Gestalt theory of perception

According to the Gestalt psychologists, certain features in visual perception are universal.

Gestalt theory proposes that we see by forming light and dark objects, edges and contours into a whole image without thinking about it.

The statement, The whole is different from the sum of its parts, sums up the way we recognize figures and whole forms instead of just a collection of simple lines, curves and shapes.

For example, we recognize a square as a square even if we transpose it, that is, change its color or size.

But if we rotate a square 45 degrees, as in Figure A, we see a diamond. We cannot see it as a square without some thought.

Gestalt psychologists have outlined fundamental and universal principles, sometimes called “laws,” of perceptual organization:

- proximity
- similarity
- good continuity
- common fate
- closure

- figure and ground
- symmetry, surroundness
- prägnanz
**Proximity**

- Shapes close together are seen as related; shapes separated by space are seen as unrelated.

- We perceive Figure B as a random pattern of squares because they are unevenly spaced.

- In Figure C, the close proximity of nine squares leads us to see them as a unified composition, that are further apart and a lonely line on the far left.

- Designers manipulate proximity to show relationships between objects. In the familiar IBM logo, proximity works with another Gestalt principle, closure, to turn random shapes into a familiar image.
Proximity in design

- Put related items close together; separate unrelated items.
- Proximity relationships often determine how we “read” a design.
- Close-edge proximity is important for how we read type.

We see two words because of close-edge proximity.
Even if we widen the spacing, we see two words because the difference in letter spaces and word spaces is relative.

Touch: When the edges of items touch the relationship becomes stronger.

Overlap: The strongest relationship happens when items overlap.
Combine: A strong relationship is created when elements are boxed regardless of what other gestalt concepts are in play.
Boxing elements also separates, an important consideration.
Similarity

- Features that look similar are seen as related.
- The circles and squares are evenly spaced. But we tend to see alternating columns of circles and squares the far right figure.
- The principle of similarity is used to create repetitive patterns that we often find pleasing to the eye.

- We can make a point of emphasis by varying that similarity.
Good continuity
- We prefer to see contours based on smooth continuity instead of abrupt changes of direction.

Common fate
- We see groups of objects as lines moving along the smoothest path.
- In the poster below, the colored circles suggest rapidly moving bicycles. The Beatles provide another famous example.
Closure

- We tend to perceive figures as “closed” rather than “open.”
- Another way to think of closure is that we mentally complete shapes that are only partially there.
- Designers and artists rely on the principle of closure, such as with this logo for Eaton.
Figure and ground

- Several principles that fall under the heading figure and ground, how the brain separates figures from the background.
  - **Smallness:** Smaller areas tend to be seen as figures against a larger background.
  - **Light/dark:** Dark objects on light backgrounds are more common.
  - **Symmetry:** Symmetrical areas tend to be seen as figures against asymmetrical backgrounds.
  - **Surroundedness:** Areas surrounded by other areas tend to be perceived as figures.
Prägnanz

- The simplest and most stable interpretations are favored.
Logos and sig cuts

- A logo is a graphic mark or emblem used by businesses, organizations and even people to create an identity mark that the public will instantly recognize.

- Logos are purely graphic (abstract symbols or ideograms) or include type (sigcuits).

- Does this logo spark instant recognition? Is it an ideogram or a pure abstraction?
Logos and sig cuts

- An ideogram or ideograph is a graphical symbol that represents an idea.
- Good logos are often ideograms.
Logos and sig cuts

A sig cut is a group of letters, such as an acronym or an initial, **highly stylized** to invoke a mood or concept.

LOVE (1967) Robert Indiana
Logos and sig cuts

- Sig cuts often are used as logos or with logos.
- A good logo connects with a concept or value that the client hopes to represent.
- A good logo is memorable; it becomes a synecdoche for the larger organization.

COLORFORMS, Paul Rand
Logos and sig cuts

We can analyze ideograms using three dimensions:

- The **explanation** is a discussion of the graphic form of the ideogram, what we want it to mean.
- The **usage** focuses on how the ideogram is employed.
- The **message** is the verbal interpretation of the meaning of the ideogram, the audience’s role.
- When an ideogram has more than one possible interpretation, the audience chooses the message that suits its narrative.
Logos and sig cuts

**Explaination:** What concepts are implied in an ideogram? For example:

- The circle is a universal symbol of the whole.
- ’Yin’ and ‘yang’ are polar opposites, light and darkness.
- The yin-yang ideogram suggests that every whole has a visible and an obscure aspect.
Logos and sig cuts

**Usage:** How is the ideogram used as a logo?

- Ideograms depict and symbolize abstract ideas, giving them body and shape so that we can see them and relate to them.
- Organizations take advantage of this in using ideograms in their logos.
Logos and sig cuts

**Message.** The message is negotiated by the audience. Some messages from this ideogram:

- Every whole has a visible and a hidden aspect.
- Human judgment is deceived by seeing only what is apparent and drawing conclusions based on limited vision.
- Wisdom means conscious striving to uncover what is subtle and hidden to complete and balance our understanding of the whole.
Logos and sig cuts

■ Examples of ideograms include wayfinding signage, such as in airports and other places where people speaking many languages might gather.

