



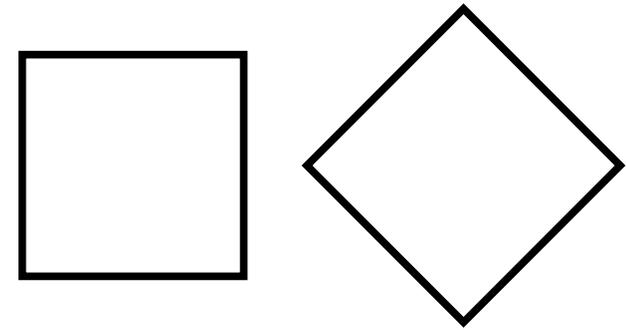
Edgar Mueller, Lava Burst, 3D pavement art, Geldern Germany, August 2008

Gestalt at work: Those who create visual texts understand Gestalt and make use of its ideas. Movie makers, photographers and artists like Edgar Mueller use forced perspective to make objects appear larger or smaller than they are, and to create scenes that don't really exist. We see the whole and do not break down the scene into its individual parts.

Gestalt theory of perception

According to the Gestalt psychologists — notably Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), Wolfgang Khlér (1887-1967) and Kurt Koffka (1886-1941) — certain features in visual perception are universal. You could say they are innate; they don't have to be taught. Such theories are known as **sensual theories**. Sensual theories are of a lower order of thinking than perceptual theories, such as semiotics; perceptual theories take into account the meaning we attach to what we see.

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

a collection of simple lines, curves and shapes.

Gestalt (the German word means organized whole) is a theory that the brain operates holistically, with self-organizing tendencies.

Gestalt states that we perceive the whole without being aware of the connection of the parts, and that the essence of the whole does not change when we transpose it. For example, we recognize a square as a square even if it changes color or size. In the more direct sense of the word “transpose,” a musical tune remains in essence the same even if played in a different key.

But if we rotate a square 45 degrees, as in Figure A, we see a diamond. We cannot recognize it as the geometric equivalent of the square without “mechanical and intellectual operations,” as Ernst Mach wrote in 1886. In other words, to see both as the same shape, we have to think about it.

Gestalt psychologists have outlined fundamental and universal principles, sometimes called “laws,” of perceptual organization. The terms vary from theorist to theorist, but these eight are generally accepted:

- proximity
- similarity
- good continuity
- common fate
- closure
- figure and ground
- symmetry, surroundness
- prägnanz

Proximity in design

Proximity relationships often determine how we “read” a design. This is obvious in typography, especially when not enough thought is given to how space is used (right).

The Kids Exchange sign shows a misuse of close-edge proximity, one of four types of proximity relationships. The others are **touch**, **over-lap** and **combining**.

- The **close-edge** concept states that items closer to one another, relative to other items, are more likely to be seen as a group. In using space, the general rule is, **Put related items close together; separate unrelated items.**

Look at Figure G. How many groups do you see among the 12 shapes? Does anything look left out?

Close-edge proximity is important for how we read type. Compare these examples:

KiDs exChaNgE

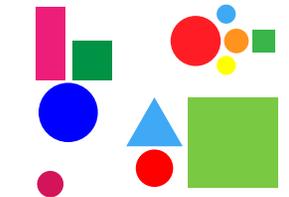
KiDs exChaNgE

Although the fonts are mixed and the case is erratic, 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.

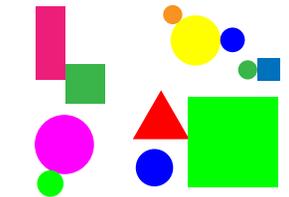
- **Touch:** When the edges of items touch (Figure H) the relationship becomes stronger. See the example below:

KiDs exChaNgE

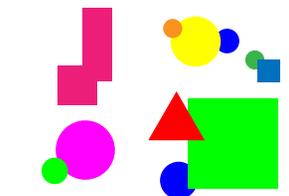
- **Overlap:** The strongest relationship happens when items overlap (Figure I). Two the same color form a new complex shape. Overlapped items form a strong group regardless of color.



G



H

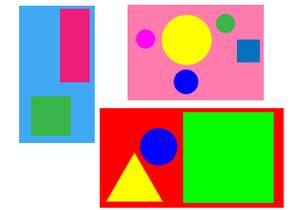


I



In the example below, the letters all overlap.

KiDs exChaNgE



J

Overlapped or touching type can make a striking display, but it is not advised for type meant to be read at long stretches, what Erik Spikermann calls “long-distance type.”

- **Combine:** A strong relationship is created when elements are boxed (Figure J) regardless of what other gestalt concepts are in play. Boxing elements also separates, an important consideration. “Highlighting” (another combining device) is a key typographical version of combine. Quotation marks, brackets and parentheses highlight words in this paragraph.

KiDs exChaNgE

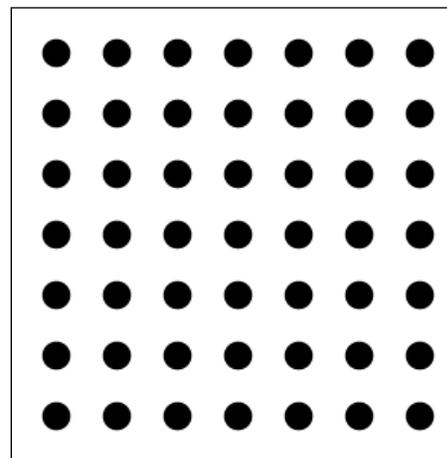


Similarity

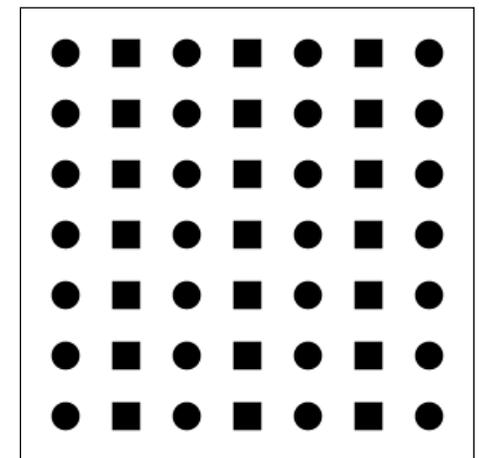
In Figures G and H, the circles and squares are evenly spaced horizontally and vertically, so proximity does not come into play. But we do tend to see alternating columns of circles and squares in Figure L. Gestalt psychologists would argue that this is because of the principle of similarity: **Features that look similar are seen as related.** Without the two different shapes, we would see a square composition, as in the Figure K.

The principle of similarity is used to create repetitive patterns that we often find pleasing to the eye. The Beatles album cover uses images of the same shape and size, but as we study them, we find subtle, interesting differences, such as the blacked out image of George Harrison at center.

When we use the principle of similarity, we can make a point of emphasis by varying that similarity. In this movie still from King Vi-



K



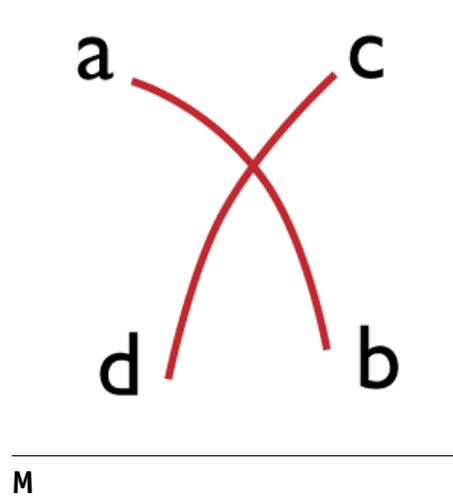
L

dor's *The Crowd* (top), a film from 1928, the actor with his face to the camera demonstrates this point. He also stands out because of another Gestalt principle, common fate. Everyone is going the same direction except him.

