

Portfolio of Writing: Ways of Thinking (ADDA4022)

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Programme of Study: BA (Hons) Graphic Design

Module: ADDA4022 Ways of Thinking

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For this assessment, I confirm that I have NOT used Generative AI to support me in structuring my submission, including creating a draft argument structure, identifying parts and headings.

I confirm that I have not used Generative AI to create text for my submission. I

confirm that I have not used Generative AI for creative materials, such as images.

Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One: Semiotic Analysis = 438 words

Task Two: Manifesto = 555 words

Task Three: Practice-based writing = 647 words

Total Word Count: 1640 words

Task 1: Observational Writing - Charlie and Lola

(Word count: 438)

I picked the Charlie and Lola opening animation because it is one of the first times I remember noticing design without realising it. I didn't know what I was looking at back then, but I remember being drawn to how it was made. Watching it again now reminds me why I want to be a graphic designer. The way it uses collage, texture, and movement feels warm and familiar, evoking nostalgia. In this writing, I'm

looking at the animation through three semiotic ideas: signifier and signified, codes and conventions, and digital transformation. Thinking about it this way helps me shift from childhood memory to understanding it as a piece of graphic design.

Hébert (2019) talks about the signifier and the signified to show how images carry deeper meaning. In *Charlie and Lola*, the paper textures and simplistic artwork make the animation feel handmade and familiar rather than polished. The moment that shows this best is when Charlie draws a blue crayon staircase, and Lola climbs it, turning a basic drawing into part of the story. The crayon line serves as a signifier of imagination, turning a child's drawing into something real within the story. It feels playful, but it also shows how drawing can shape the world the characters move through.

The animation also uses familiar visual codes that make the world feel safe and comforting. Deni and Zingale (2017) describe codes as visual cues that help viewers quickly understand meaning. The soft colour palette, stitched edges, cut-out shapes and collage style all feel nostalgic to primary school art lessons or things made at home. These materials and activities are linked to childhood for many people in the UK, so they make a quick emotional connection. The intro doesn't just start the show; it sets a soft and welcoming tone.

Another key part of the animation is how it brings together physical textures and digital tools. Scherling and Scherling (2024) explain this through digital transformation in design. In *Charlie and Lola*, the scanned paper, stop-motion feel, and layered imagery create a style that is both traditional and digital at once, so the computer becomes part of how the story is told. This mix keeps the handmade feel but still takes advantage of what digital animation can do.

Looking at this animation through semiotics has changed how I see it. What used to be just a comforting memory now looks like a thoughtful piece of design. The textures, movement and small details all work together to create meaning. This process has helped me understand how visual language can shape emotions and how small decisions can decide how something feels.

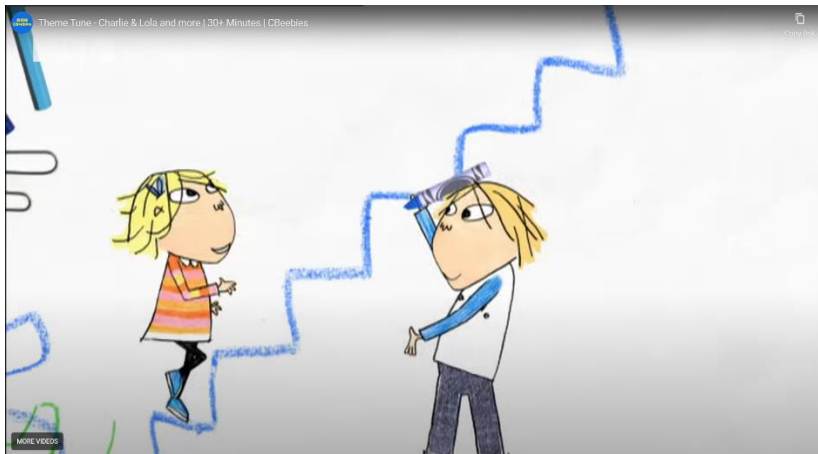


Fig 1. (*Charlie and Lola Opening Animation, BBC, 2005*)

Bibliography

Deni, M. & Zingale, S. (2017). 'Semiotics in Design Education. Semiotics by Design', *The Design Journal*, 20(sup1), pp. S1293–S1303. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352658>.

