The Gestalt Principles

Part 1

Figure and Background 1

When you first look at the image, you can see the famous apple logo. If you look again but closer, you can see that Steve Job's face is shaping the bitten part of the apple.

In this picture, the negative space is forming the figure, which in this case is the apple. You can not see them at the same time so you have to concentrate on one or the other. Since the figure and the negative space work together, this is an example of this principle.

Figure and Background 2

In this image, you can see a tree with a lot of branches sticking out. At first glance it doesn’t look like a tree though, but rather a bird. At a closer second glance, the tree can be seen, but the bird is still the dominant shape.

Grouping 1

At this bus stop, our eyes tend to group the two young boys who are sitting next to each other, and to think that the older man doesn't belong to that group. This phenomenon is called grouping, since our brains make the connection involuntarily that the two boys are a group because of how close they are sitting. Since the old man is sitting further away, our brains do not make that connection that he is with the boys. It is grouping based on proximity.

Grouping 2

In this image, there is a bunch of people and it fits perfectly into the grouping principle because they are all very close to each other and they are doing the same pose, smiling with their mouth wide open. It’s not hard to see that they all belong to the same group. This is also grouping based on proximity, and you could say that some similarity is playing in because of the same smile that they are all doing

Proximity 1

The proximity principle suggests that our brains group objects that are close to each other, just like the other images I showed under grouping. Proximity is a sub group to Grouping.

This image has the proximity principle because all of the figures in the picture are very close to together, which makes them look like a group.

Proximity 2

Here we see a man and a woman, and we would assume they are a group because of their close distance to each other. The only thing that would group them together is the proximity, which is why the principle applies to this image.

Similarity 1

The similarity principle is the other subgroup of grouping along with proximity. This principle suggests that we group objects based on similar elements the objects possess. For example, in this picture there’s a couple of human-shaped figures which all have different colors. Our brain immediately groups them based on the color, not the figures as a whole. We see the red group, the green group, the blue group etc.

Similarity 2

Here we can see two girls with identical shirts on. That makes the brain believe that they belong together since why else would you have two very specific shirts like this standing next to each other if you're not together? If they were to stand further away, the brain would still group them because of the similarity of the shirt.

Continuity 1

The principle of continuity suggests that if objects are lined up in an unbreakable line, it's easier for the brain to remember the continuous line than to remember each object individually.

The principle applies here because all of the small circles and swirls make a continuous shape that's easy to follow with the eye. It would be hard to recreate this if we didn't remember the pattern.

Continuity 2

The principle applies to this image because all the people in the picture are making poses in order to spell the word “girl” out. It’s way easier to remember the word “girl” than to remember each individual pose that the people are doing.

Closure 1

The principle of closure is that we tend to complete unfinished images. Here, for example, we can see a bunch of very small objects together forming a fish, and even though there are no definite lines to finish the fish, we still complete it in our heads because of the principle.

Closure 2

We assume that even though we can’t see the tigers whole head, the tiger is complete behind the leaves. The unseen part of the head could very well be completely distorted, but thanks to the closure principle we complete the head and assume that the tiger’s head is whole.

Leveling

The principle of leveling suggests that we need symmetry to break the tension in the image. Objects that are almost in the middle will be perceived to be in the middle.

In this image, we can see that the sun isn’t exactly in the center if we take a close look, but at first glance it looks like it’s in the middle between the reed on each side. Symmetry is important for the brain to avoid tension, which is why leveling happens.

Sharpening

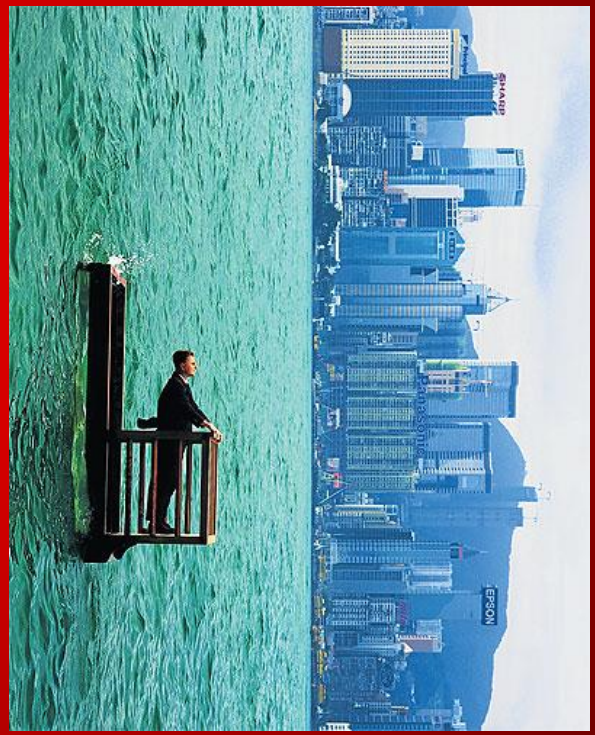
The principle of sharpening is the opposite of leveling. It appears when there is contrast, since we tend to remember it because it’s asymmetrical.