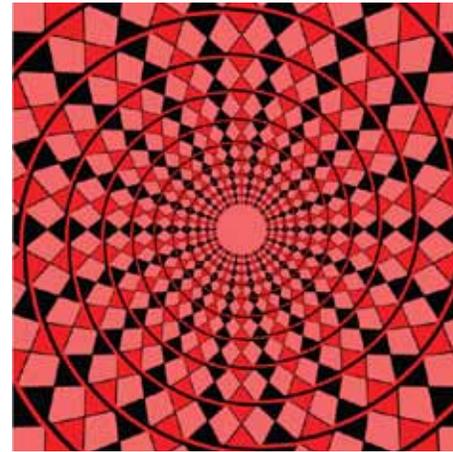
Good continuity

A third Gestalt principle is good continuity: **We prefer to see contours based on smooth continuity instead of abrupt changes of direction.** In Figure M, for example, we are more likely to identify lines a-b and c-d crossing than to identify a-d and c-b or a-c and d-b as lines.

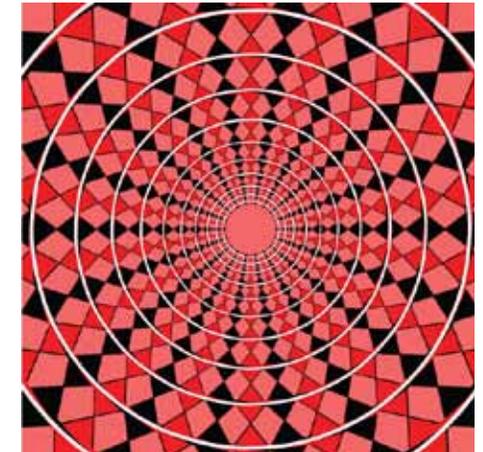
Figure N illustrates how this tendency to seek continuation can lead to misperception. We think we see a spiral, but as we impose concentric circles on the image (Figure O), we see that the spiral is just an illusion.



M



N



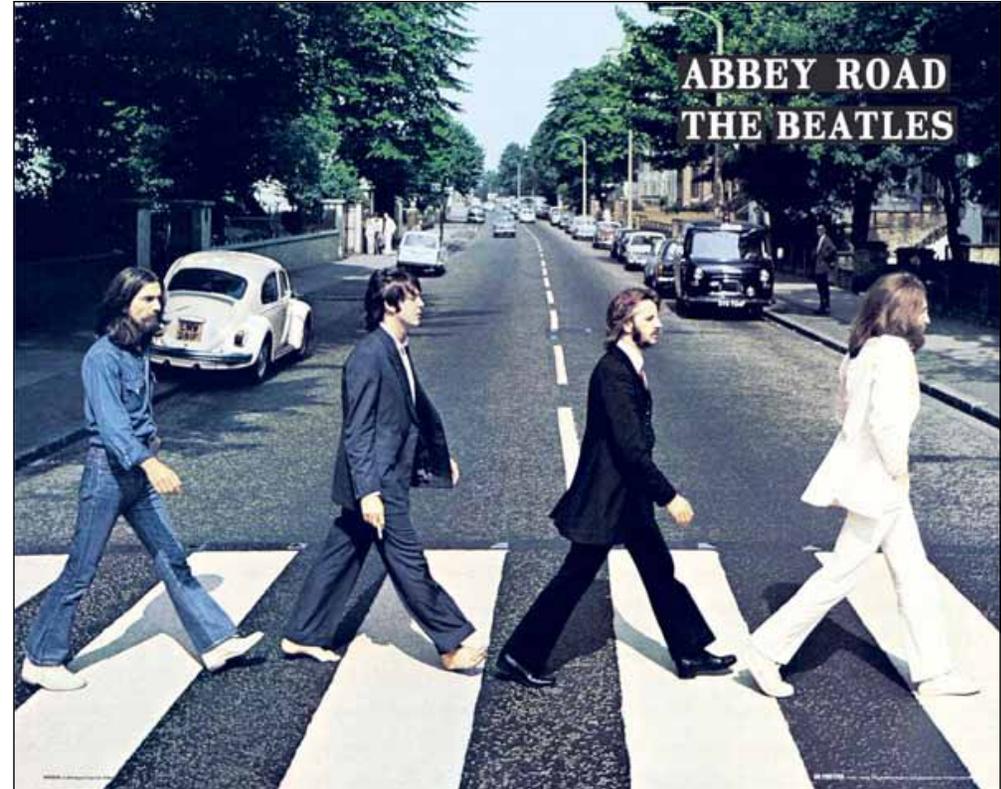
O

Common fate

According to the principle of 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 (right).



Poster for the 2010 UCI Road World Championships of cycling, in Geelong and Melbourne, Australia. The designer used similarity in the shapes and colors of the circles, and added a sense of movement by exploiting the principle of common fate.



Closure in art and design

Designers and artists rely on the principle of closure, such as with this



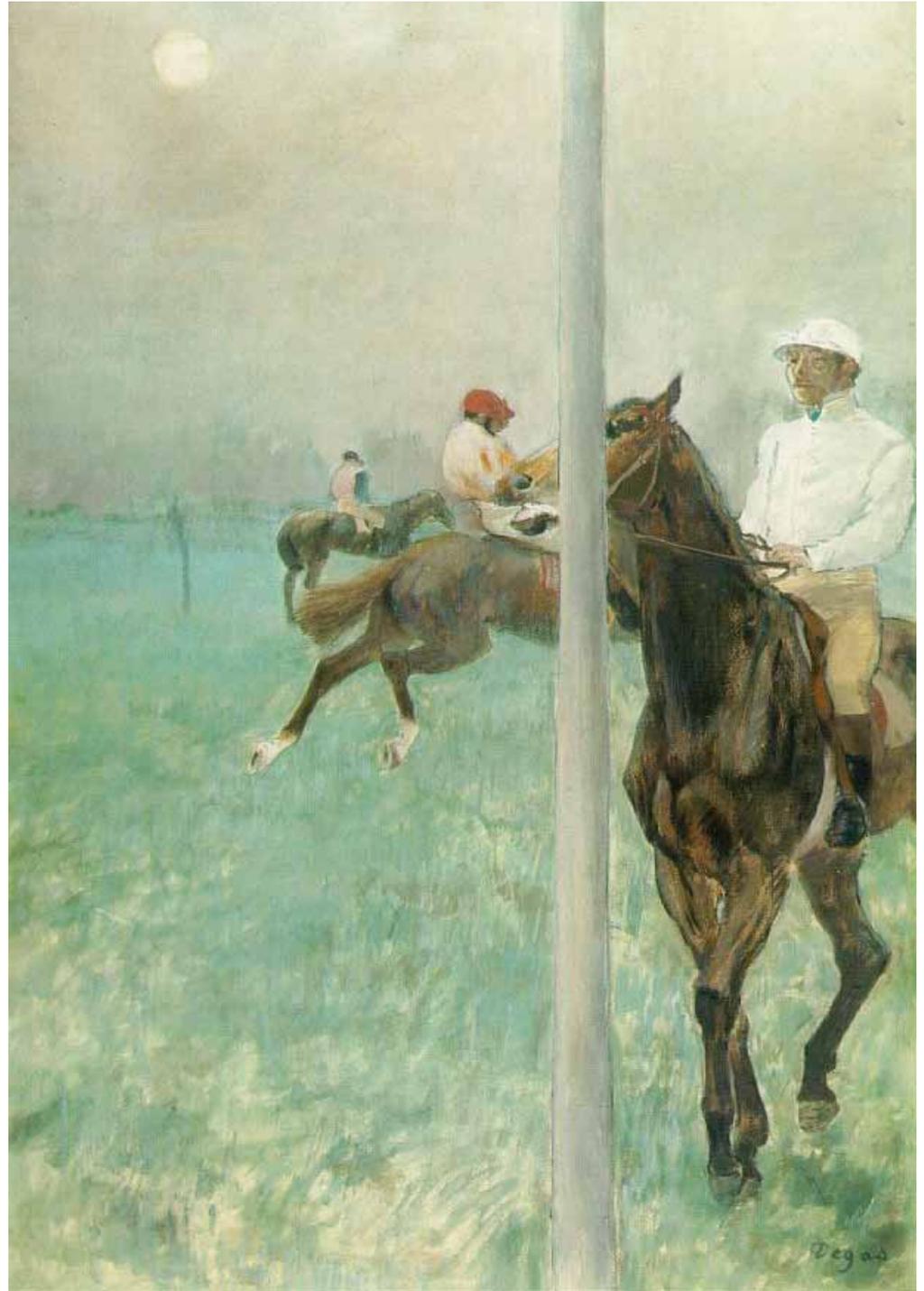
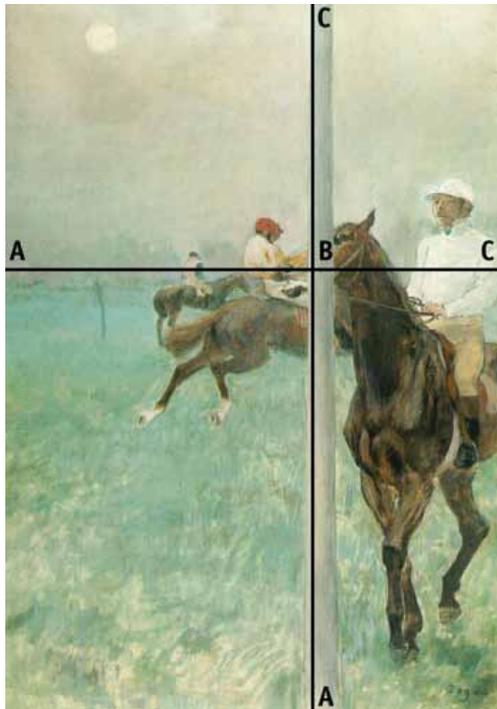
logo for Eaton. The "E" and the "O" are formed out of negative space. The artist has manipulated another Gestalt principle, figure and ground.

