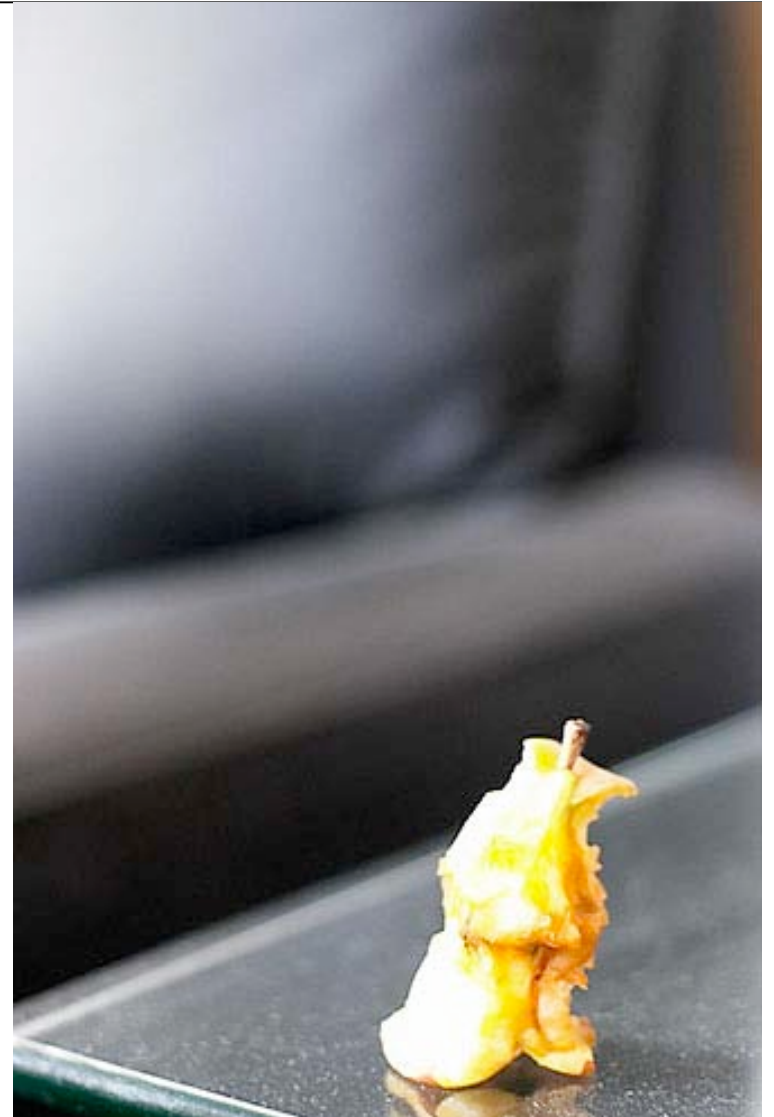


Figure/ground (also known as positive and negative space)

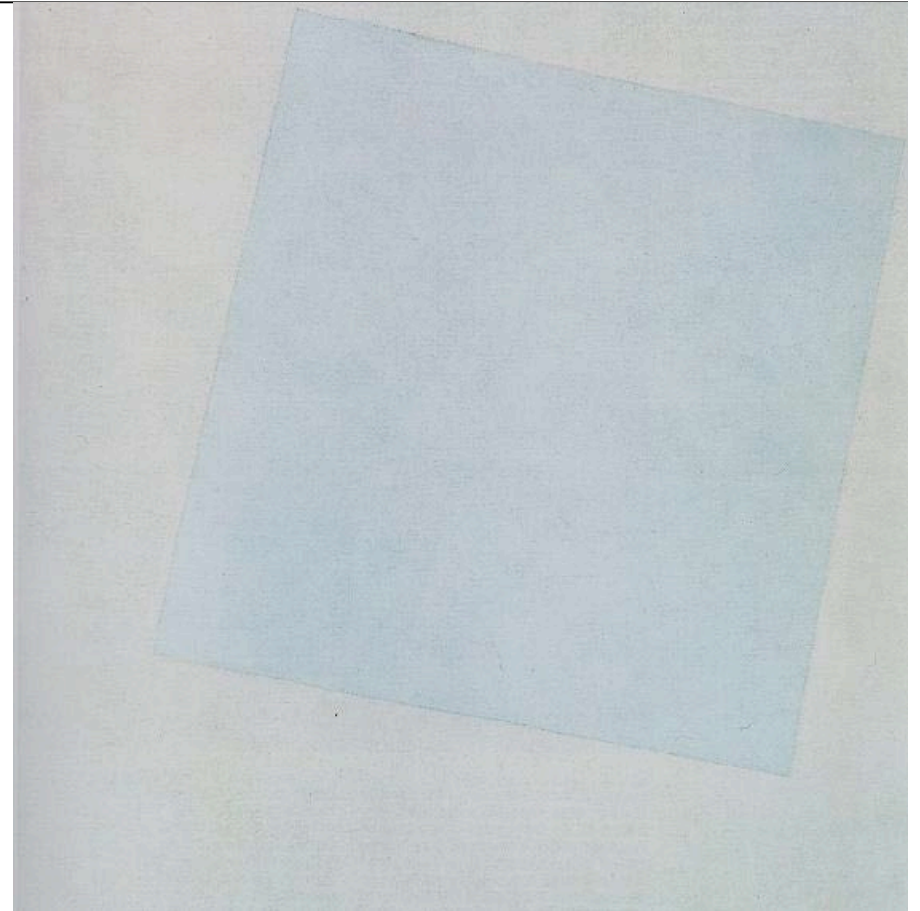
Human perception tends to separate a figure from the ground.

