

# Vocabulary of Elements

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*Design for Communication*

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# point

Point, line, plane: the building blocks of design. From these elements, designers create images, icons, textures, patterns, diagrams, animations, and typographic systems.

Points mark positions in space.



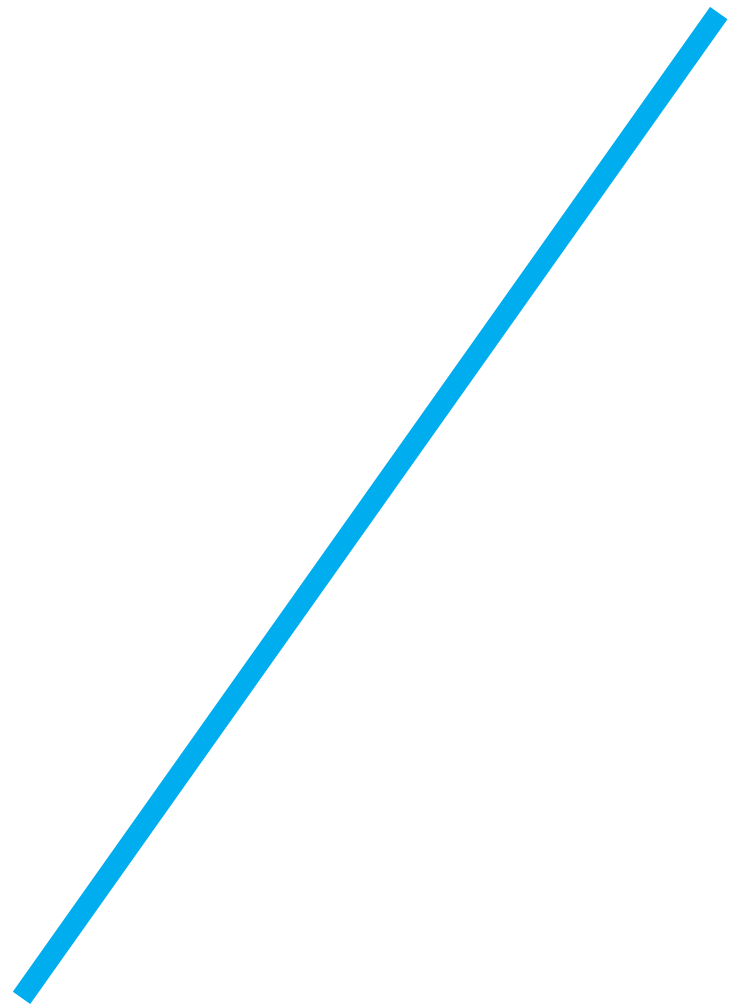
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# line

A line is an infinite series of points. Lines can organize, direct, separate, be expressive, suggest an emotion, or create a rhythm. They can join elements or divide them using a rule.



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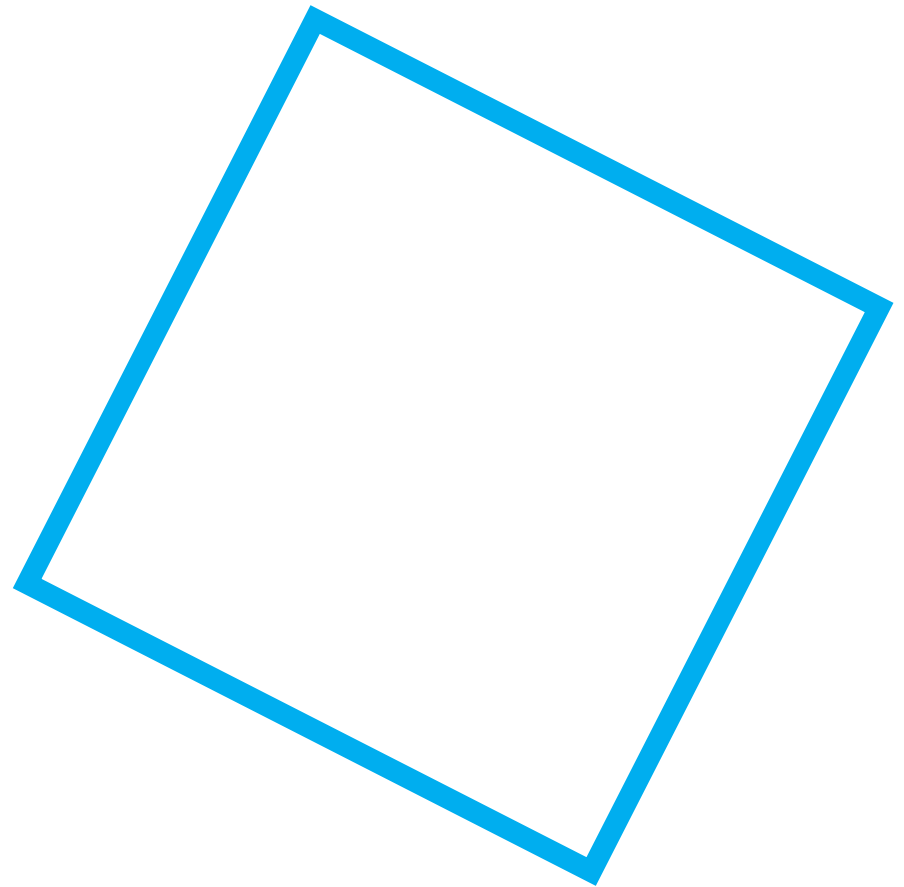
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# plane