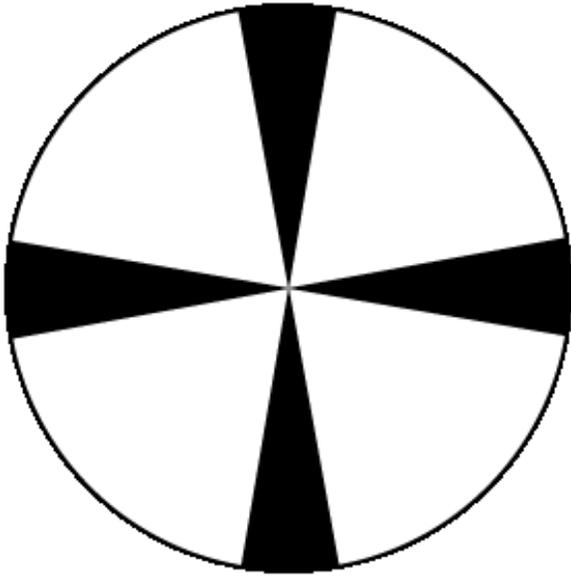
Edgar Degas (July 19, 1834 – Sept. 27, 1917) is known for compositions such as *Jockeys Before the Start with Flagpole* that were like snapshots, with the composition seeming to be almost random. The flagpole cuts through the scene. The horse of the main figure is partially hidden; other riders in the background disappear into the pole.

Photography influenced Degas. Photos, unlike carefully composed paintings, capture what is there, the frame often coming into play.

Degas exploited closure. He relied on the viewer to fill in the missing parts, to see the whole horse and rider when only part is exposed. The viewer must extend the scene outside the frame.

Careful examination reveals that Degas' composition is not haphazard. The pole divides the frame vertically according to the Golden Proportion, and the horse's head is placed vertically in the same proportion. In the Golden Proportion, $ab:bc=ac:ab$, a ration of about 1.618:1.

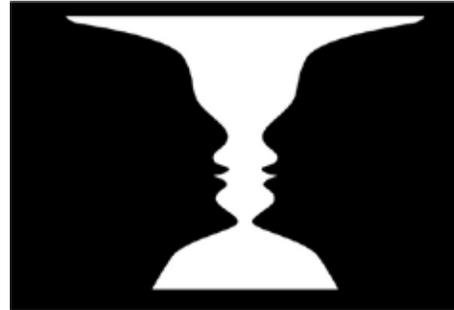




R



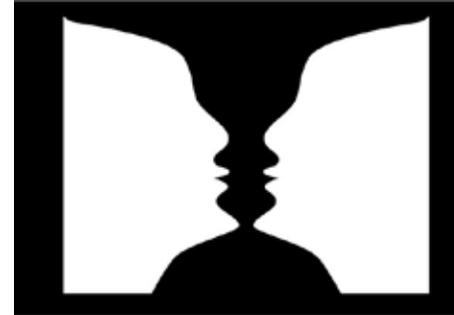
S



U



T



V

Rubin's vase is an ambiguous or bi-stable (reversing) two-dimensional figure introduced circa 1915 by the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin. The illusion illustrates principles of how we perceive figure and ground. You can see a vase, or you can see two faces, but you can't see both at the same time.

Below: Because we are used to seeing dark figures on a light background, images like this from the Taos Pueblo are a bit startling. The white wall plays against our expectations, with the dark background seen through the doorway.

Figure and ground

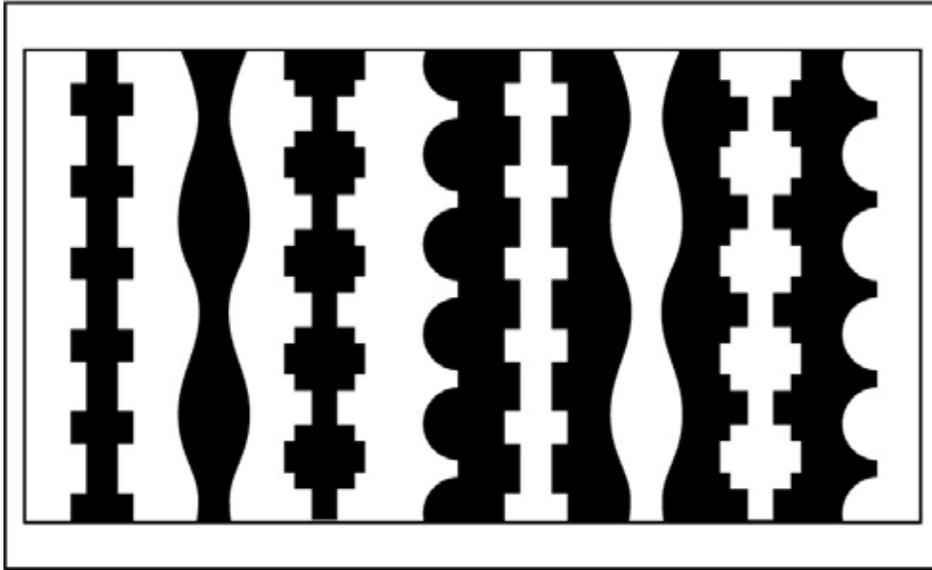
A fifth principle of Gestalt is really several principles that fall under the heading figure and ground. It explores how the brain separates figures from the background, a critical skill for prehistoric man, who had to decide quickly if something in the distance was a threat.

Theorists believe several factors figure into how we perceive figure and ground:

- **Smallness:** Smaller areas tend to be seen as figures against a larger background. In Figure R, we are more likely to see a black cross rather than a white cross within the circle because of this principle. Compare figures S and T, two examples of Rubin's vase. The vase in Figure S takes up a smaller area, so it is easier to see as the figure.
- **Light/dark:** Dark objects on light backgrounds are more common, so when we have a light figure/dark background, as in Figure U, we are more likely to interpret the drawing as two faces.

Two other factors, symmetry and surroundness, enter into how we interpret figures U and V.