- A figure (form) is always seen in relation to what surrounds it (ground, or background)
- letters to a page, a building to its site, a sculpture to the space within it and around it, the subject of a photograph to its setting
- A black shape on a black field is not visible; without separation and contrast, form disappears.

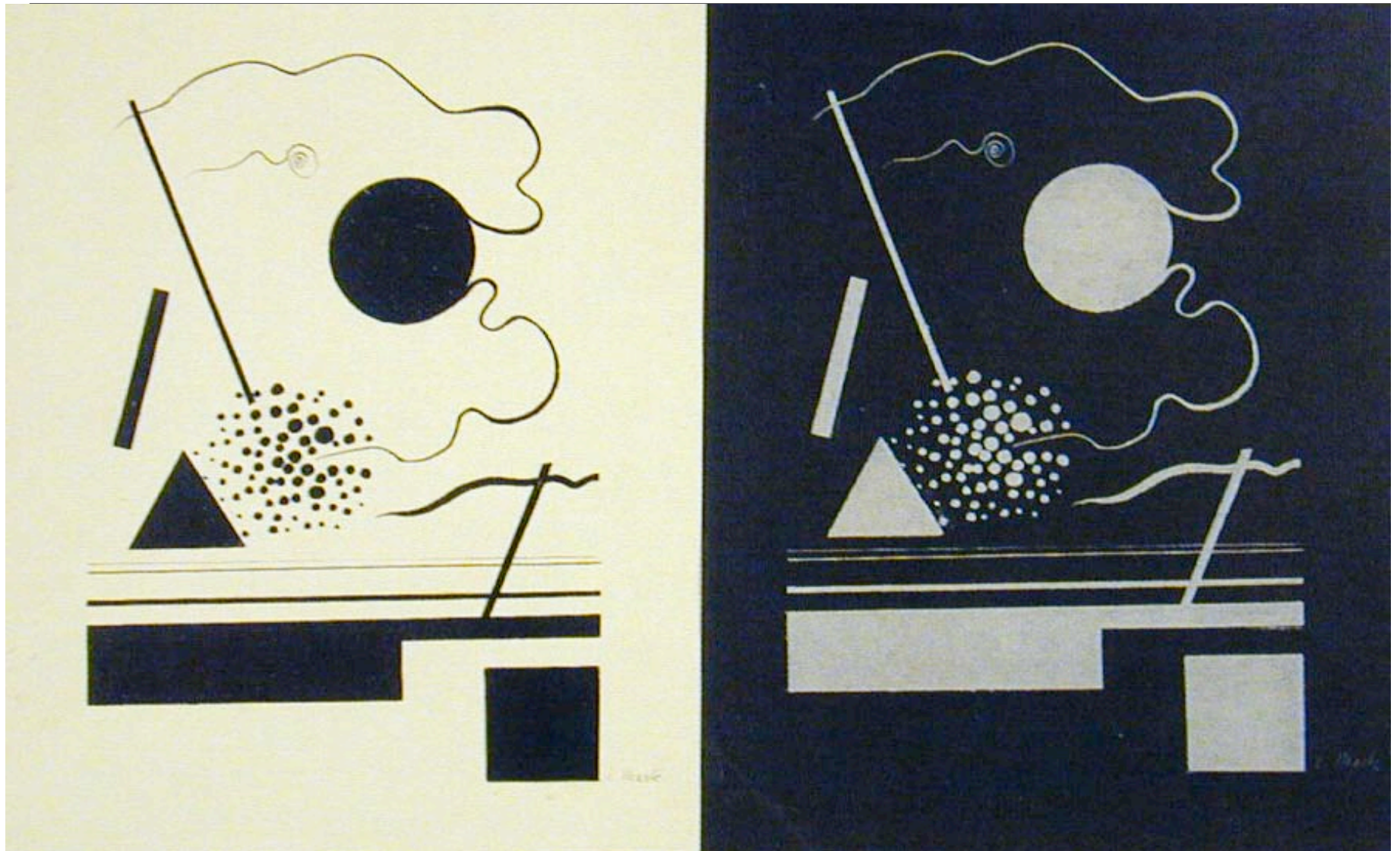


Background

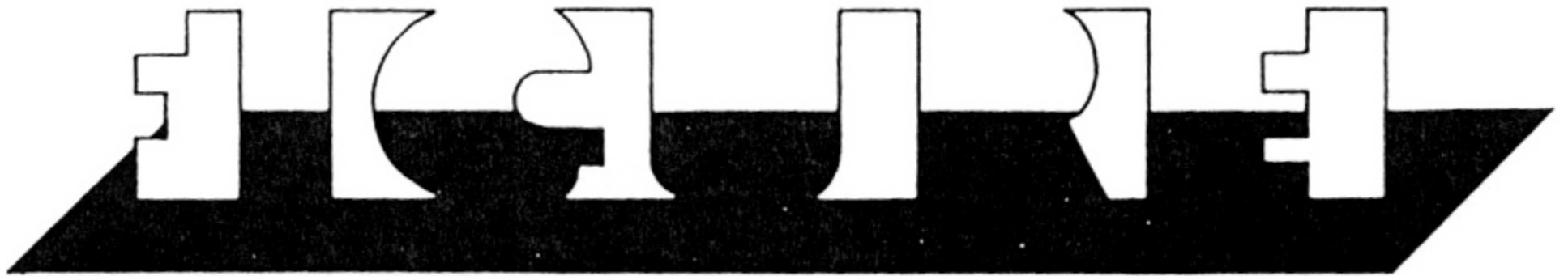
- People are accustomed to seeing the background as passive and unimportant relation to a dominant subject.
- Yet visual artists quickly become attuned to the spaces around and between elements, discovering their power to shape experience and become active forms in their own right.



