

Design is the art of gradually applying constraints until only one solution remains."
—Unknown

"The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak."
—Hans Hofmann

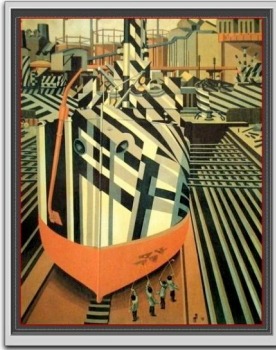
"Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as best to accomplish a particular purpose."
—Charles Eames

MORE NOTES ABOUT GESTALT AND DESIGN

One thing about Gestalt psychology is that while it has gone somewhat out of favor with psychologists of late, the theories about visual gestalt are still being researched today. New information has come about in the last few years concerning human perception. We do have innate physiological responses to visual stimuli that in some cases are on the level of single cell responses. This factual research pokes holes in some aspects of Post Modernist theories about world views being understood solely from a unique individual's point of view, influenced primarily by culture, education, experience, geography, etc. Post Modernists believed that language and form are not neutral but carry cultural assumptions, and that meaning is arbitrary. Their theories were based in part on the writing of Jacques Derrida.

As designers and artists, we need to understand what is innately human in how we communicate and interpret our visual world and also what is colored by culture, etc. The Modernists who preceded the Post Modernists believed that **all** visual symbols and images have universal meanings. Their theories were furthered through the teachings of a school of design known as the Bauhaus. It was an influential design school in Germany from 1919 – 1933. We know that this theory is not entirely true either. But the

No, Watson, this was not done by accident, but by design.
-SHERLOCK HOLMES
(Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)



Dazzle Art from WW2

fact that there is debate further illustrates the qualitative nature of design.

THE ROLE OF THEORY IN DESIGN

Design choices come from both qualitative and quantitative criteria, not to mention pure inspiration. Quantitative design work entails investigation and research. During WW2, British and American ships were under attack from German U-boats. Designers couldn't come up with a plan that would camouflage the ships so they created a pattern that would confuse the U-boat gunners. Ships were painted to confuse their direction and speed.

Some design work might be based more on the qualitative approach. Artists are more likely to work from intuition, experience and inspiration. So often designers work from a theory that is later proven by facts or intuitive experimentation as useful. Theories often fall into the two camps mentioned above. Gestalt theory's basic premise is that organization is central to the way our brain functions. Good Gestalt would be synonymous with good organization.



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COMPONENTS OF ART

Some theorists would divide an artwork into the following components:

Subject – is the what of art

Form – is the how of art (design)

Content – is the why of art

Form follows function
– that has been
misunderstood. Form
and function should
be one, joined in a
spiritual union.
Frank Lloyd Wright

The word Form has several meanings in art jargon. It is both a reference to a 3-dimensional object, a 2-dimensional shape that has the illusion of 3-dimensionality, and it also means a planned organization or **design**. While this class primarily is concerned with the middle component, the other two aspects merit your attention. First of all, design becomes manifest through the use of visual elements and organizational principles. Design is also intimately entangled with meaning and interpretation of form. Design is significantly cross-disciplinary. It is influenced by theory from sociology, philosophy, science, anthropology, psychology, history, communication, and more that I fail to mention. Design might be better understood by analyzing the word **form**. Form can have function, form can inform, form can persuade or inspire. It is said that form does not follow function but **is** function. Aesthetics, a study of the definition of beauty, also plays a role in design or form. Might Aesthetics be a limiting consideration for design to create expressive and informative form?

Art at the highest level communicates with renewable closure. Art at the next level speaks to an aesthetic achievement, or an expressive one. Greeting cards have pleasing



Chris Hipkiss *Your Fause Jit*
2007 graphite
Outsider Art

Aesthetics. Art at a more basic level is concerned with skill. Crafts usually fall into this realm.

So how do we evaluate design? We might ask if the design works in the context of the application. If design can inform, persuade, enlighten, and also be visually pleasing, useful and meaningful, then perhaps we can say it is good. Is that definition still too limiting? There is no single solution to this problem. Good design is generally memorable.



American Folk Art ~1868 Artist Unknown



Josef Forster

Art from the Prinzhorn Collection for the mentally ill.