line and plane each catalogued by affective character.

## For my work

Structural model for my own typographic notation.

## V. S. Ramachandran & E. M. Hubbard

“Synaesthesia: A Window Into Perception, Thought and Language” · 2001

### BOUBA / KIKI

95% of people, across languages and cultures, map “bouba” to round shapes and “kiki” to angular shapes.

### Found

Cross-modal correspondence between abstract form and perception is non-arbitrary, predictable, and measurable.

“Form is content” stops being a metaphor. It becomes a falsifiable claim.

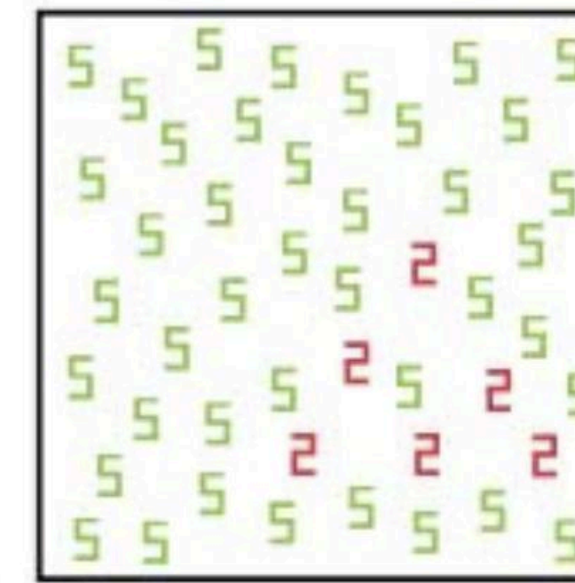
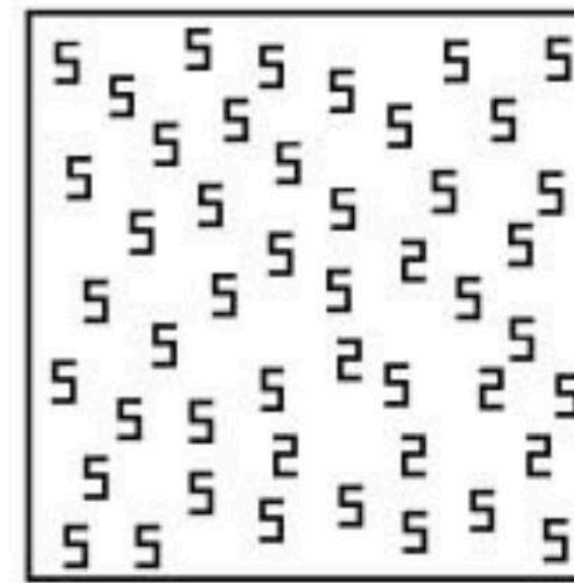


Figure 1: Schematic representation of displays used to test whether synaesthetically induced colours lead to pop-out. Left: When presented with a matrix of 5s with a triangle composed of 2s embedded in it, control subjects find it difficult to find the triangle. Right: However, because they see the 5s as (say) green and the 2s as red, our synaesthetic subjects were easily able to find the embedded shape.

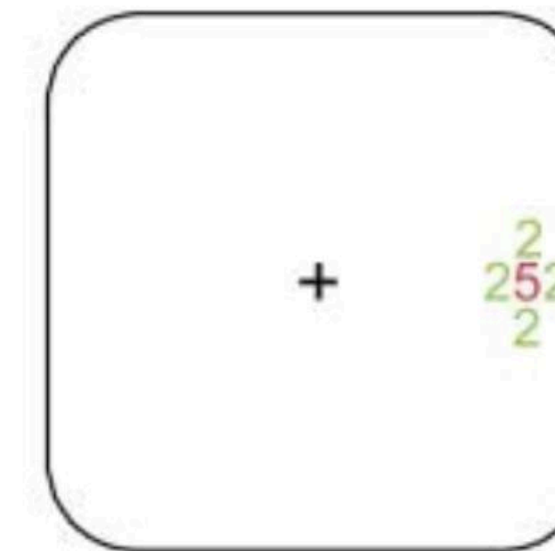
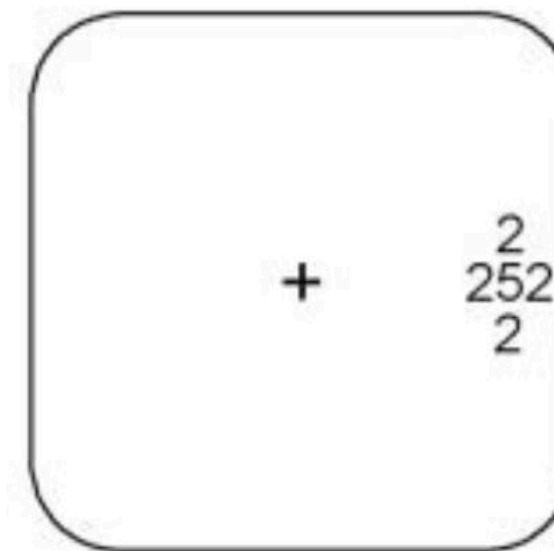


Figure 2: A demonstration of the effect of synaesthetically induced colours on crowding. A single grapheme presented in the periphery is easily identifiable. However, when it is flanked by other graphemes, the target grapheme becomes much harder to detect. Synaesthetic colours are effective (as are real colours) in overcoming this effect.