Reversed ground color



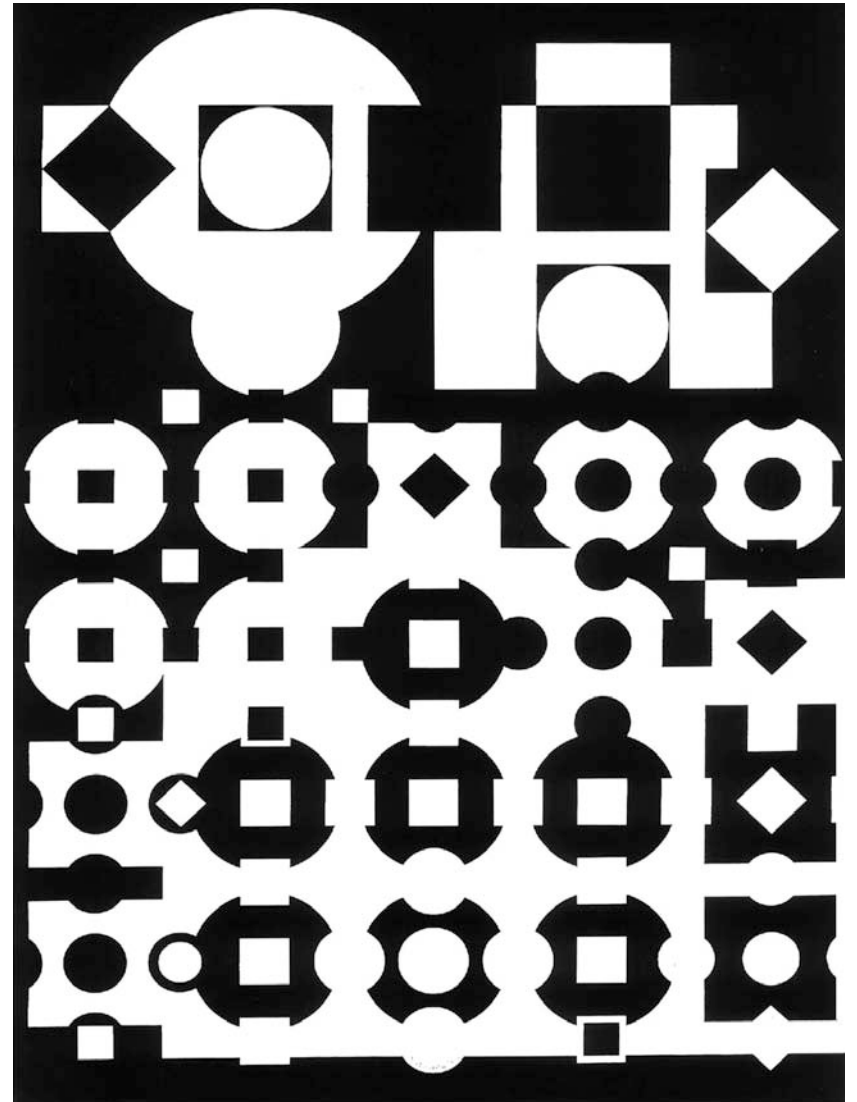
Counterchange between figure and ground



D

Exchange of figure and ground (black and white).

