On Language and Scale

Sarah Hulsey's *Iterations* is an exhibition about extrapolation and the scale of language. Both a printmaker and linguist, Hulsey uses letterpress, a serial process invented to disseminate and deliver information. In *Linguistic Elements*, Hulsey compares the alphabet to the periodic table, asking the viewer to look closely at the humble letter and ask what, precisely, does it do? It can manifest as sound or a series of marks on a page or screen, changing its appearance based on style. It can be elegant and precise in form, made to speak with quiet authority, like the humanist typeface Hulsey has chosen in her prints. Its line weight can ebb and swell, inviting closer examination. When combined with other letters, a variety of sounds are generated, much as atomic elements join to form chemical compounds. Like strands of DNA, language represents possibility, a series of symbols to be spoken in endless variations. They have meaning; they have life, and they will continue to evolve as they are employed in new situations.

In thinking about *Iterations* I was reminded of another work on scale, *Powers of Ten* by Charles and Ray Eames, "a film dealing with the relative size of things in the universe and the effect of adding another zero."[1] That effect is one of humbling interconnectivity. In *On Einstein on Maxwell on Electromagnetism*, Hulsey pairs a visualization of electromagnetism, a force that flows through and affects all things, with a linguistic diagram of a quote by Einstein regarding the subject. This side-by-side comparison of forms deftly comments on the fact that modern technological communication relies on this phenomenon, and that language is evolving apace.

Sarah Hulsey's background in linguistics allows her to reveal the fundamental framework of our words. By drawing parallels between linguistic structure and the visual language of historical diagrams and maps, she imbues her selected texts with greater meaning. Viewing Hulsey's work, we may not completely understand the science, but are drawn in by the visuals, and once there, curious to crack the code. We may not quite grasp the electron configuration of an atom of gold (Au), but we can appreciate the beauty of the material nonetheless.

– Marianne Dages
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[1] *Powers of Ten*, Charles and Ray Eames. IBM. 1977