

Closure

Forces of organization driving toward spatial order, toward stability, tend to shape optical units into closed compact wholes. Confronted with a complex optical situation, the beholder searches for the form with the most stable unity, or with the least disturbed relationship to the environment. Goethe observed that the after-image of a sharp square gradually becomes rounded into a circular shape. Just as a drop of water tends to adapt its shape to the most economical surface, so an optical unit tends to form the most economical closure, segregating itself as completely as possible from its surroundings. A closed area appears more formed, more stable, than one which is open and without boundaries. A psychological filling-out of the intervals between the units occurs, and one constructs latent connections. This factor of closure may act on the flat dimension, generating from open linear units the experience of a closed shape, but it may also unify further dimensions. Certain latent inter-connections of points, lines, shapes, colors, and values are closed psychologically into bi-dimensional or tri-dimensional wholes. The factor of closure can be more significant than either nearness or similarity .

Due to the laws of visual organization, no visual unit can exist in itself on the picture-plane. Each unit leads beyond itself and implies a larger whole. Thus units not only live on the picture-plane; they also grow. They merge into wholes with a common function. Three musical tones have each its particular wave length, its individual tonal quality; but when the three are sounded together their individual characteristics retreat and something entirely new appears—the chord. Similarly, the optical units organized into spatial configurations become more than the sum total of their component parts. These larger wholes form with other groups a still farther-reaching unit, and this process continues until all possible relationships are exhausted; that is, until the limit of attention is reached. This law of organization implies, then, that the numerical increase of elements does not necessarily lead to a loss of order of the picture whole. A uniform picture surface is flat. A gradual increase of the elements upon that surface shows clearly that, in each addition to the number or quality of units, a spatial unity can be maintained. Reaching the numeric limit of organization, previously separate units, in a kind of revolutionary leap, form a common figure—and thus a new condition for the organization of a more embracing whole. The number of units can be increased in so far as they do not interfere, forming further units. But when this point of saturation is reached, there is no further opportunity for plastic organization. A uniformity of surface is produced on a new level.