In this image, it’s easy to remember the tree’s placement because of the asymmetry. That’s what sharpening is suggesting.

Surrounding 1

The principle of surrounding suggests that instead of negative space influencing our perception, it is how the objects in the surroundings are placed.

For example, in this image the city and the ocean is turned around, and the man isn't standing in the same angle as the city and the water, so it looks like he is doing something supernatural, defying the laws of gravity since he's not on the same plane as the other major objects.



Surrounding 2

The same thing can be seen here. In this image, there's a city upside down over another city, and it's all connected to the same building in the middle. If you turn the image around, you will see the city at the top on the bottom of the image. It looks like there are two cities, one in the sky and one on the ground. That's the surrounding principle because the surroundings are placed in a way that's not natural, defying gravity.

Third dimension 1

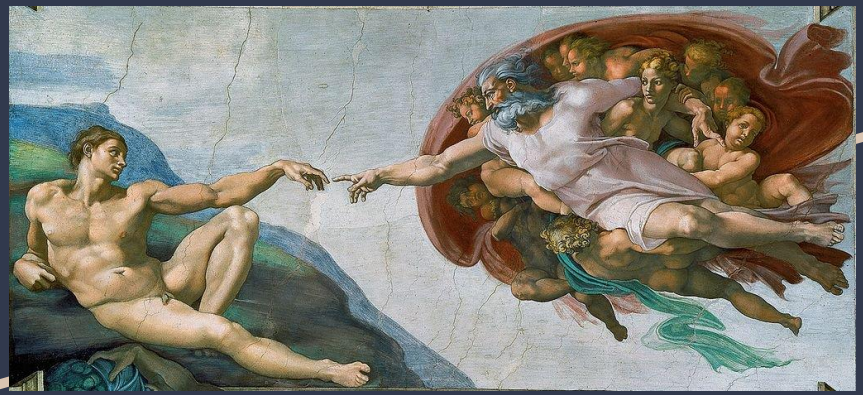
The third dimension principle is just like it sounds. The principle is an optical illusion, making it look like the image is sticking out of or escaping the frame. For example in this image, it looks like the foot is coming out of the frame because of the way it’s painted. They painted the leg and the foot over the frame, and added shadows in the background. The foot is not really coming out of the wall, but the principle of third dimension is perceiving our brains that it is.

Third dimension 2

Here it looks like the bed is floating over a waterfall. The floor is painted with depth, making it an optical illusion that there is a raging waterfall under the bed, when in fact there is no waterfall. It’s only a painting on a flat surface that looks like it.

Part 2: Images of great impact

“The creation of Adam” by Michelangelo



This famous painting uses the principles of grouping, sharpening and continuity.

The principle of grouping comes into play because the two men’s finger are reaching out to touch, and the distance between the fingers doesn’t result in any uncomfortable tension. We also assume that they are a group because of the fact that they are reaching for each other, and meeting each other’s eyes.

Sharpening is present here because their fingers aren’t in the centre of the picture, which makes it easier to remember it asymmetrical since it’s located more to the left side of the image instead of the centre.

Continuity can be seen, as there is a smooth continuous line going from one man to the other thanks to the connection of the arms.

“The starry night” by Vincent van Gogh

This images contains the principle of continuity, similarity and sharpening.

Continuity can be seen in the shapes that the brush strokes make, most noticeable in the sky. You can easily see continuous lines where he painted the sky, the stars and the gush of wind.

Grouping by similarity also plays a role in this image, thanks to the brush strokes and clear dots of color. It’s easy to group the yellow strokes into one unit, a star, and the brain also groups the stars from similarity, as well as the two gushes of wind and the fields behind the mountains.

Sharpening is used because the shapes are not symmetrical. The big dark bush is slightly to the left from the centre, and the big yellow star is located in the far right upper corner. There is no clear object in the middle, which makes it have a sharpened effect.

The Adidas logo

The adidas logo is very famous across the world, and the principles we can find here is figure and background, closure and leveling.

Figure and background fits in here because the brain tend to see a figure with a dominant shape instead of the negative space that doesn't have a dominant shape. Therefore, we see the shape of the black adidas text and the figure above it instead of the negative space.

Closure plays a role in the logo above the text because the principle of closure suggests that our brains tend to complete uncompleted shapes if the objects are close enough to appear like they could complete the picture. The two lines in the middle, even though they are broken apart, we still complete the shape.

Leveling, the opposite of sharpening, is applied here because the logo is placed in the very centre of the image. It's symmetrical and it makes it easy to remember.