Illustration Artwork Editing

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1 Synopsis

This is the brief, first version of what will become a much longer document. Ultimately, I hope to cover a number of standard types of book illustration, ranging from graphs and bar charts through two-dimensional (2-D) sections, three-dimensional (3-D) blocks and maps.

Here, because the materials are to hand (if a little aged), I will focus on re-visualising a difficult image.

This exercise goes back to the days before computer graphics, when roughs were often supplied on ordinary cartridge paper, and book illustrations were drawn at the drawing board, using drawing pens, ink, the smoothest drawing materials available, Letratone ornament (in those days, supplied as printed self-adhesive sheets) and filmset lettering on clear acetate.

The technology may have been superseded, but the principles are timeless.

The standard procedure in those days was to hold a briefing session, at which the author and editor were able to discuss how individual drawings should be presented. Conventionally, the briefing session was packed into a single day, so many short-cuts were needed in order to deal with perhaps 200 or more illustrations.

The focus would inevitably be on the more challenging items – sometimes at the expense of lowly graphs, bar charts and so on that could easily be categorised and hence uniformly styled.

2 Reinterpretation

The author's hand-drawn rough shown in Figure 1 is intended to portray the various processes that take place along the course of a river, from its origin as a mountain or highland spring, down across a low-lying plain, past industrial facilities, through a town or city, and then out to sea.

Crucially, the detail in the background, high up in the distant mountains, is meant to show a hydroelectric power facility – a dam, together with spillways and a complex of associated buildings.

Figure 1 The author's hand-drawn pictorial rough

The rough is pictorial in nature – unbounded, and presented as a natural sketch. As such, it is necessarily ragged around the edges, the detail is sometimes difficult to pick out, and the lettering is superposed on the drawing, which obscures the detail.

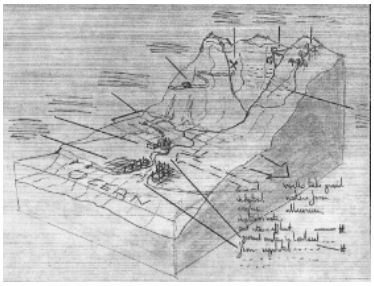

Figure 2 The small preliminary pencil sketch

This illustration needs to be reinterpreted, and the best way to approach it is to turn it into a 3-D block.

The first quick sketch for the new drawing (produced in about 15 minutes – see Figure 2) shows the basic idea: the lettering will be positioned around the outside, connected to the drawn detail using leader lines. In that way, the drawing itself won't be obscured.

But this sketch, done on a small slip of paper during the author briefing

session, isn't suitable as raw material for a drawing studio (nowadays, read "graphics program"). It's just the starting point.

Note the large open arrows that were intended to show water movements through the soil – flows in and out. That idea was subsequently abandoned.

3 Reworking for the Illustrator

Let's look at the more detailed pencil drawing shown in Figure 3. This represents a couple of hours' work.

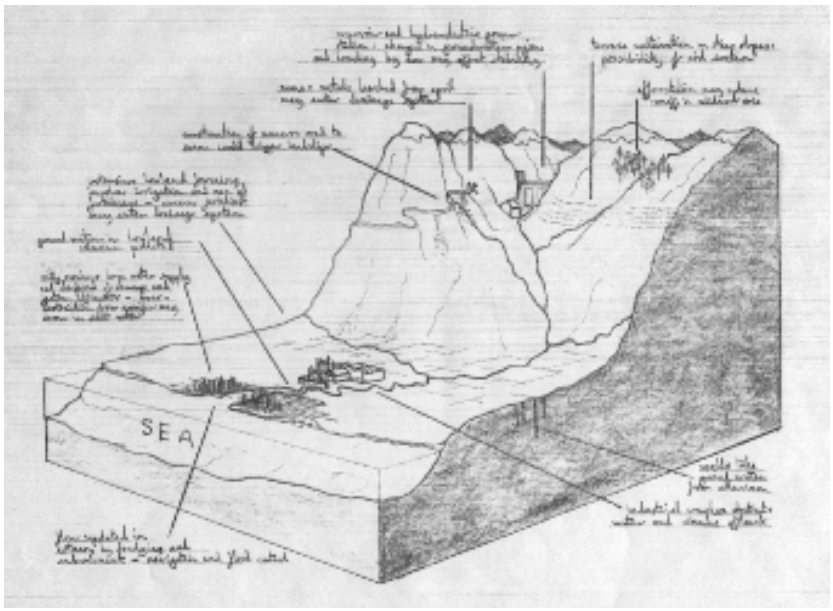

Figure 3 The fully detailed pencil drawing

Note first of all that our 3-D block is parallel sided – there's no attempt to add proper perspective. This is partly a matter of aesthetics and partly convenience. Also, the mountains are rather high, which is a means of generating a little more space for the lettering!

There's a need to avoid a self-limiting representation. In proper perspective, the sides would taper away, and the background mountain range would become distant – but, of course, we need to show fine detail in the background, just as we do in the foreground. The hydroelectric dam is in the background, and must be clearly visible. On the other hand, the city in the foreground must be compact, so that it doesn't dominate the illustration. Suddenly, despite the real-looking mountains and the basically natural view, a game is being played – the features are actually scaled in reverse. It's a levelling strategy to ensure that readers see everything clearly.

The principles behind the drawing are broadly as follows. This is a representation of a chunk of landscape. There is a ground surface (drawn using a fairly heavy freehand line), but the other bounding lines are hypothetical. Ideally, there would be no boundary lines below ground, because those areas are no more constrained by boundaries than the sky overhead – everything continues.

The heavy ground-surface outline clearly defines what can be seen in a realistic scenario, and divides it from the subsurface realm that cannot ordinarily be seen. The surface can, of course, be seen through the shallow seawater.

Finally, this redrawn sketch goes off to the illustrator, who produces the ink drawing shown in Figure 4.

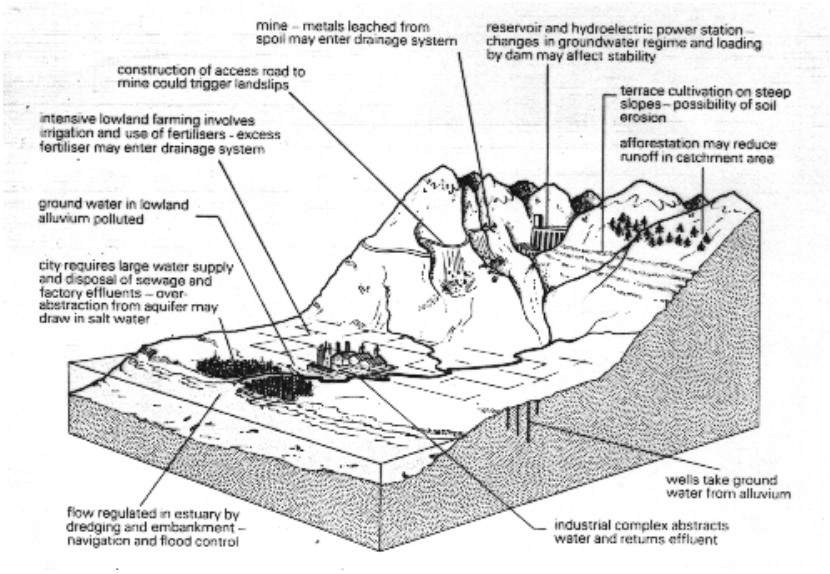

Figure 4 The finished drawing

So there we are. The author's pictorial rough has been converted into a stylised, but legible and understandable, 3-D block. There's room for the original explanatory lettering and more.