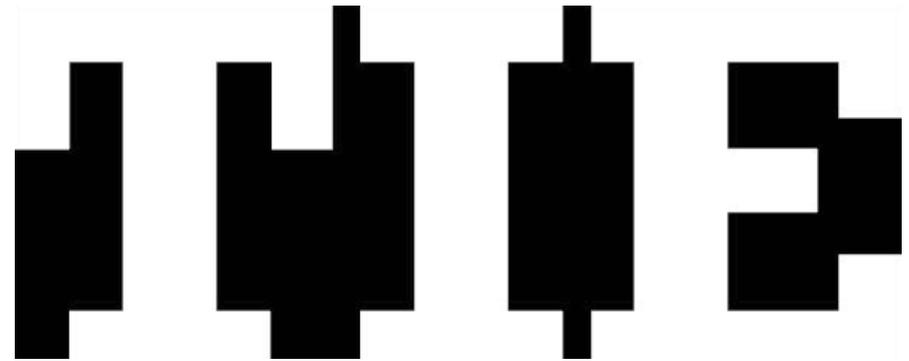
W

Symmetry, surroundedness

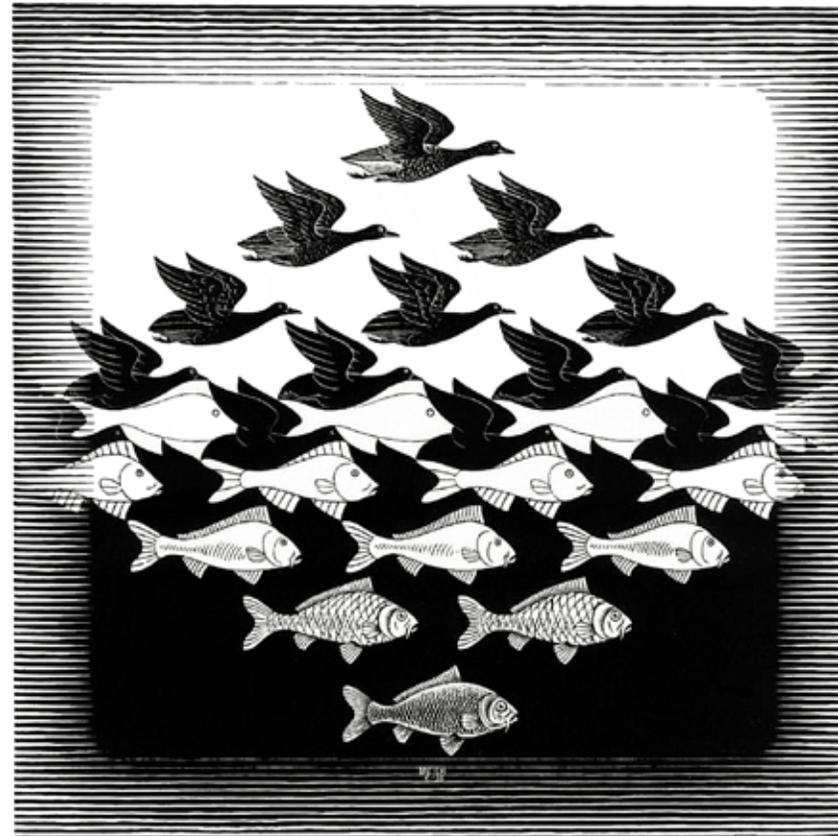
Symmetrical areas tend to be seen as figures against asymmetrical backgrounds. Study Figure W: Which shapes do you see as figures and which as ground? Because some shapes are dark and some light, some symmetrical and some asymmetrical, we might be confused about figure-ground relationships.

The principle of surroundedness states that areas seen as surrounded by other areas tend to be perceived as figures.

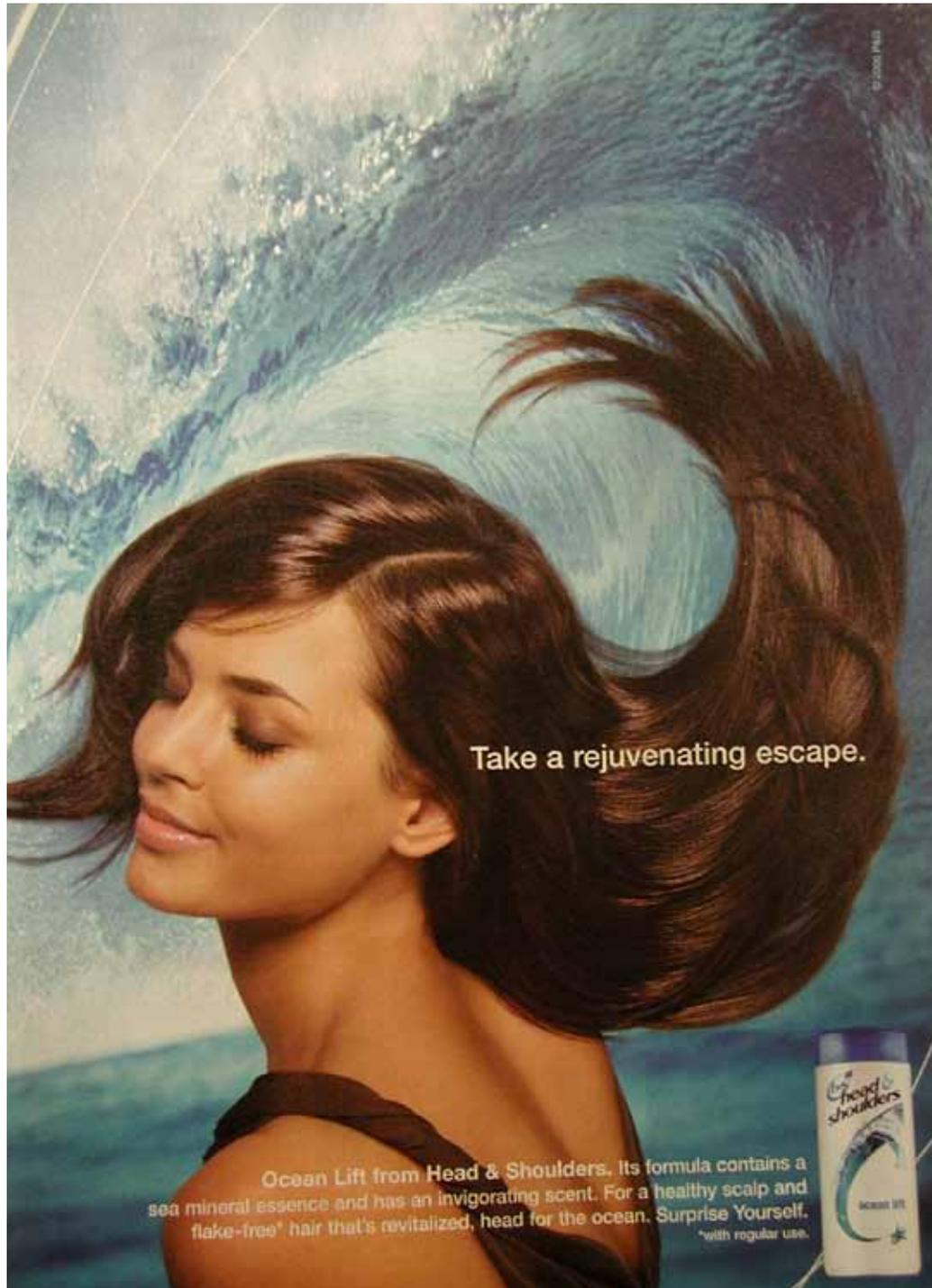
What do you make of Figure X? Observers first assume that the white area is the ground because it surrounds the black areas. But try to reverse that idea in your mind. What word do you see?



X

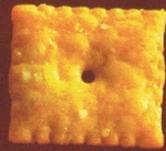


M.C. Escher, *Sky and Water I #306* (1938), woodcut
M.C. Escher fascinates us with his imaginative manipulation of figure-ground relationships, similarity, proximity, continuation and common fate.



Gestalt at work

These examples all exploit one or more Gestalt principles. Can you name them?



BIG CHEESE TASTE IN EVERY BITE.



CHEEZ-IT. THE BIG CHEESE®

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No one grows Ketchup like Heinz.

lively! Goes like a greyhound
with a hotfoot . . . curves 'round corners like a
sports car . . . packs more power than you'll ever expect!
No other small car gives you such terrific
performance—up to 60 miles per gallon—
and seats 4 in such easy comfort .