A plane is the flat surface extending in height and width.

A plane is the path of a moving line; it is a line with breadth. Lines close to become shapes (bounded planes). Shapes are planes with edges.



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# texture

The look and feel of the surface.

In two-dimensional form, texture is essentially visual and adds richness and dimension to work.

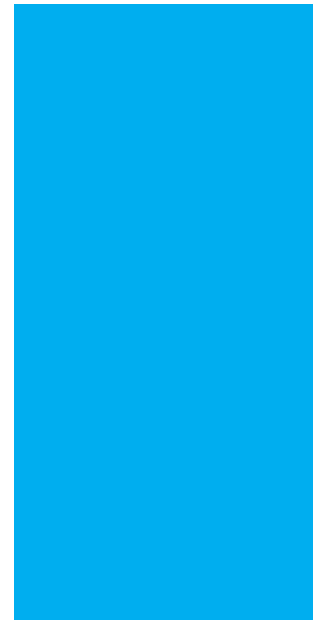
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# space

The distance between shapes and forms, usually referred to as white space, or positive and negative space.



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# scale

Scale is how big or how small something is in relationship to other objects.

Scale refers to the process of making size relationships. Unless there is a scale of reference within a design, it is impossible to discern the relative size of objects and the meaning they represent.



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# value

The relative lightness or darkness of an area or object is its value.

Value adds dimension by the creating the illusion of depth in a design. With the addition of color, you can create and convey a mood or enhance a strong concept.





# Formal Constraints

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balance

László Moholy-Nagy  
A 19, 1927

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# balance

When all the design elements are equally distributed, they are balanced.

Balance could be symmetrical, which suggests stable or static motion, or asymmetrical, which creates deliberate imbalance, suggesting variety or dynamic movement.

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# emphasis

The most important element on the page, based on the message.

It's the element that stands out and gets noticed first.



Matthias Ernstberger, Sagmeister Inc.  
Punctuation Poster, 2008

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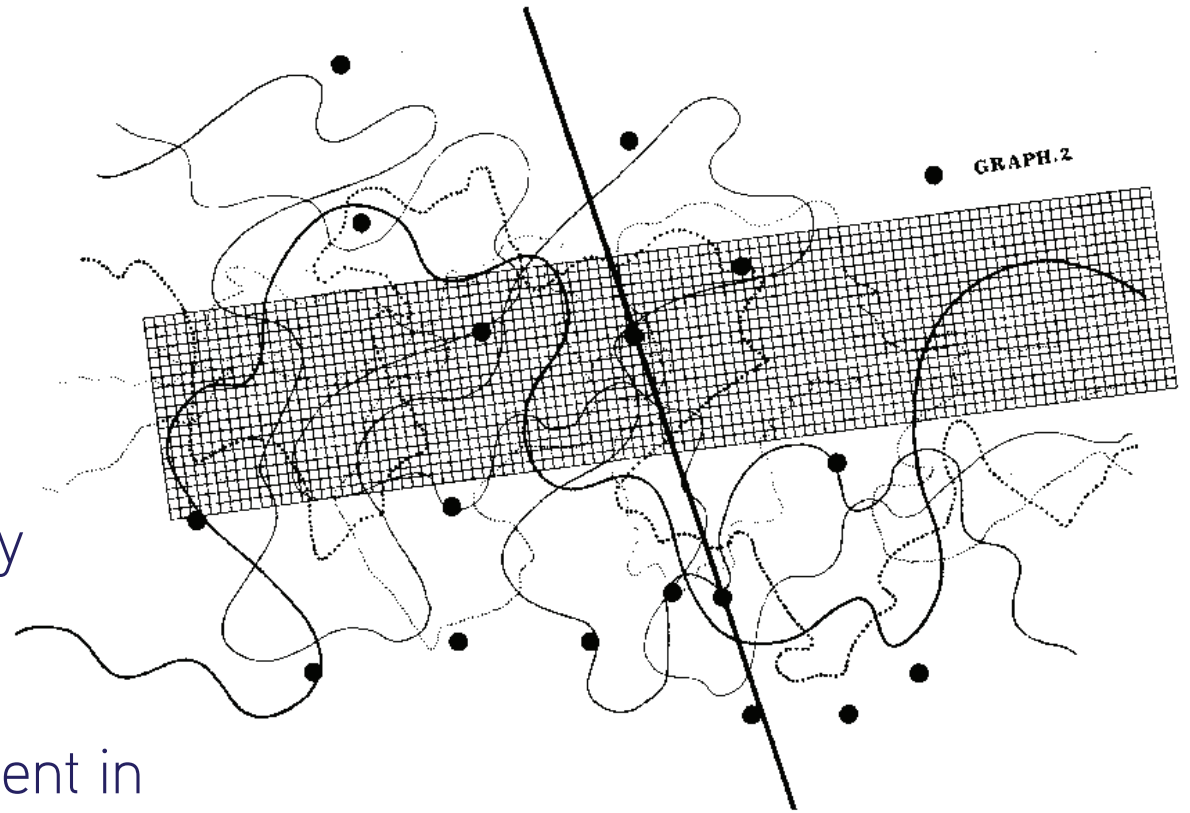
# rhythm