Hébert, L. (2019). *An Introduction to Applied Semiotics: Tools for Text and Image Analysis*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Scherling, L.S. & Scherling, M. (2024). *Digital Transformation in Design: Processes and Practices*. 1st ed. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839471425>

BBC (2005) *Charlie and Lola: Opening Animation*. Directed by Kitty Taylor.

[Television] BBC.

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Figure 1: BBC (2005) *Charlie and Lola* Theme Song (With the Subtitles). Screenshot taken by Michael Hill from a YouTube video. Available at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFQkN_lhgF8 (Accessed: 7 November 2025).

Task 2: Manifesto

(Word Count: 555)

1. Trust the process because things make sense in the end.
2. Mix clean structure with soft texture.
3. If a design stops working, take a break and come back with a better idea.
4. Teachers are inspirers; give that same feeling to someone else one day.
5. Keep things simple and bold so the concept can breathe.
6. Using photos helps make the design feel real and personal.
7. Don't chase perfection, embrace the mistakes and learn.
8. Neutral colours help create work that feels calm and intentional.

3- If a design stops working, take a break and come back with a better idea.

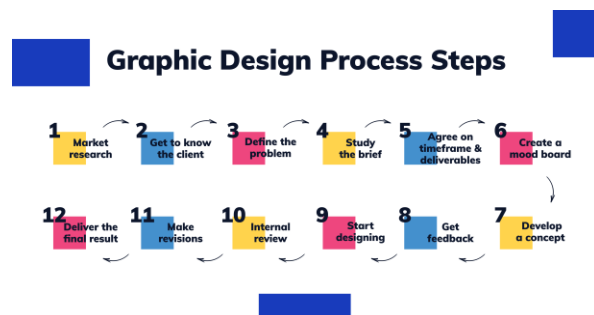


Fig 1, (Popovic, 2023, Graphic Design Process Steps)

When a design stops working, I step away from it because forcing the idea never helps me. I take a break, which gives me space to come back with a clearer head and see what I missed the first time. This is something Candy (2001) discusses when she explains that reflection is a regular part of creative practice. She describes how stepping back from the work helps practitioners understand their decisions and notice details they didn't see while making them. I recognise this in my own process because I often realise the solution after taking some time away from the problem. Candy also writes about creative work happening in cycles of making, pausing and rethinking, rather than a smooth, constant flow. This idea matches how I work, especially when I move on to a new design for a while before returning to the old one. That small break usually gives me exactly what I need to understand the piece better and improve it.

4- Teachers are inspirers; give that same feeling to someone else one day.



Fig 2, (Shield, 2024, Dead Poets Society)

I got into design because a teacher believed in me, and that changed everything. Before studying design, my creativity mostly showed up in sewing and hairdressing, but I never connected those things to design. Berger (1972) says, "Seeing comes before words," which feels true to me. I noticed design long before I knew how to talk about it, and my teacher helped me make sense of that feeling. He also writes that "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we

believe," and that matches how that encouragement shifted the way I saw my own potential. It changed the way I saw my own abilities and created a path I hadn't considered before. Because of that experience, I don't just want to become a graphic designer; I also want to become a graphic design teacher. If I can give someone else the same belief and direction that my teacher gave me, then that would feel like completing the circle.

7- Don't chase perfection, embrace the mistakes and learn.



Fig 3, (Deng, 2025, Kintsugi)

I try not to strive for perfection too much because it usually makes my work feel stiff, and I stop experimenting without even realising it because I'm too scared of it not being perfect. When I concentrate too much on getting something right, I end up holding back ideas that might have helped the design grow, and it loses the energy it had at the beginning. Young talks in Chapter 3 about how people rarely agree on what "good" means in art, and how disagreements in taste are completely normal (Young, 2017). That helped me realise that perfection isn't a fixed thing anyway, because everyone responds differently. Something I see as a mistake might be the part someone else connects with, or the thing that makes the work feel more alive. In Chapter 7, Young also explains that aesthetic value changes depending on the viewer and the situation rather than a strict set of rules (Young, 2017), which

strongly connects to how I work. Letting go of perfection gives me space to try things, learn from what goes wrong and move the idea forward, instead of freezing it in place.

Bibliography

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Young, J.O. (2017). *Semantics of aesthetic judgements*. 1st edn. Edited by J.O.

Young. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198714590.001.0001>.

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Figure 1: Popovic, D. (2023) *The Graphic Design Process Explained: A Step-by-Step Guide*. ManyPixels. Available at: <https://www.manypixels.co/blog/graphic-design/design-process> (Accessed: 7 December 2025).