Austin 850

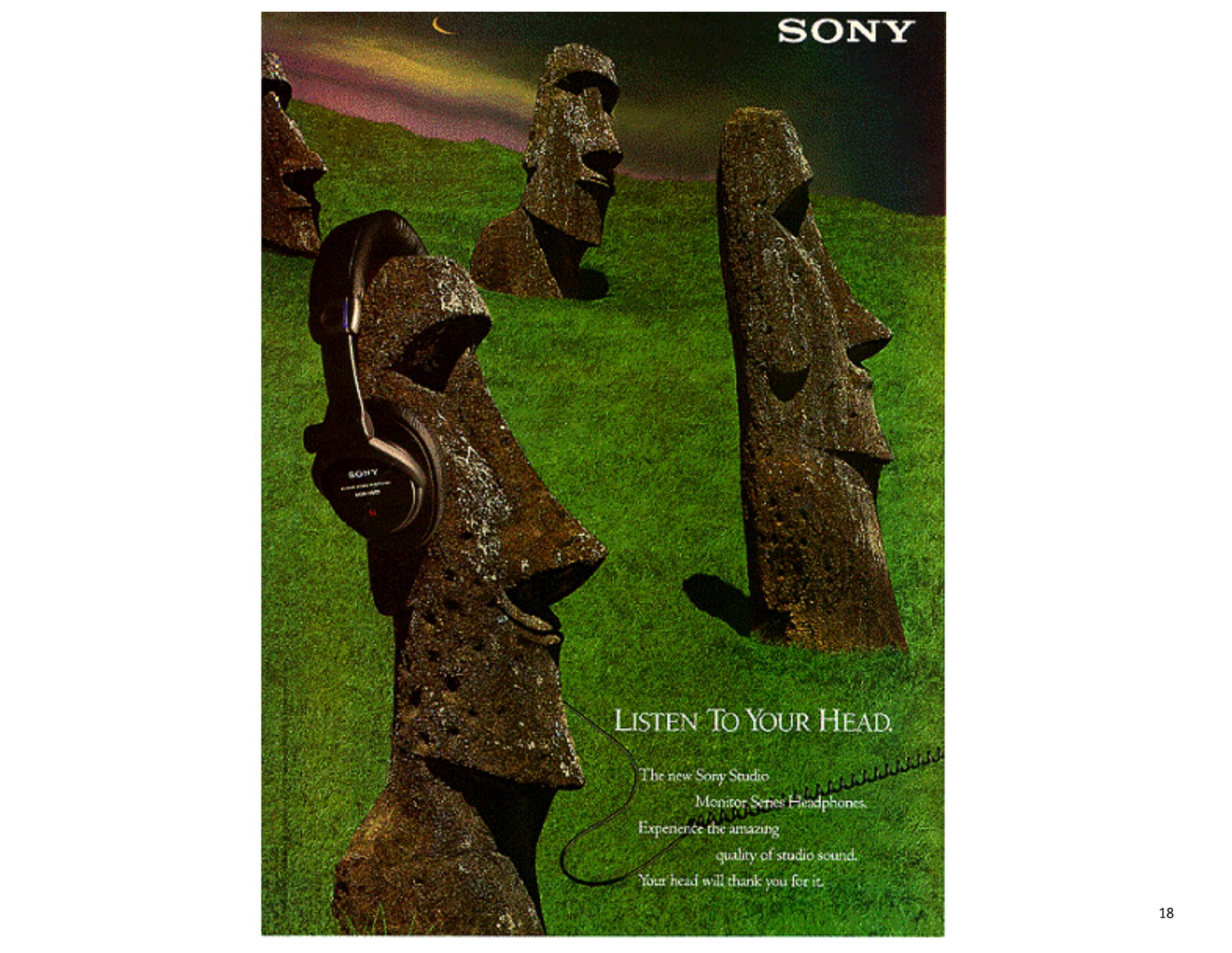


AUSTIN ANSWERS EVERY DRIVING NEED—WITH A CHOICE OF SIX GREAT CARS

NO EXTRAS TO BUY: HEATER, DEFROSTER, TURN SIGNALS, SPARE TIRE, TOOLS—AND 12-MONTH WRITTEN FACTORY WARRANTY—ALL INCLUDED AT THE PRICE.



Why do I run?

An advertisement for Sony Studio Monitor Series Headphones. The background is a surreal landscape with several Moai statues on a green hill under a dark, cloudy sky with a crescent moon. One Moai in the foreground is wearing a pair of black Sony headphones. The Sony logo is visible on the earcup. The text 'SONY' is in the top right corner. The headline 'LISTEN TO YOUR HEAD.' is in the bottom right, followed by a paragraph of text. The headphones' cord is visible at the bottom.

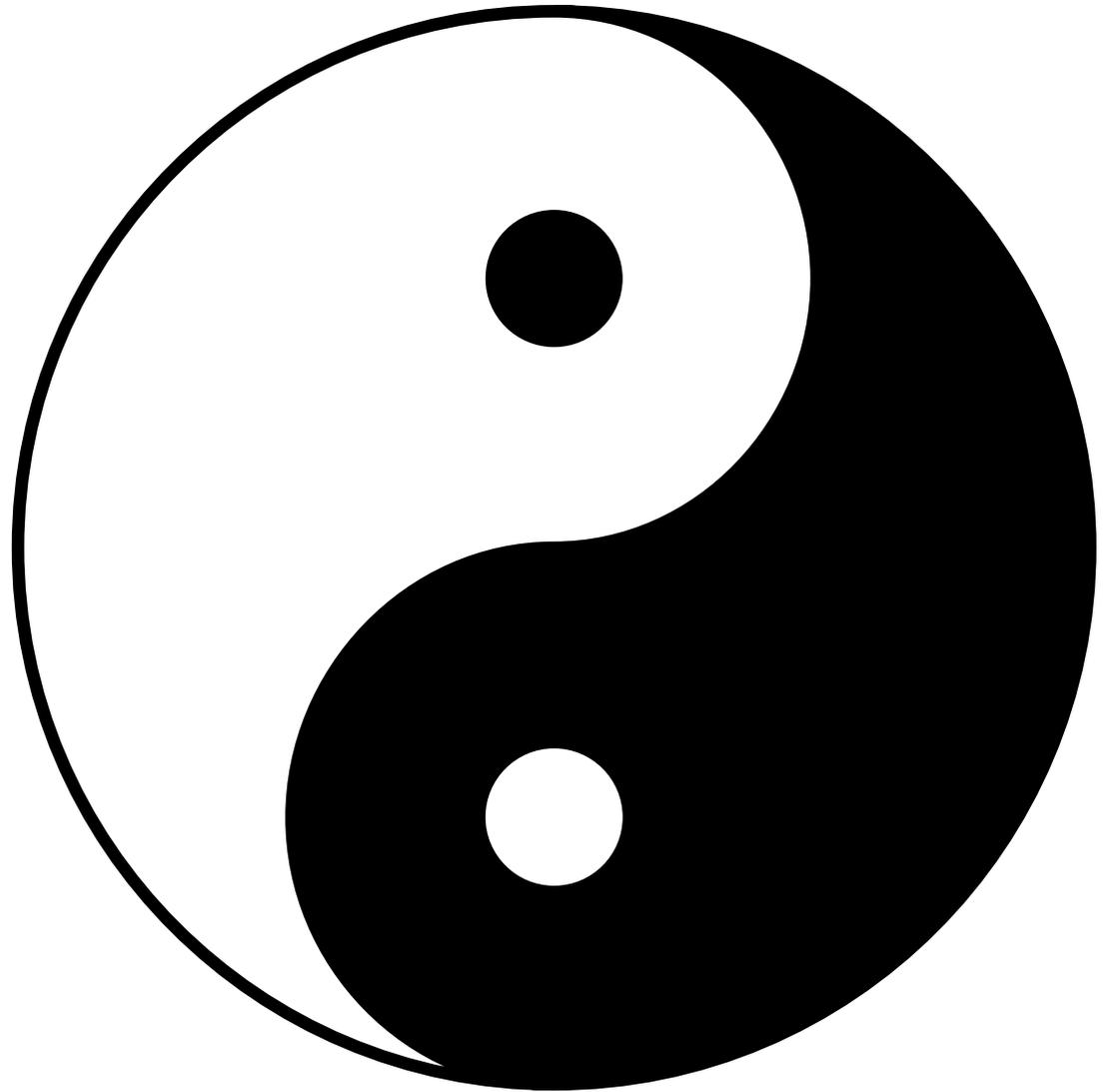
SONY

LISTEN TO YOUR HEAD.