Pattern that is created by repeating elements.

Rhythm denotes movement in the way that elements direct our gaze to scan the message for understanding or information.

John Cage

Fontana Mix Score Excerpt, 1958



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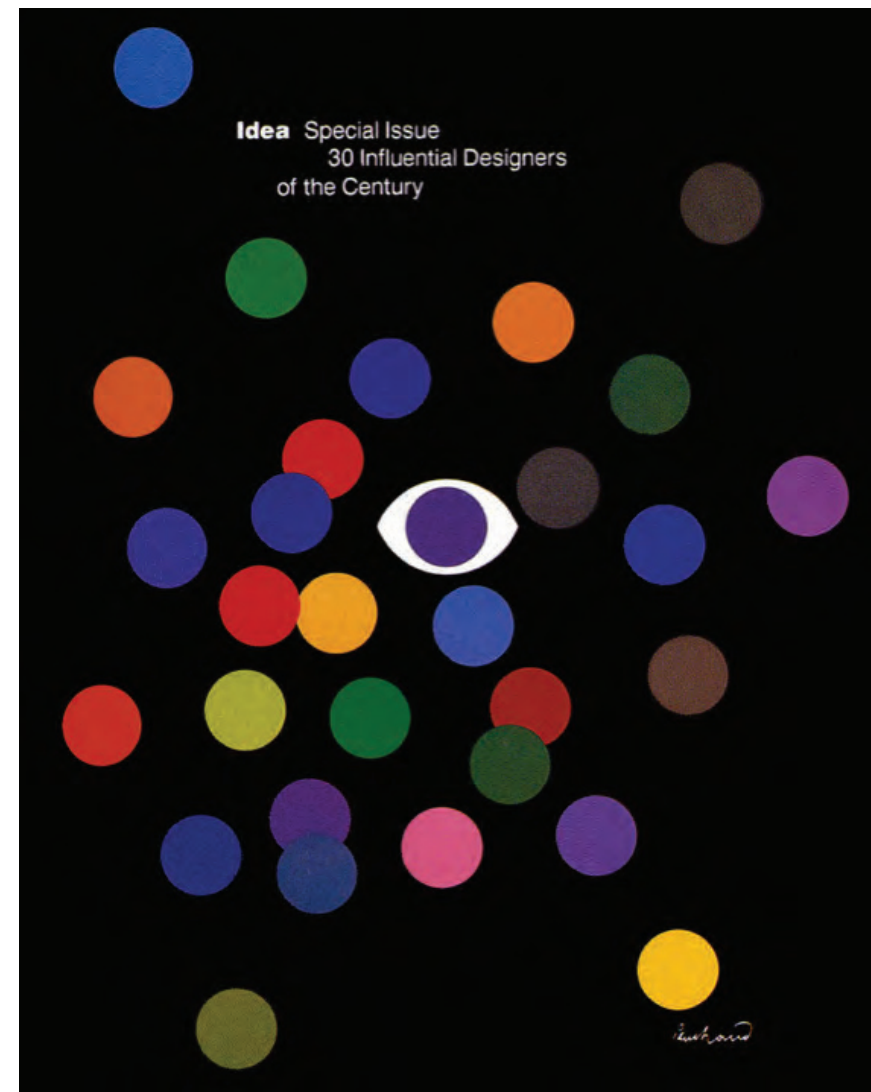
# contrast

Stresses the visual differences in size, shape, and color between the elements to enhance the perception of the message intended.