Figure 2: Shield, C. (2024) 'Dead Poets Society Coaches You as a Teacher', *Medium*, 20 December. Available at: <https://medium.com/educreation/dead-poets-society-coaches-you-as-a-teacher-a6cbe11c3956> (Accessed: 3 December 2025).

Figure 3: Deng, C. (2025) 'Kintsugi', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 22 June. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/kintsugi-ceramics> (Accessed: 3 December 2025).

Task 3: Practice-Based Writing

(Word Count: 647)

The piece I'm reflecting on is a Vogue-style cover I made in sixth form based on NF's album 'Hope'. At the time, I remember feeling genuinely proud of it. It was one of the first designs where I felt like I'd made something that looked 'real', even if I didn't fully understand why my design choices worked yet. Now that I've learned more about

reflective thinking, I can see the project differently and make sense of the decisions and processes I did properly.

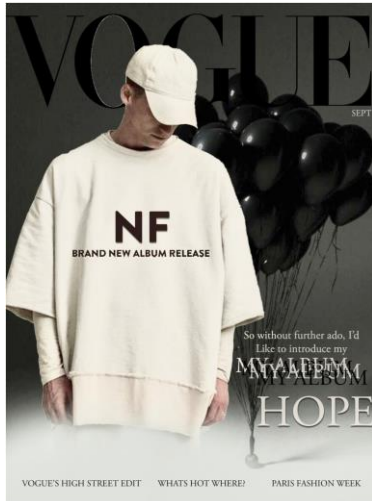
In the design, NF stands with his head lowered, surrounded by black balloons, the colours are soft and almost washed out, with this fog I created on the bottom for the text to have space but to also add some softness. One detail I really loved, was the overlapping “my album” text, that line echoes repeatedly in the song and it felt important to show that visually. I didn't think of it as typographic expression back then, but now I can see how it brings a rhythm into the layout too. Hyndman writes about how even simple changes in type can shift the emotional tone of a design, because we instinctively react to the shapes we see (Hyndman; 2016). In her examples, tighter, repeated forms create energy or agitation, while softer shaped feel calm and balanced. So, my repeated text sits somewhere between the 2, adding some movement, without overwhelming the cover. At the time, I didn't understand why it worked, but now it feels like one of the small decisions that set the mood of the piece.

The use of the balloons actually circle back to semiotics, in NF's music videos they are used to symbolise his emotions; especially the weight of his anxiety and depression, I was aware of this back when I made the design, but now I know what this means from the audience perspective too. Chandler explains that signs gain meaning through cultural association, which shapes how viewers interpret what they see (Chandler, 2007). Thinking about that now, the presence or absence of these balloons becomes a visual signifier of whether he is getting better or worse. Sometimes the balloons float away and sometimes they follow him everywhere, which makes them a clear emotional marker. Bolton writes the reflection helps us notice details we overlooked the first time, and with that in mind, I realise this small

background choice of mine is probably the strongest part of the whole cover. It carries meaning without me needing to explain it, and I didn't appreciate or think about that at the time.

Even though I was proud of this piece, there are things I see now that I'm not happy with. The text at the bottom sinks too much into the gradient and the spacing and tracking feel tighter than I'd use now, which makes the lower part of the layout feel quite cramped. The biggest thing that bothers me though is the Vogue logo, I cut it out myself in Photoshop and you can still see such rough edges around the letters, I would definitely find a proper transparent PNG of the logo or just create my own magazine logo completely if I remade this again today. At the time I didn't notice these issues, but now I recognise them, I see how simple the solutions are, and it would have cleaned up the whole design.

Looking back now, I see how early I started caring about atmosphere and tone. Even without the typography, you can see that my design was trying to convey emotion. If I repeated this project today I'd experiment more confidently with hierarchy, spacing and a clearer contrast between Vogue's identity and NF's. Reflecting on this piece really helped me understand how my process is developing and it made me realise that trusting my instincts is important but reflecting afterwards is what will truly cause improvement.



Fig

1: Hill, M. (2020) *NF Hope* Vogue-Inspired Cover. Own Artwork

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Bolton, G. (2001) *Reflective practice, writing & professional development*. 3rd edn.

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Hyndman, S. (2016) *Why Fonts Matter*. London: Virgin Books, Penguin Random House.

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Figure 1: Hill, M. (2020) *NF Hope* Vogue-Inspired Cover. Own Artwork