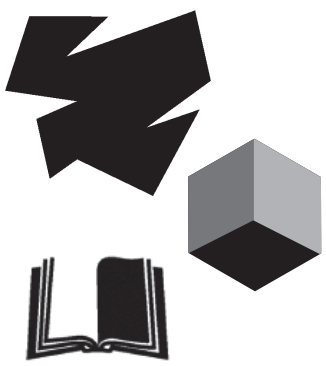
Syntax
Form Identity

Although the meaning of images and signs is most important for conveying ideas, it's the form that ideas are given that helps understanding and also unifies a visual communication as a totality. Being able to recognize, and thus alter, the form or syntax of elements—independent of what they mean—is especially important for achieving that totality.

Dot, Line, or Plane / Every image or other graphical element can be appreciated at the simplest level as having a fundamental identity: It is either a dot, a line, or a plane. We perceive each of these basic kinds of form as behaving very differently: dots are static, showing location; lines express movement, and also divide spaces from each other; planes suggest the quality of surfaces and, sometimes, volume or mass.

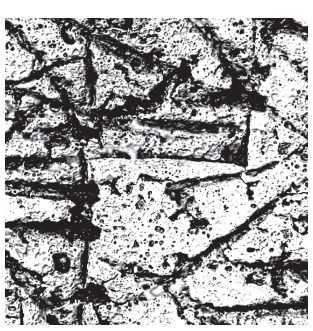
Dot

Line

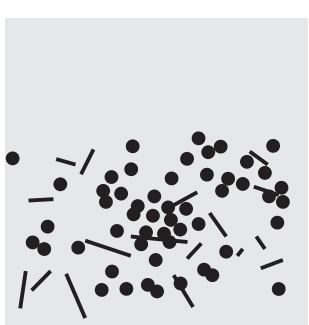


Plane

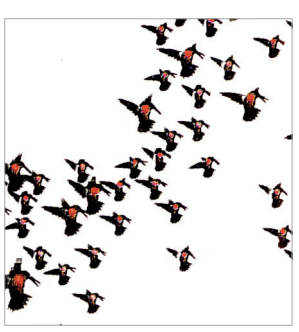
Texture / Visual activity on a plane surface is categorized as a texture if it appears random or if it changes in quality from one location to another. While most often organic in source, such textures may also be created from dot-based or linear forms, as well as from more complex, aggregated images. A texture may be pictorial or non-pictorial.



Pictorial (tree bark)

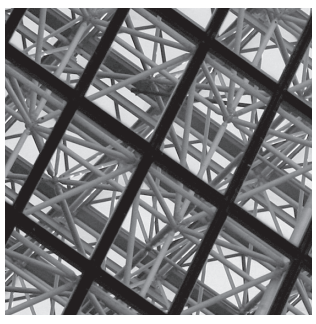


Non-pictorial (dots+lines)



Pictorial (images)

Pattern / Visual activity on a plane surface should be categorized as pattern if it exhibits some repeated, consistent relationship, such as a grid structure, between its component elements. As with textures, patterns may also be pictorial or non-pictorial; patterns may also be made of either geometric or organic forms.

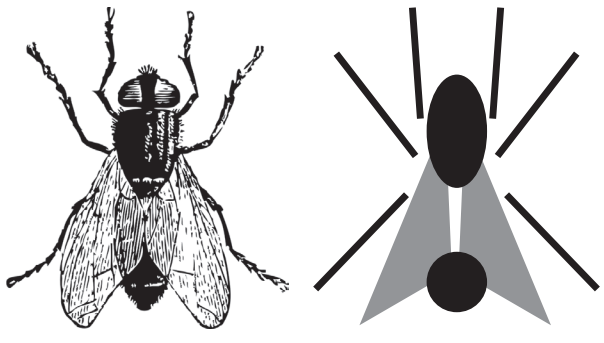


Pictorial

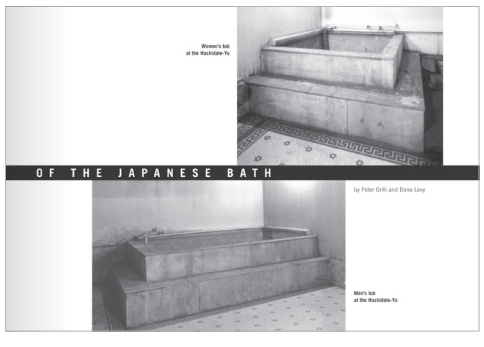
Non-pictorial

Organic forms

Aggregates / Most images are made up of multiple components that are different in their form identities—combinations of dots, lines, and planar shapes. Appreciating the complexity of an aggregate form depends on its scale: At a large size, the differences among the form identities of its components is readily clear; if the image is very small, however, its internal complexity disappears, to be appreciated as the simplest form identity (at the far right, the aggregate of forms that make up the artichoke are reduced to a single form identity, a dot, when seen at a smaller size).



Form Quality / Whether dot, line, plane, texture, or pattern, any given form may be described as fundamentally geometric in nature (having the qualities of hard-edges, mathematical shapes like rectangles, circles, triangles, parallelograms, etc.); or as organic in nature (exhibiting softness, irregularity, and uncontrolled variation, as is seen in nature).



Geometric forms

Organic forms