Figure 3: Pictorial representation of the fall off in synaesthetic colours with increasing eccentricity. Even though graphemes were scaled so that they were larger in the periphery, our two synaesthetic subjects reported that they no longer experienced colours when the graphemes were presented.

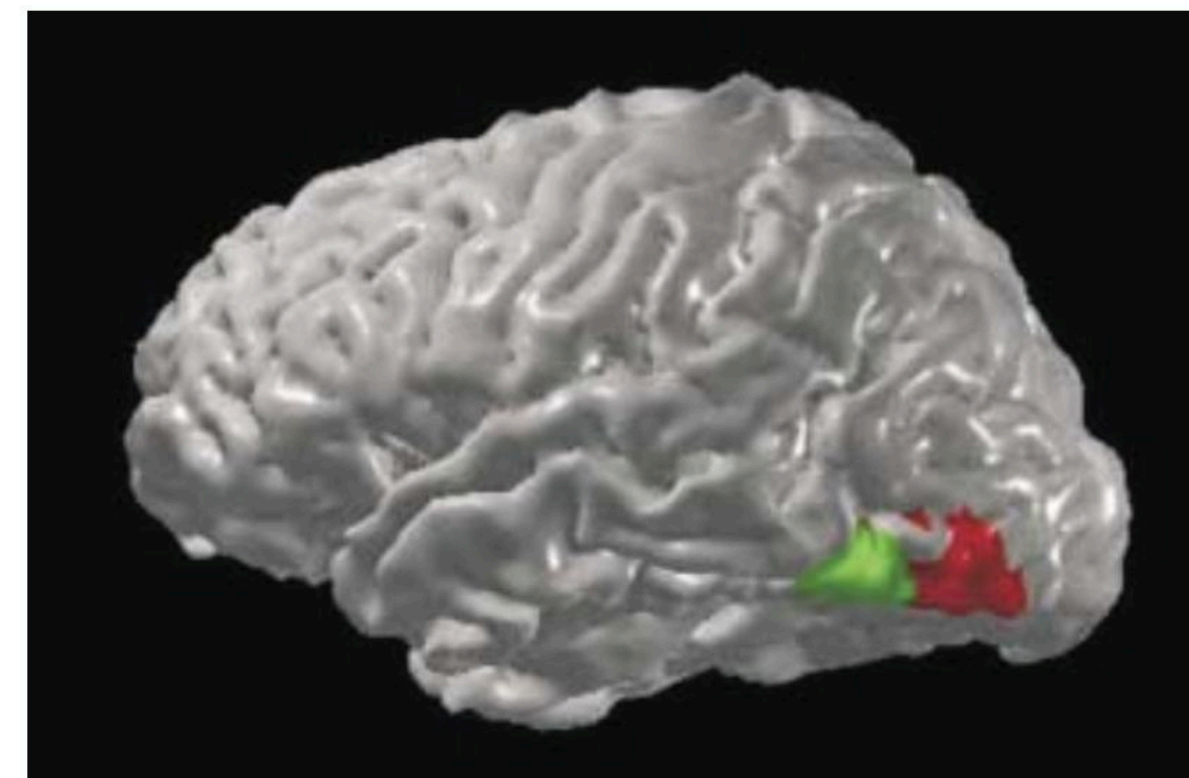


Figure 4: Schematic showing that cross-wiring in the fusiform might be the neural basis of grapheme-colour synaesthesia. Area V4 is shown in red while the number-grapheme area is shown in green.

From:  
**V.S. Ramachandran and E.M. Hubbard**  
‘Synaesthesia — A window into perception, thought and language’

Codes and notation

# Charles Sanders Peirce

Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs · 1894–1910

## Job

Vocabulary for what my  
typographic moves are doing.

## Found

Three sign types:  
Icon — resemblance  
Index — causal trace  
Symbol — convention

## For my work

A stretched word is iconic.  
A worn letter is indexical.  
A font choice is symbolic.

Codes and notation

## Roland Barthes

“Rhetoric of the Image” · in Image–Music–Text · 1964

EVERY IMAGE CARRIES THREE LAYERS:

### Literal

denotation

A bold “fight” reads as a verb.