The new Sony Studio
Monitor Series Headphones.
Experience the amazing
quality of studio sound.
Your head will thank you for it.

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.

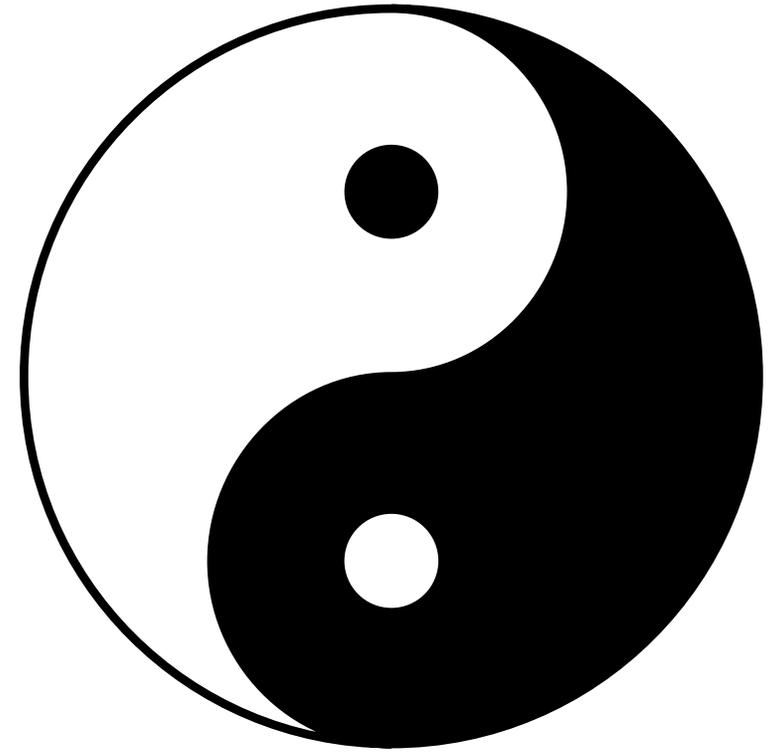


Logos and sig cuts

We can analyze ideograms using three dimensions:

- The **explanation** is a discussion of the graphic form of the ideogram.
- The **usage** focuses on the specific function of the ideogram.
- The **message** is the verbal interpretation of the meaning of the ideogram.

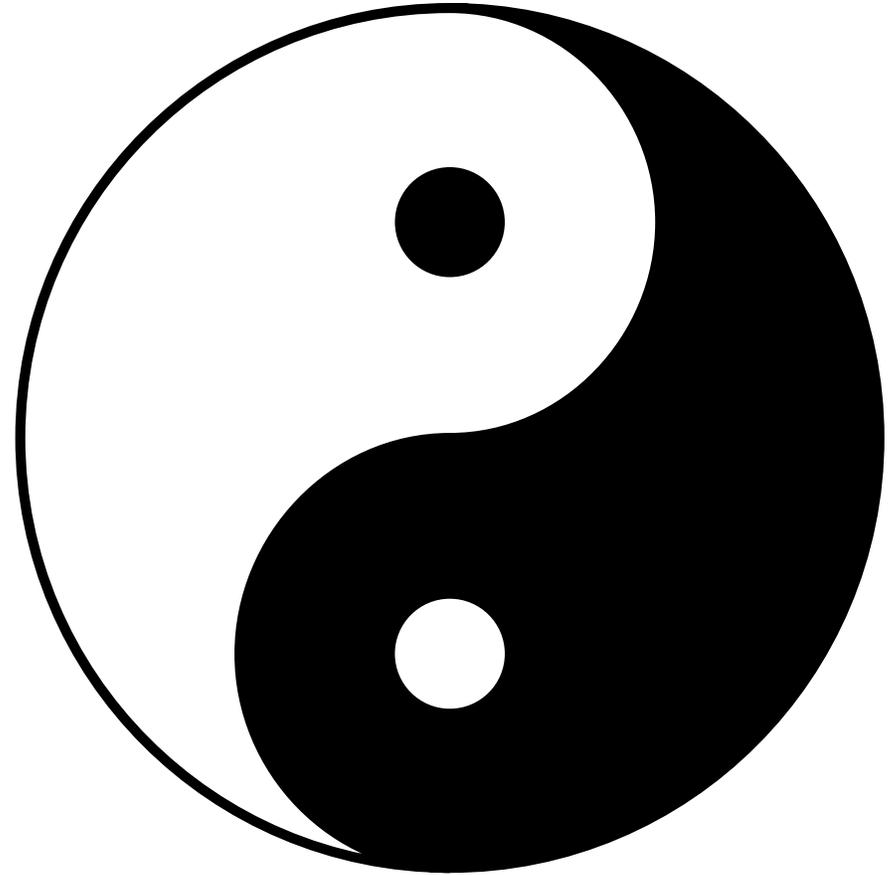
When an ideogram has more than one possible interpretation, the audience chooses the message that suits its narrative.



Logos and sig cuts

Explanation: 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 exploited in a logo?

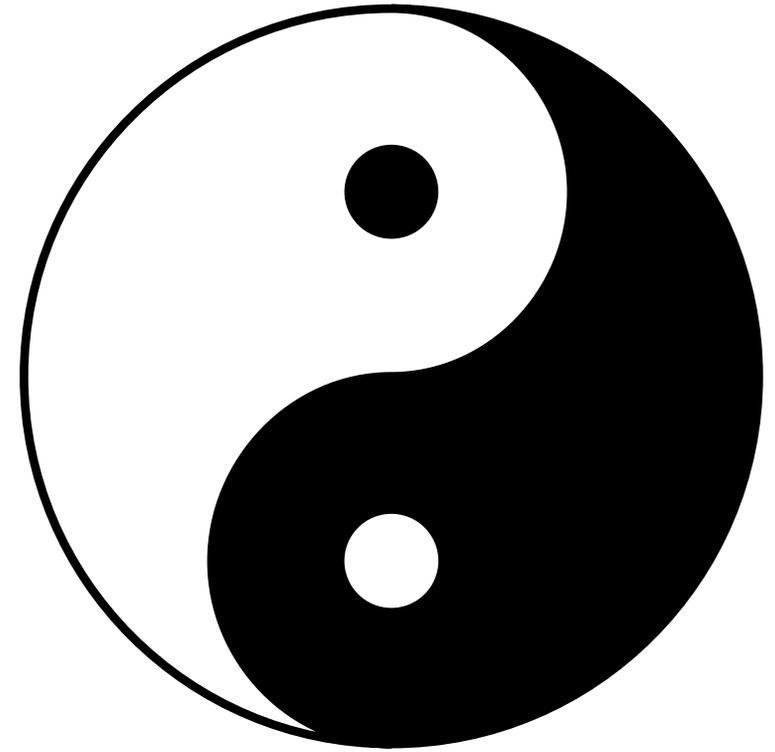
- Ideograms depict and symbolize abstract ideas, giving them body and shape so that we can see them and relate to them.
- Organizations take advantage of this in using ideograms in their logos.



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

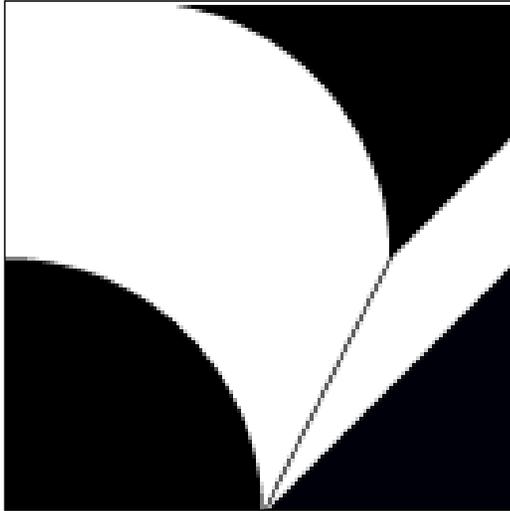
- Examples of ideograms include wayfinding signage, such as in airports and other places where people speaking many languages might gather.
- But these signs assume **some agreement among diverse audience members** about what ideas are attached to what images.
- Audiences negotiate meaning.