Vasarely



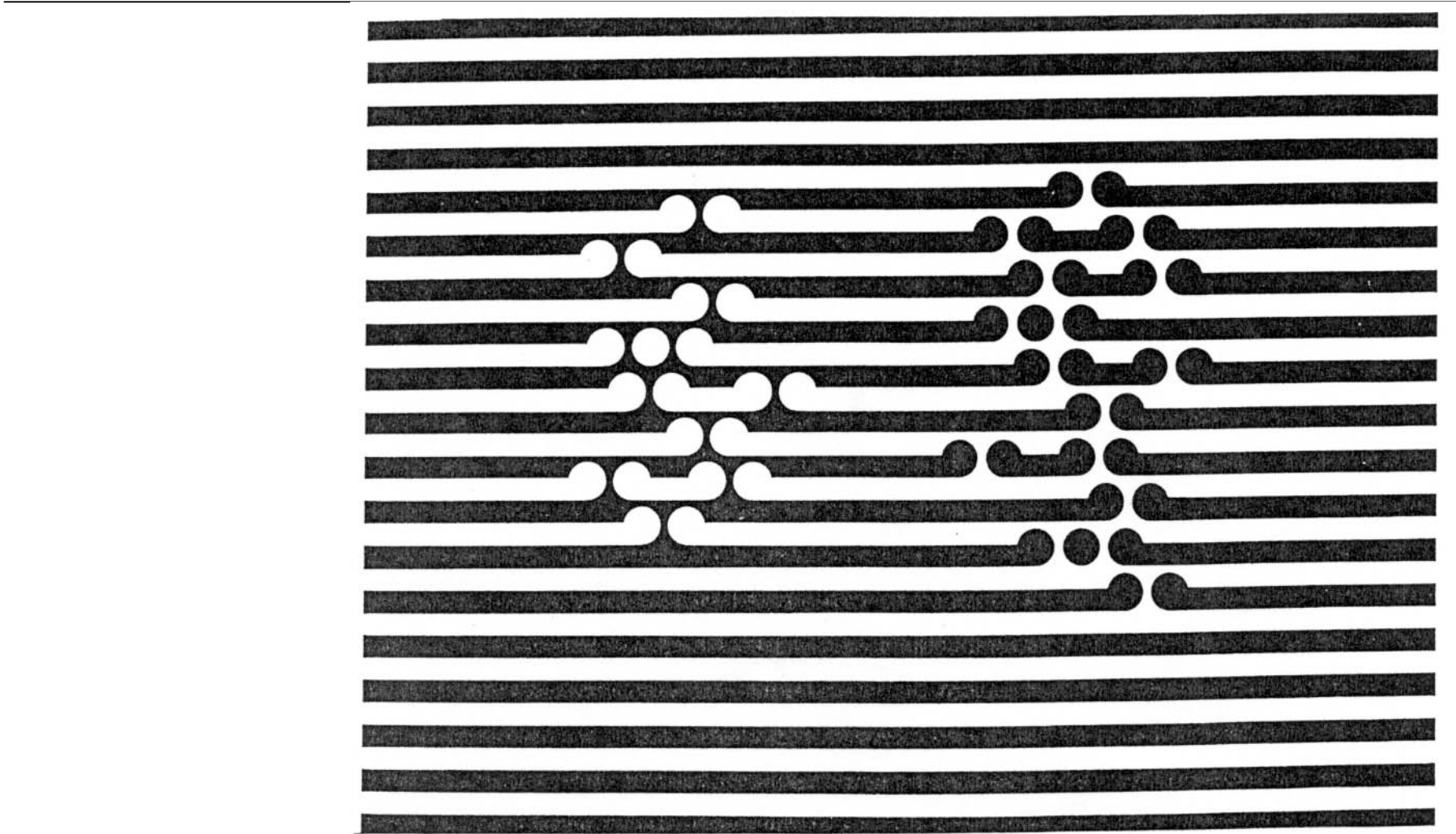
Graphic Designers

- often seek a balance between figure and ground, using this relationship to bring energy and order to form and space.
- They build contrasts between form and counterform in order to construct icons, illustrations, logos, compositions, and patterns that stimulate the eye.
- Creating figure/ground tension or ambiguity adds visual energy to an image or mark. Even subtle ambiguity can invigorate the end result and shift its direction and impact.