### Cultural

coded connotation

Heaviness reads as force,  
resistance, weight of body.

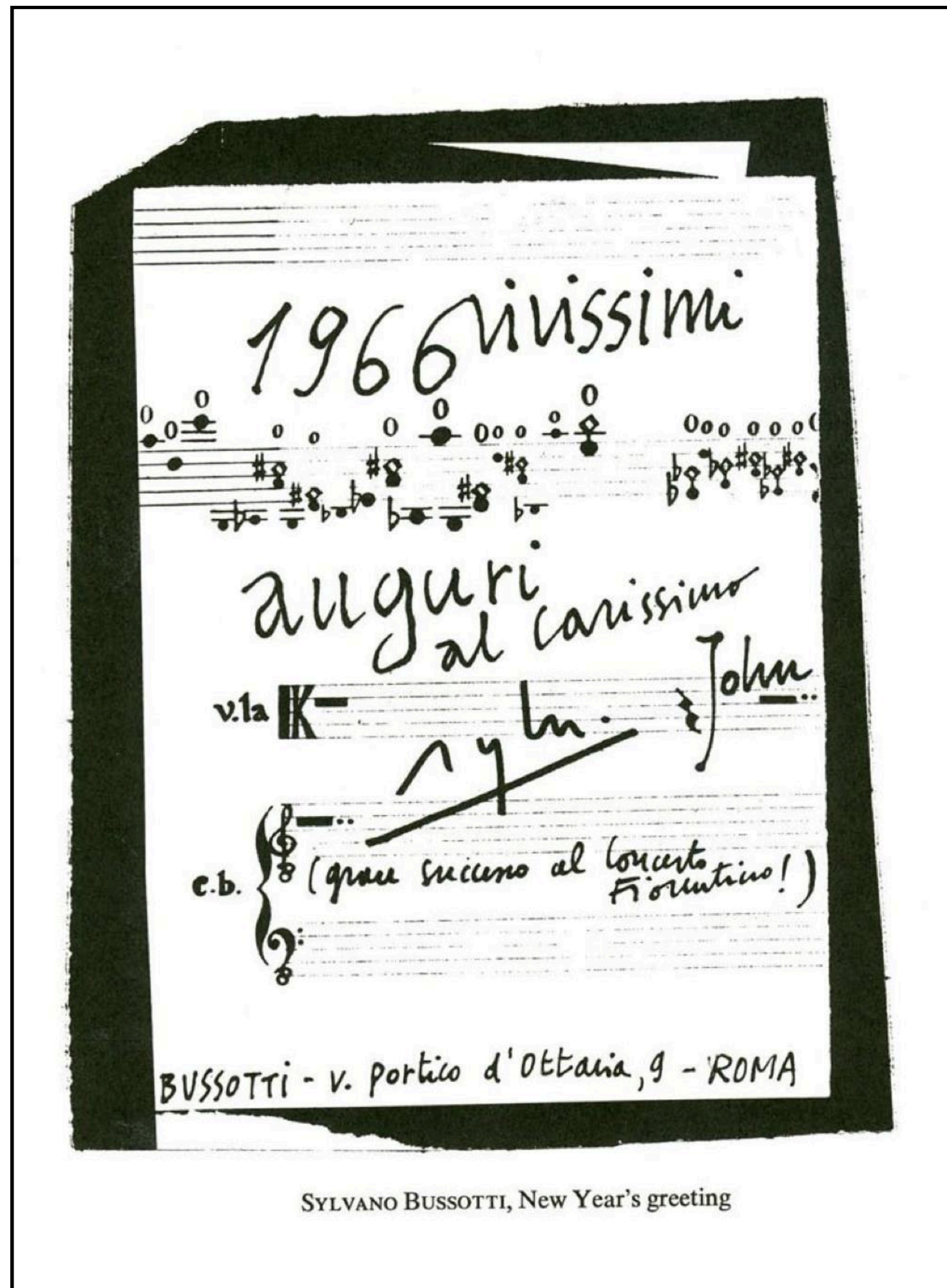
### Emotional

affective resonance

The same heaviness reads as  
anxiety, pressure, exhaustion.

# John Cage

Notations · 1969



SYLVANO BUSSOTTI, New Year's greeting

## Job

Find a primary archive of how others have already solved my problem.

## Found

269 composers contributed experimental scores. Each page is one attempt to encode non-verbal information in visual form.

## For my work

A working library of precedents for my own system. Lets me see which solutions transferred, which collapsed into private code, and which moves recur across very different practitioners.

# Two foundations

## Perceptual Psychology

Does form carry meaning before convention?

Arnheim · Kandinsky · Ramachandran & Hubbard



**form has perceptual meaning  
before convention.**

## Semiotics

How does form become a code?

Peirce · Barthes · Eco



**form becomes a system  
through codes, and others  
have already tried.**