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Gestalt Laws: Similarity, Proximity and Closure

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According to the Gestalt school of thought, humans are naturally capable of perceiving objects as orderly and organized forms and patterns. This refers to "pragnanz", a German word that means "pithiness".

Proposed by the Gestalt psychologists in the early 20th century, the Gestalt laws of grouping involve a set of principles that account for such natural manner of perception. These include six categories, namely: similarity, proximity, good form, closure, common fate, and continuation.

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Law of Similarity

The law of similarity holds that a person can normally recognize stimuli that has physical resemblance at some degree as part of the same object. This is in an assumption that all other aspects related to the stimuli are equal. On the other hand, stimuli with different physical properties are part of a different object. One application of the law of similarity is putting flowers of varying colors by row in a large flower bed. The brain utilizes this principle to determine which flowers may be planted adjacent to each other or be placed in the same row based on their colors. Below is another example with which the law of similarity may be applied.

Law of Proximity

Suppose that all aspects related to the stimuli are equal. The law of proximity states that humans perceive stimuli that are close to each other by grouping them and recognizing them as part of the same object. Meanwhile, stimuli that stand far from one another are parts of two or more different objects. The distance that defines how close or far the stimuli are from each other is subjective to every individual.

The principle of proximity enables us to group elements together into larger sets. In addition, this principle relieves us from processing so many small stimuli. Thus, the law of proximity helps us to gain understanding of information much faster. For instance, instead of identifying every single of a large number of dots in a paper, the brain perceives them as clusters of dots.

Law of Closure

Gestalt psychologists believe that the brain tends to perceive forms and figures in their complete appearance despite the absence of one or more of their parts, either hidden or totally absent. This refers to the law of closure [1]. For example, a circle drawn using broken lines is still perceived by the brain as a circle. Through this example, we can infer the brain's tendency to ignore the gaps and see the figure as a circle. Previous experience with the figure or form facilitates our natural tendency to perceive an incomplete or partially hidden object as the same object that's stored in our memory.

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Links

[1] <http://www.etc.edu.cn/eet/articles/visualperc1/start.htm>