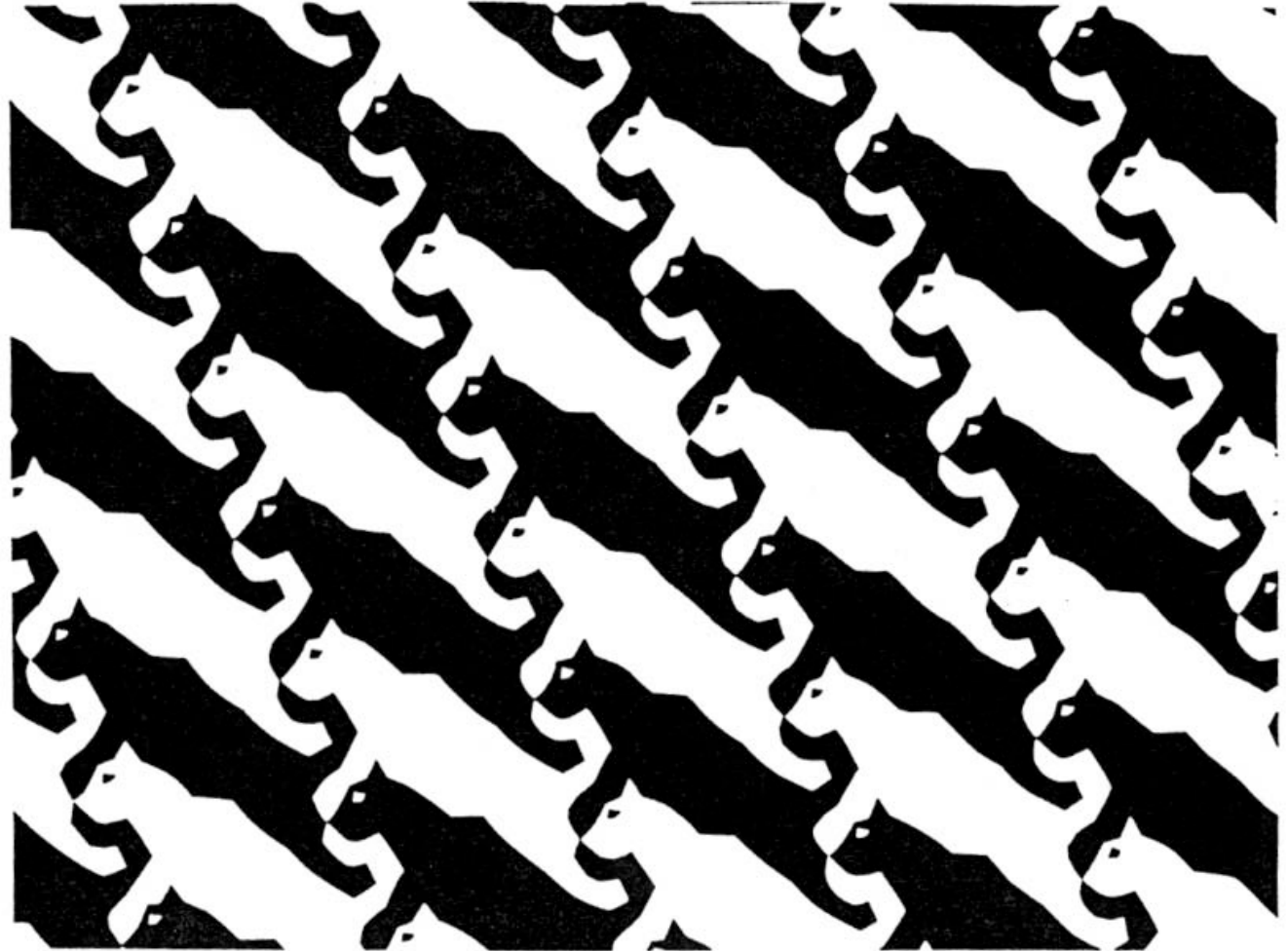


Figure/ground

- at work in all facets of graphic design:
 - In the design of logotypes and symbols, the distillation of complex meaning into simplified but significant form thrives on the taut reciprocity of figure and ground.
 - In posters, layouts, and screen designs, what is left out frames and balances what is built in.
 - Similarly, in time-based media, including multi-page books, the insertion and distribution of space across time affects perception and pacing