Contrast also draws and directs the viewer's attention to specific areas of information.

Paul Rand

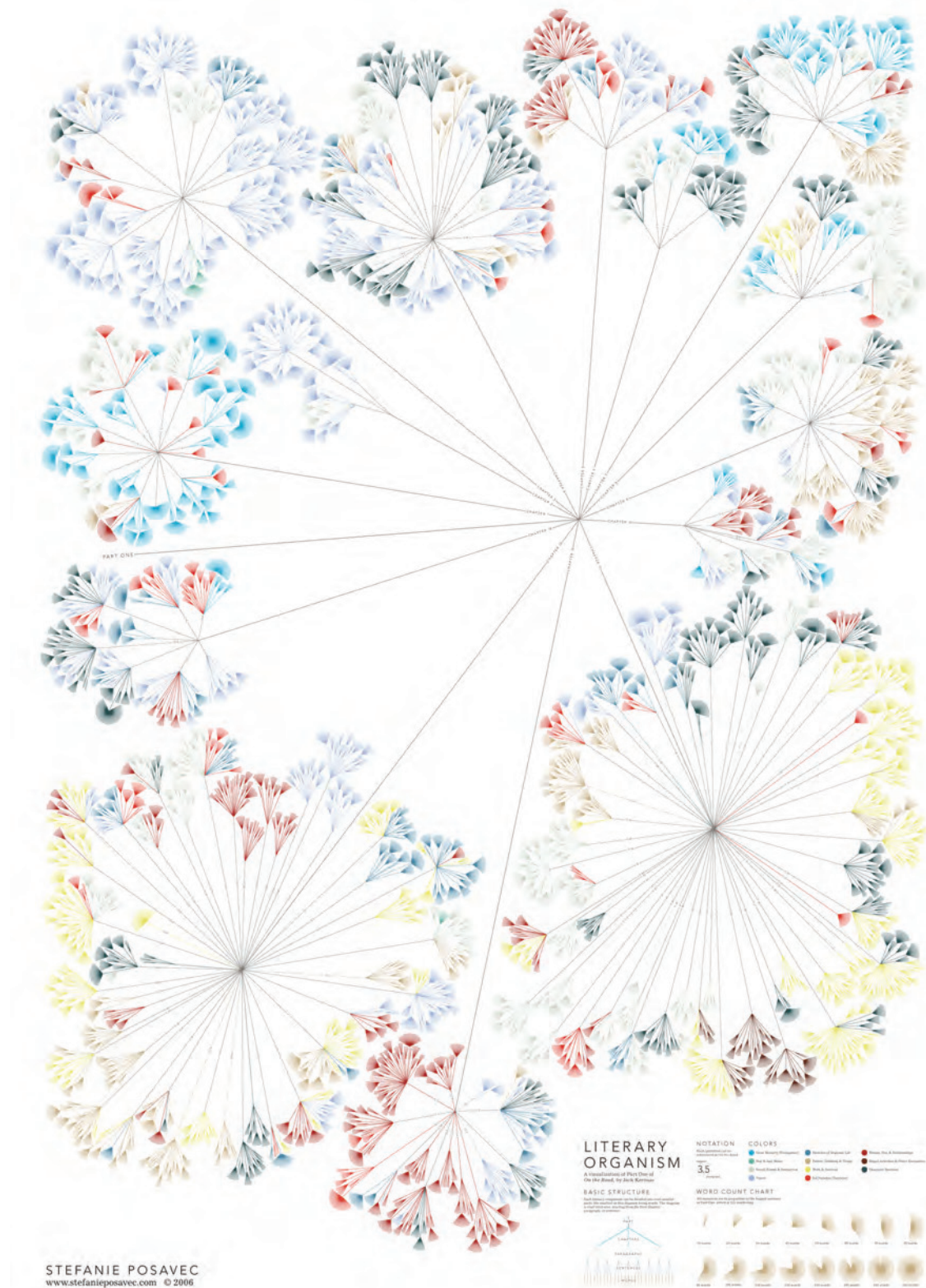
*Idea Magazine Cover, 1984*



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unity

Stephanie Posavec  
Literary Organism, 1998



## Formal Constraints

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# unity

Achieved when all the design elements relate to one another and project a sense of completeness.

A viewer always seeks unity in a message.

**Gestalt theory** is the psychological process by which a viewer unites disparate design elements into whole form that is greater than the sum of its parts.