Logos and sig cuts



Logos and sig cuts



■ Explanation

■ Usage

■ Message

Logos and sig cuts



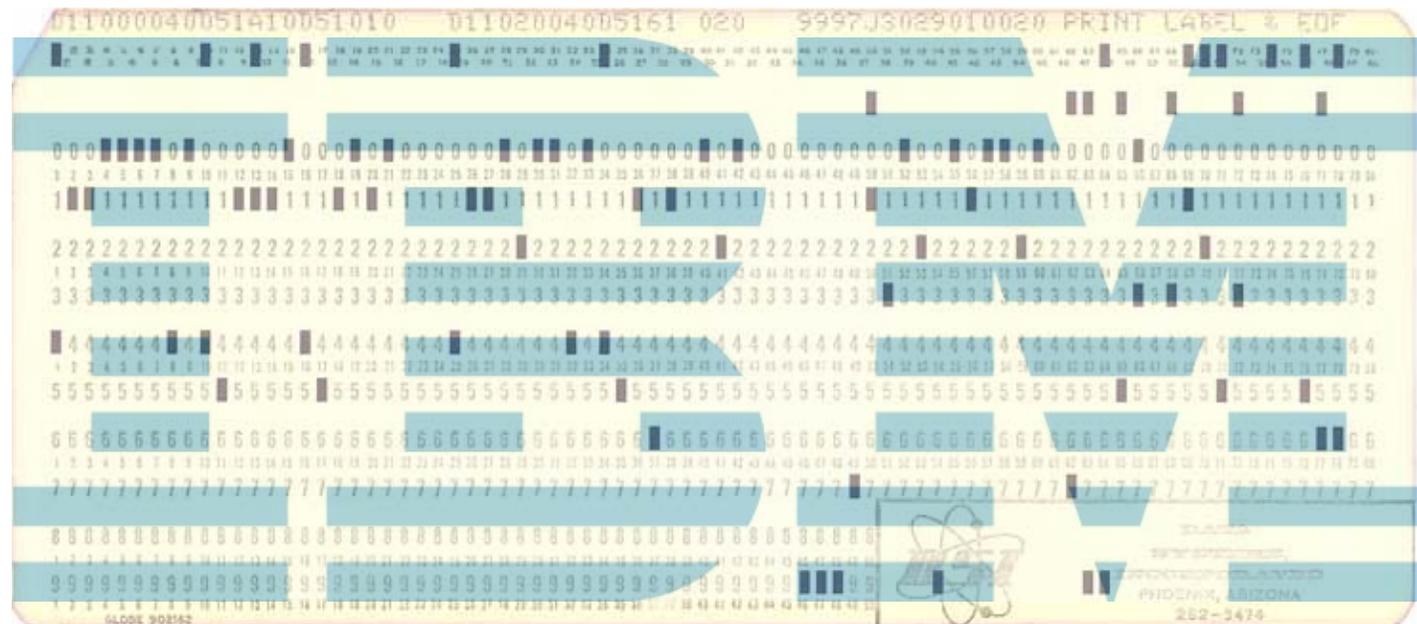
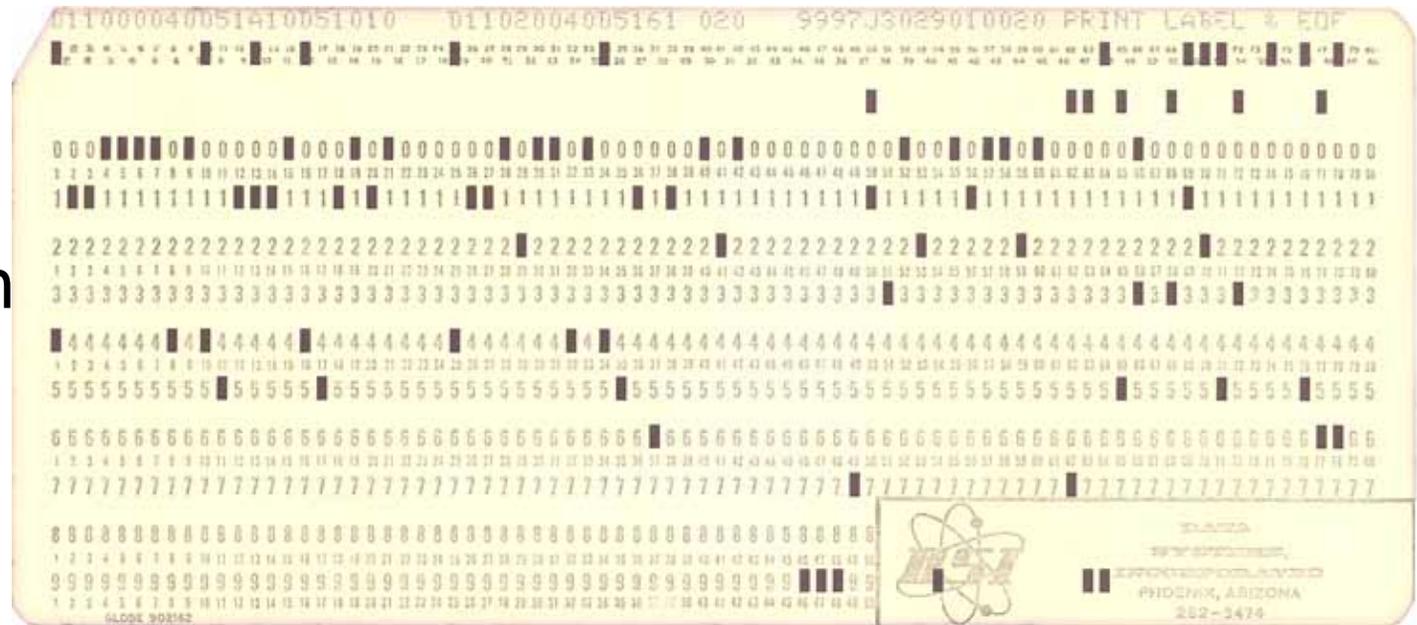
■ Explanation

■ Usage

■ Message

Logos and sig cuts

- Explanation
- Usage.
- Message.



Logos and sig cuts



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.

Obama campaign logo

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."

Logos and sig cuts



USAGE

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

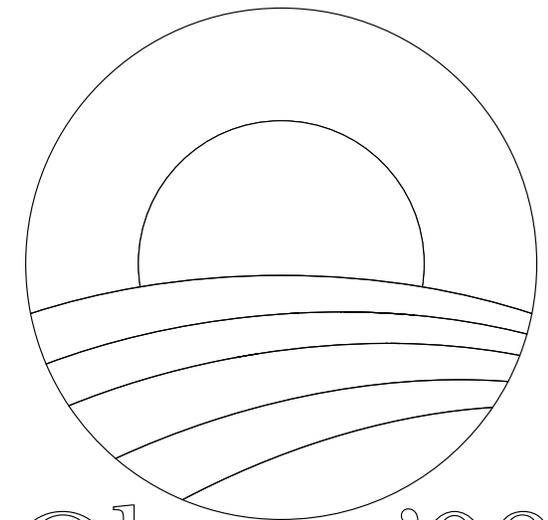


Usage: The Obama team has blanketed every official campaign space with the familiar “O,” borrowing a trick from the Nike playbook. The shoe company’s famous swoosh means nothing, Michael Bierut, a partner with the design firm Pentagram, but “you think it means something because Nike has made it ubiquitous.”

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.