Double function of the contour line



Ambiguity of figure and ground

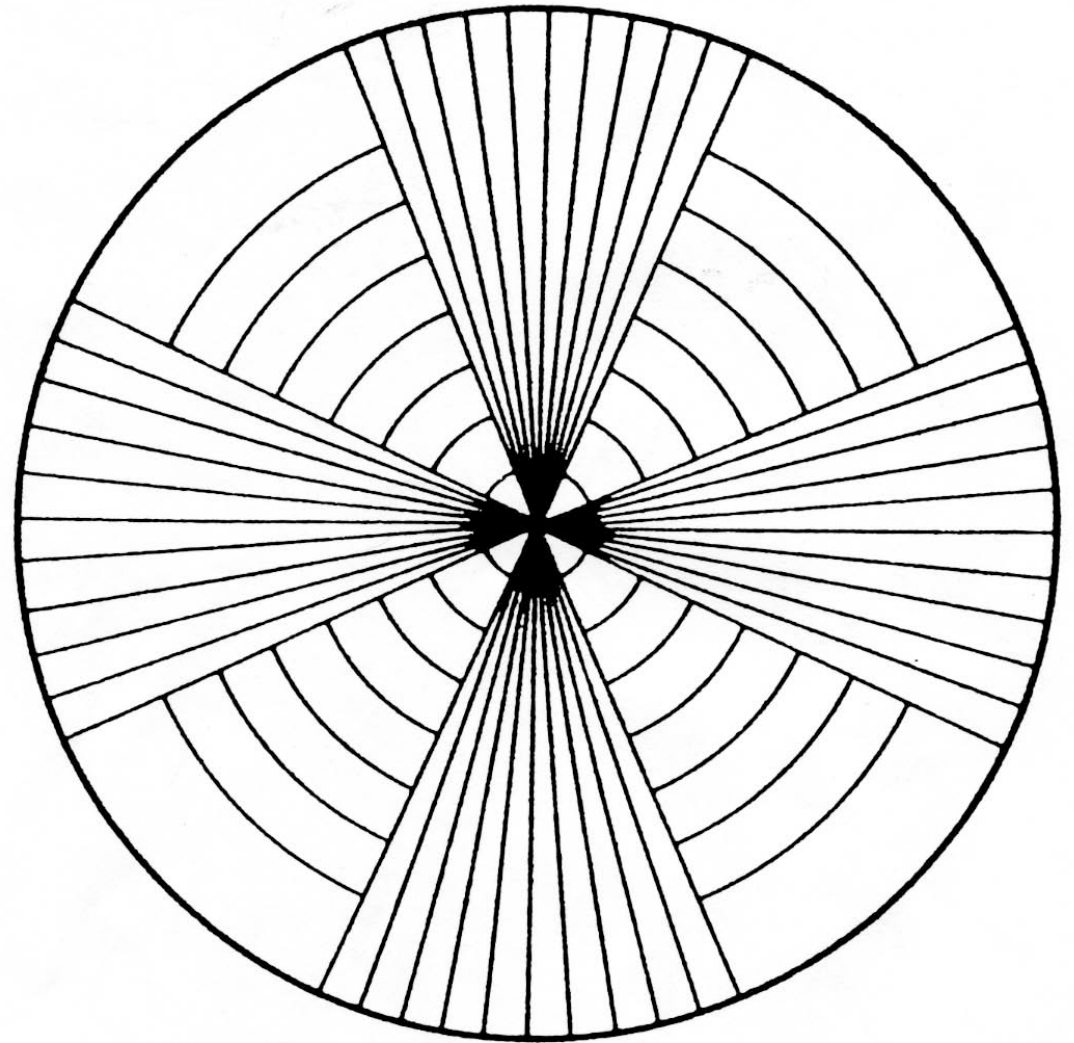


Figure 36.10. A demonstration of the Gestalt law of area. The pattern in (a) is multistable and can be organized with either the white region (b) or the black region (c) as figure. The interpretation in (b) is preferred because, according to this law, the white regions occupy less area than do the black.

