

timeinspace

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## GESTALT PRINCIPLES

Gestalt is a psychology term which means “unified whole,” and refers to theories of visual perception developed by German psychologists in the 1920s. Supposedly free from subjective aesthetic bias, these theories provide artists with a way to present visual information. These theories attempt to describe how people tend to organize visual elements into groups or unified wholes when certain principles are applied.

Gestalt is a German word meaning ‘shape’ or ‘form,’ and refers to *a way a thing has been gestell*t ; i.e., ‘placed,’ or ‘put together.’ **The basic principle is that the whole is other than the sum of its parts.** In other words, the whole (example: a car) carries a different meaning than its individual components (tire, paint, metal). In viewing the “whole,” a cognitive process takes place—the mind makes a leap from comprehending the parts to realizing the whole. Gestalt is not design, but knowing the visual principles of Gestalt will give you valuable insight to add to your design toolbox.

SIMILARITY



**Similarity** Occurs when objects look similar to one another. Often perceived as a group or pattern. Things that look sufficiently alike will be seen as belonging together (producing unity) and things which look sufficiently different i.e. dissimilar, will be seen as belonging apart (producing variety). The perception of similarity or dissimilarity is the result of sorting, which depends on attention and on which characteristics of which element(s) are seen or viewed as more important.

CONTINUATION



**Continuation** Occurs when the eye is compelled to move through one object and continue to another object. Used to guide viewers to focal point(s).

CLOSURE



**Closure** Occurs when an object is incomplete or a space is not completely enclosed. If enough of the shape is indicated, people perceive the whole by filling in the missing information.

PROXIMITY



**Proximity** Also called *grouping*...Occurs when elements are placed close together. They tend to be perceived as a group. Can be used most effectively with *contrast* i.e. standing out from the group. Can also indicate depth.

FIGURE-GROUND



**Figure-Ground** Occurs when the eye differentiates an object from its surrounding area. A form, silhouette, or shape is naturally perceived as figure (object), while the surrounding area is perceived as ground (background). Balancing figure and ground can make the perceived image more clear. Using unusual figure/ground relationships can add interest and subtlety to an image.

EQUILIBRIUM



**Equilibrium** Whether we are aware of it or not, our sense of *balance* profoundly influences our visual judgments. The principle of equilibrium explains our search for balance in everything we see. As we will discover, our use of balance, or our decision not to use it, influences the message and, therefore, the viewer of our work.

ISOMORPHIC  
CORRESPONDENCE

**Isomorphic Correspondence** This simply means that we respond to meaning. When we see an image such as a painting, a photo, or a symbol, we interpret its meaning based upon our experiences and memories.