■ But these signs assume some agreement among diverse audience members about what ideas are attached to what images.

■ Audiences negotiate meaning.
Logos and sig cuts

- Triangle sign with a car falling into water
- Triangle sign with an animal crossing
- Triangle sign with animals next to "NEXT 96 km"
- Triangle sign with a large animal and small animal
Logos and sig cuts

- Explanation
- Usage
- Message
Logos and sig cuts

- Explanation
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Logos and sig cuts

- Explanation.
- Usage.
- Message.
The Obama logo was created early in 2007, through a collaboration between Chicago firms Sender LLC and MO/DE. Chief Obama strategist David Axelrod gave the agencies a mandate: design a logo that would evoke “a new sense of hope,” as he told the Chicago Business Journal.

**Explanation:** The red stripes can represent rolling farmland as heartland values or flag stripes as patriotism, and the semi-circle stands for sunrise as hope), framed by the initial “O.”
On Feb. 10, 2007, when Obama officially announced his candidacy, the newly minted logo was already emblazoned on his podium, along with thousands of signs waving in the arms of devotees.
Logos and sig cuts

**Usage:** The Obama team blanketed every official campaign space with the familiar “0,” borrowing a trick from the Nike playbook. The shoe company’s famous swoosh means nothing, says Michael Bierut, a partner with the design firm Pentagram, but “you think it means something because Nike has made it ubiquitous.”
Logos and sig cuts

Usage: Obama’s team took that concept a step further – they allowed campaign managers to adapt the logo for different constituents.
Logos and sig cuts

Message

- The simple, recognizable design has inspired many “unofficial” uses.
- The Logobama Web site allowed visitors to insert their own photo into the logo.
- The site Yes We Carve posted photos of Obama-themed jack o’ lanterns.
- Brand proliferation by the public is a sign of a good logo.
Logos and sig cuts

Choice of font and style are often key identifiers.
Logos and sig cuts

- A logo is designed to activate positive recognition. Nothing is worse than a logo that sparks indifference.
- A product that fails to appeal is one such valueless attribute.

Some logos are more than marks of failure; sometimes they unintentionally illustrate the failures of an institution all too vividly. This logo for the Archdiocesan Youth Commission was designed 30 years before sex abuse in the Catholic Church became a public scandal. When a good design signifies bad deeds, the result is an unfortunate logo.
Logos and sig cuts

■ The Procter & Gamble logo originated in 1851 as the symbol for Star candles.
■ The man in the moon looks at 13 stars for the 13 colonies.
■ An urban legend says the logo is a satanic symbol mocking Revelation 12:1, ‘... a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of 12 stars.’
■ Where the beard meets the circle, three curls were inferred to be a mirror image of the number 666.
■ At the top and bottom, hair curls were seen as horns.
Logos and sig cuts

These interpretations have been denied by company officials, and no evidence linking the company to the Church of Satan or any other occult organization has ever been presented.

The moon-and-stars logo was discontinued in 1985 as a result of the controversy.
Logos and sig cuts

Paul Rand
IBM 1956
IBM 1967 (13-bar variation)
IBM 1972 (8-bar variation)

Enron 1996

Westinghouse 1960

Harcourt Brace 1957

UPS 1961

Yale 1985
Logos and sig cuts

Raymond Loewy

Exxon 1972

Shell 1971

NABISCO 1952

Post Office 1971

LUCKY STRIKE 1940
Logos and sig cuts

NEW YORK’S jetBlue HOMETOWN AIRLINE

I ♥ NY horizontal

I ♥ NY stacked

WOODSTOCK FILM FESTIVAL

Milton Glaser
Logos and sig cuts

- Many logos use negative space, the space around the subject of an image.
- In two tones, subject is usually dark and space is white (silhouette).
- Reversing tones can cause negative space to form an alternative shape (figure-ground reversal).
- Using negative space, a logo can offer two views.
Good logos often use negative space to create multiple readings and a sense of visual play.
Logos and sig cuts

- The task: Establish an identity for Albert Lea girls hockey.
- The team mascot, the tiger, appears on sweaters for the boys team.
- A new design must evoke the concept of the tiger.
- The new design must be separate from the boys team.
- The new design will be part of a move from cherry red-based uniforms to navy blue.
Logos and sig cuts
Logos and sig cuts
Logos and sig cuts

2001-2002 YEARBOOK

FRANCES O'DONELL

27

Year: 99-00 00-01
G 3 2
A 2 1
P 6 1
PIM 1 1

Senior Defense Captain

TOTAL 18 23 41 11 22

2001-2002 YEARBOOK
Logos and sig cuts
Logos and sig cuts