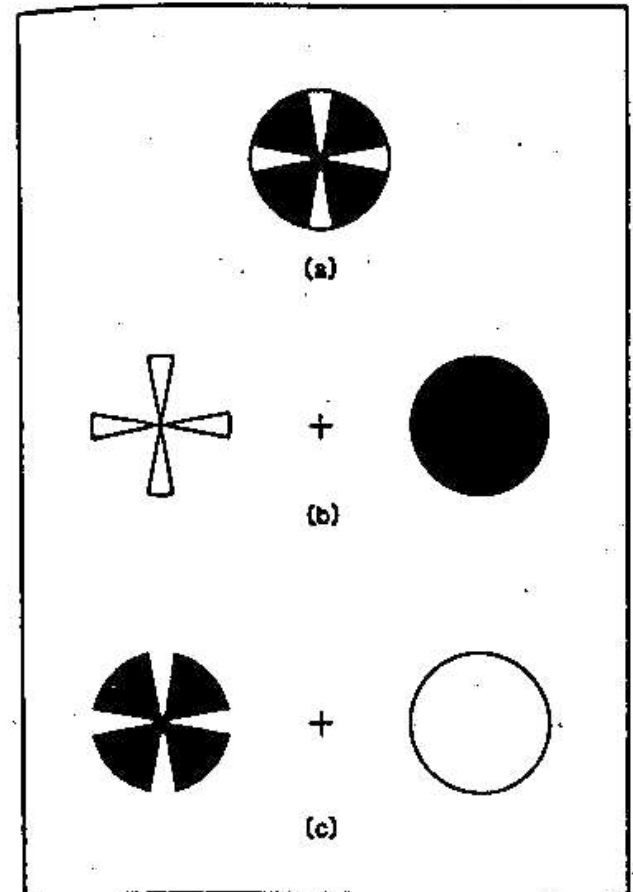
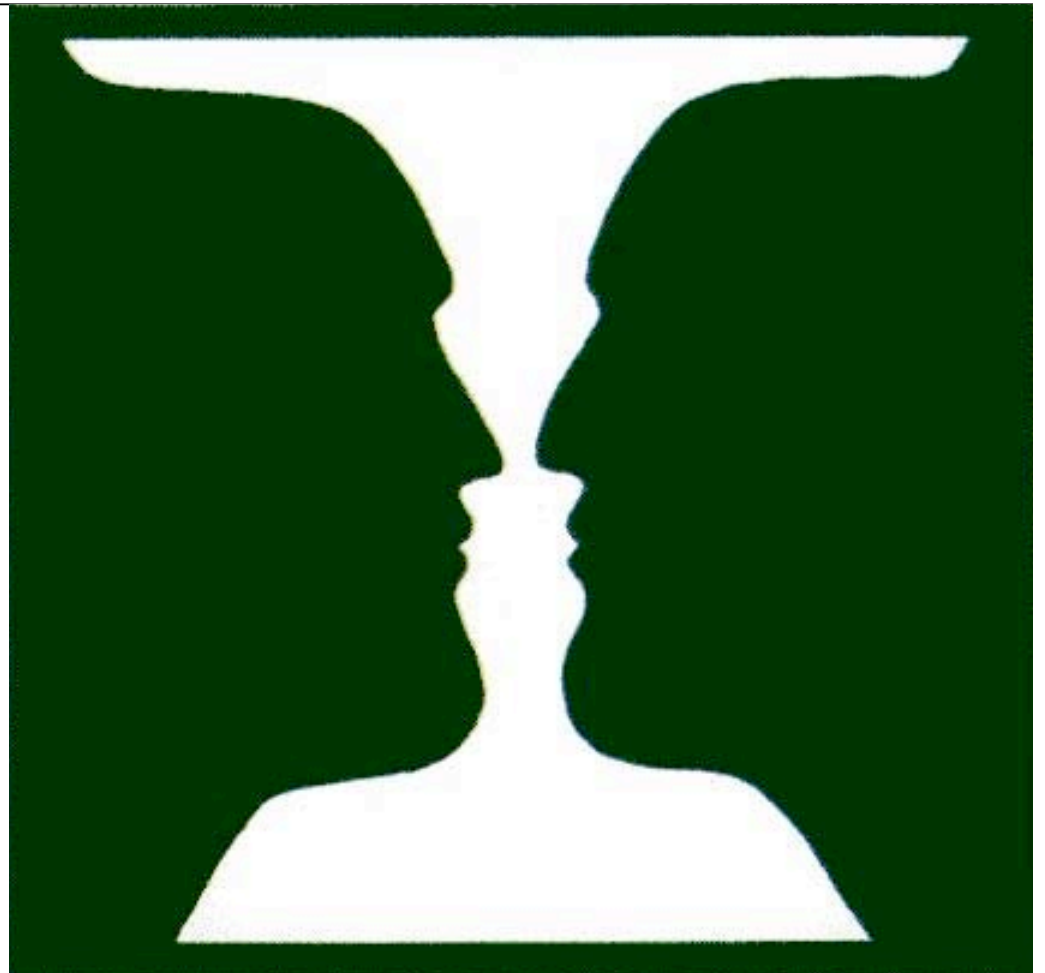
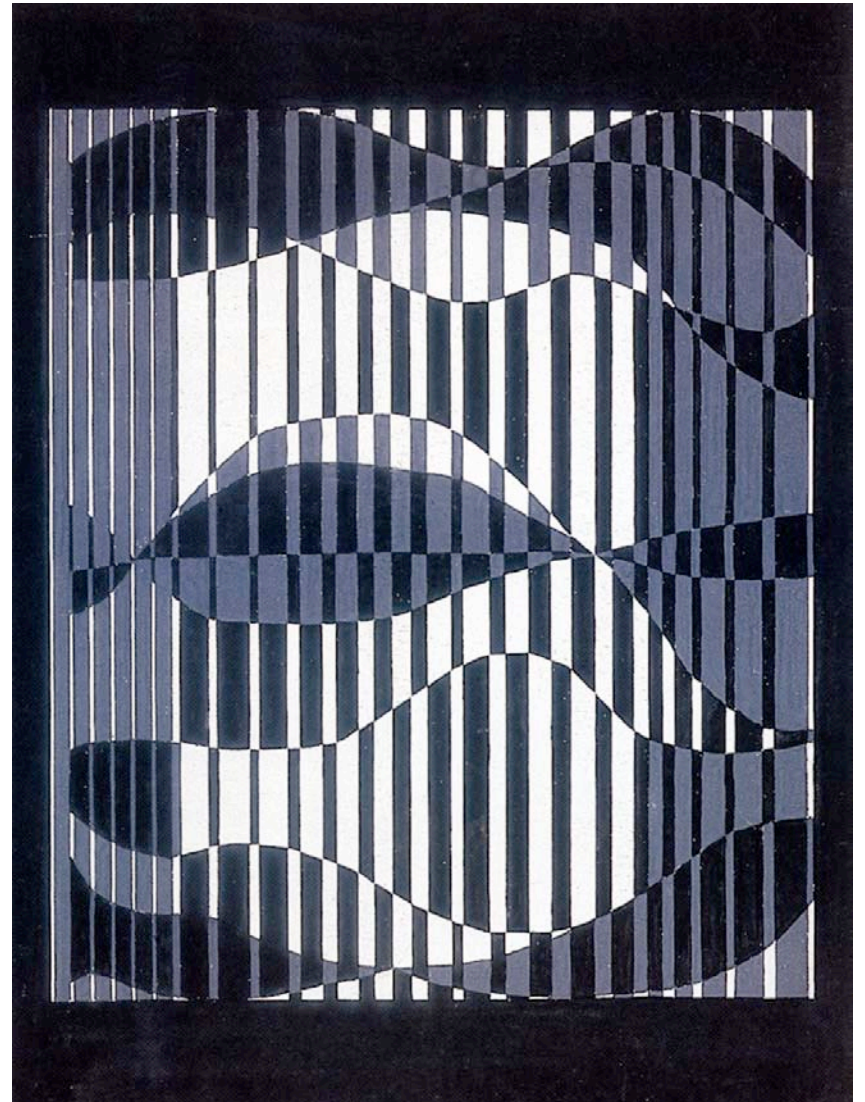