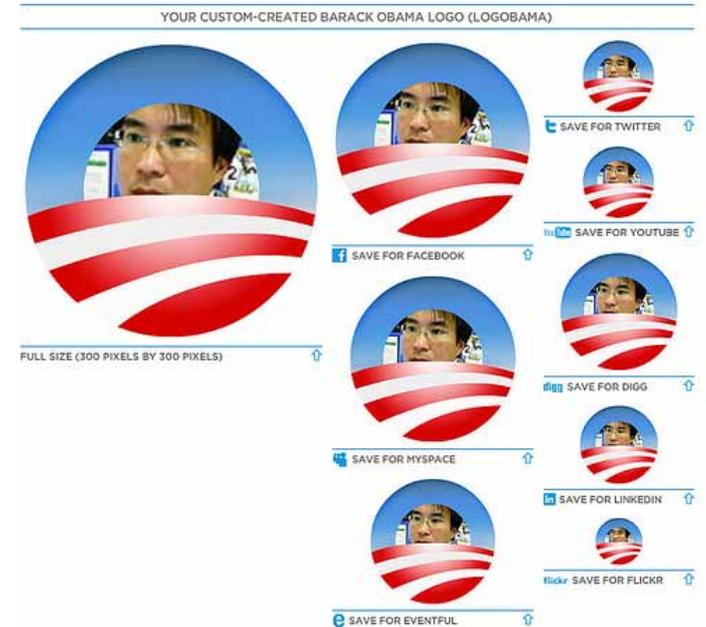
Obama'08



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

- 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.



P&G

Logos and sig cuts

Paul Rand



IBM 1956

IBM 1967 (13-bar variation)

IBM 1972 (8-bar variation)



Enron 1996

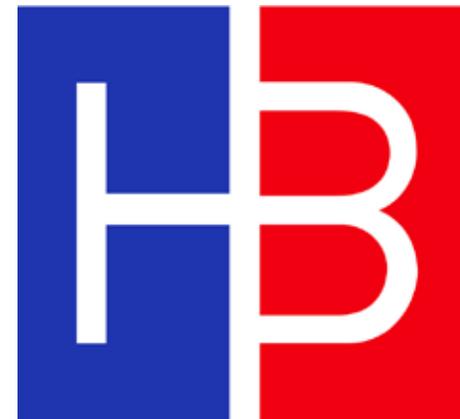


UPS 1961



Westinghouse 1960

Westinghouse



Harcourt
Brace
1957



Yale
1985

Logos and sig cuts

Raymond Loewy



Exxon 1972



Shell

Shell 1971



Lucky Strike 1940



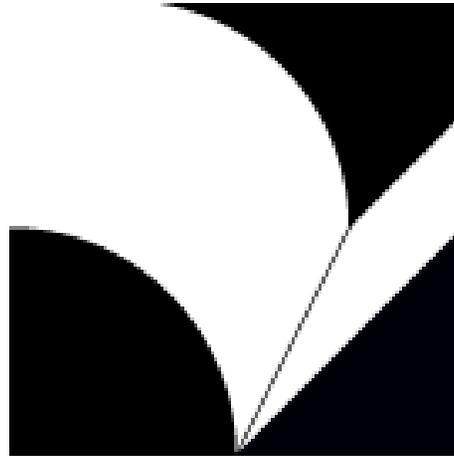
NABISCO 1952

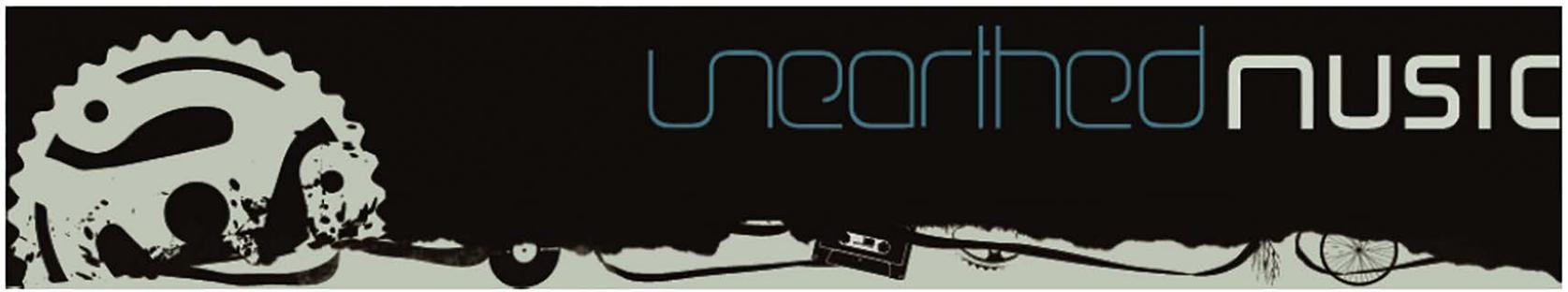


Post Office 1971

Logos and sig cuts

Negative space





unearthed music

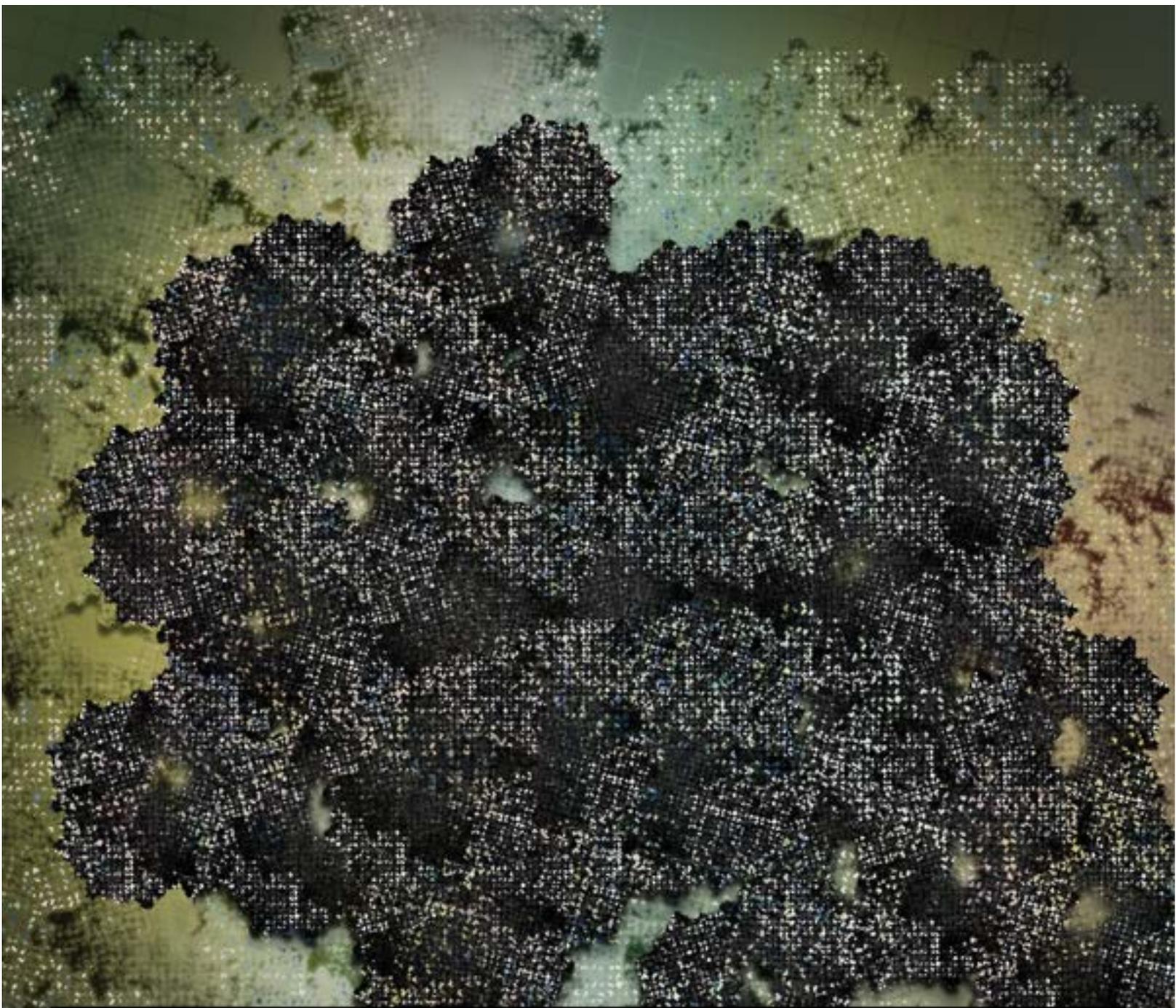


**ONE
DAY
TO
SAVE
ALL LIFE**





Truth is Stranger
KESTON AND WESTDAL



OSTRACON UNAUTHORIZED MODIFICATIONS





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Logos and sig cuts



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