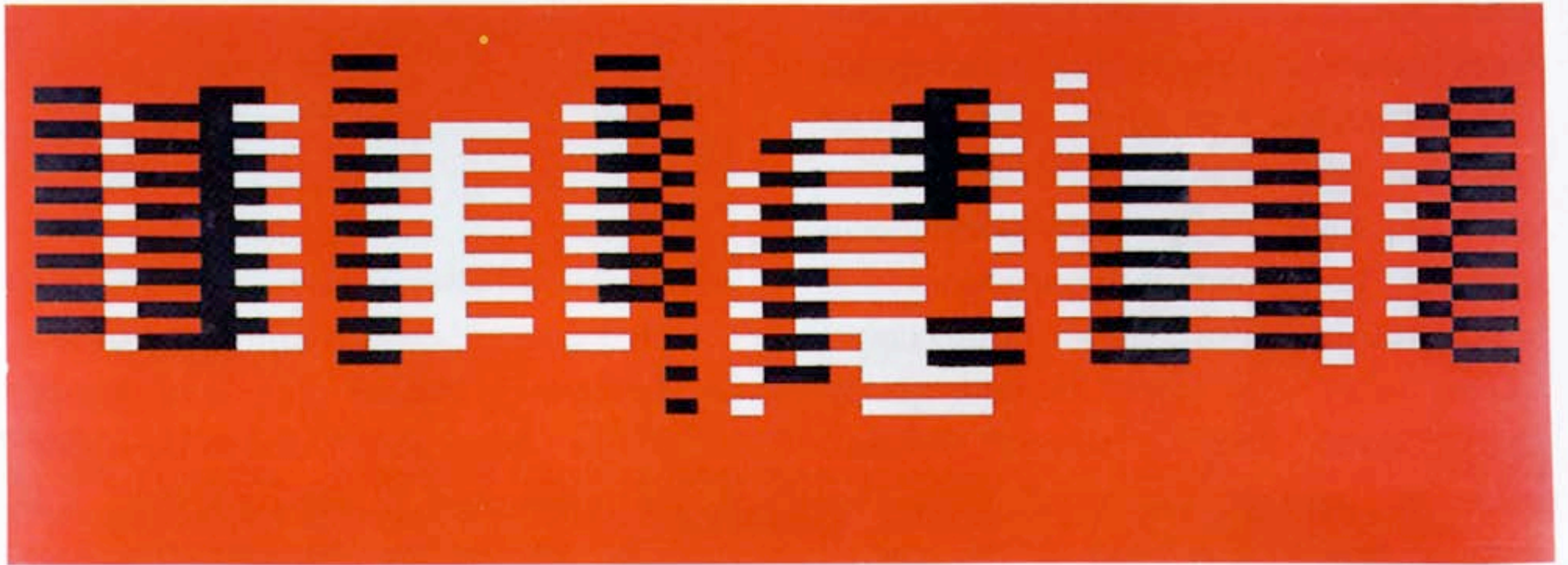
Figure-ground ambiguity



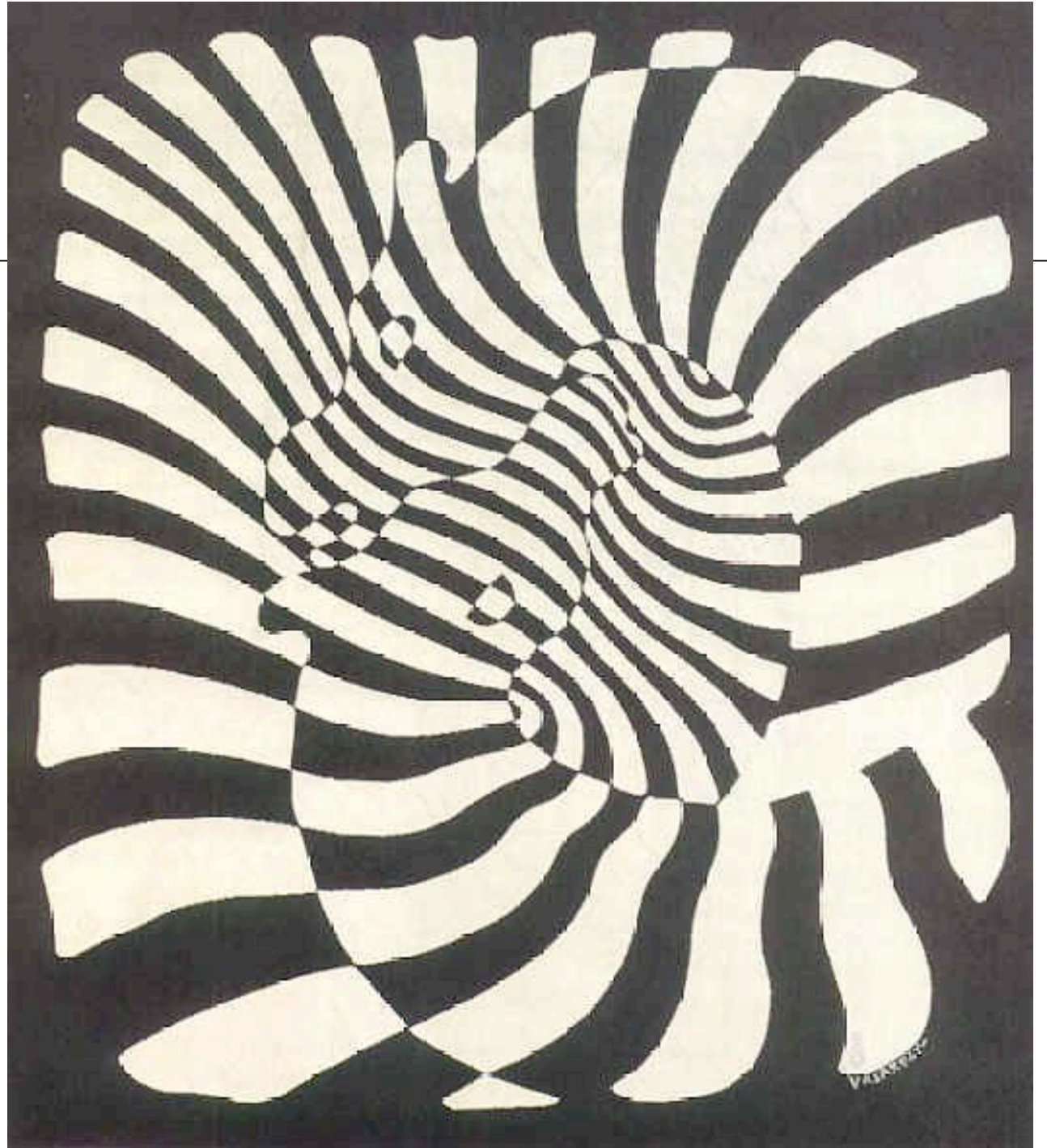
-
- Figure-ground ambiguity can be used to create a strong sense of instability.
 - Joseph Albers



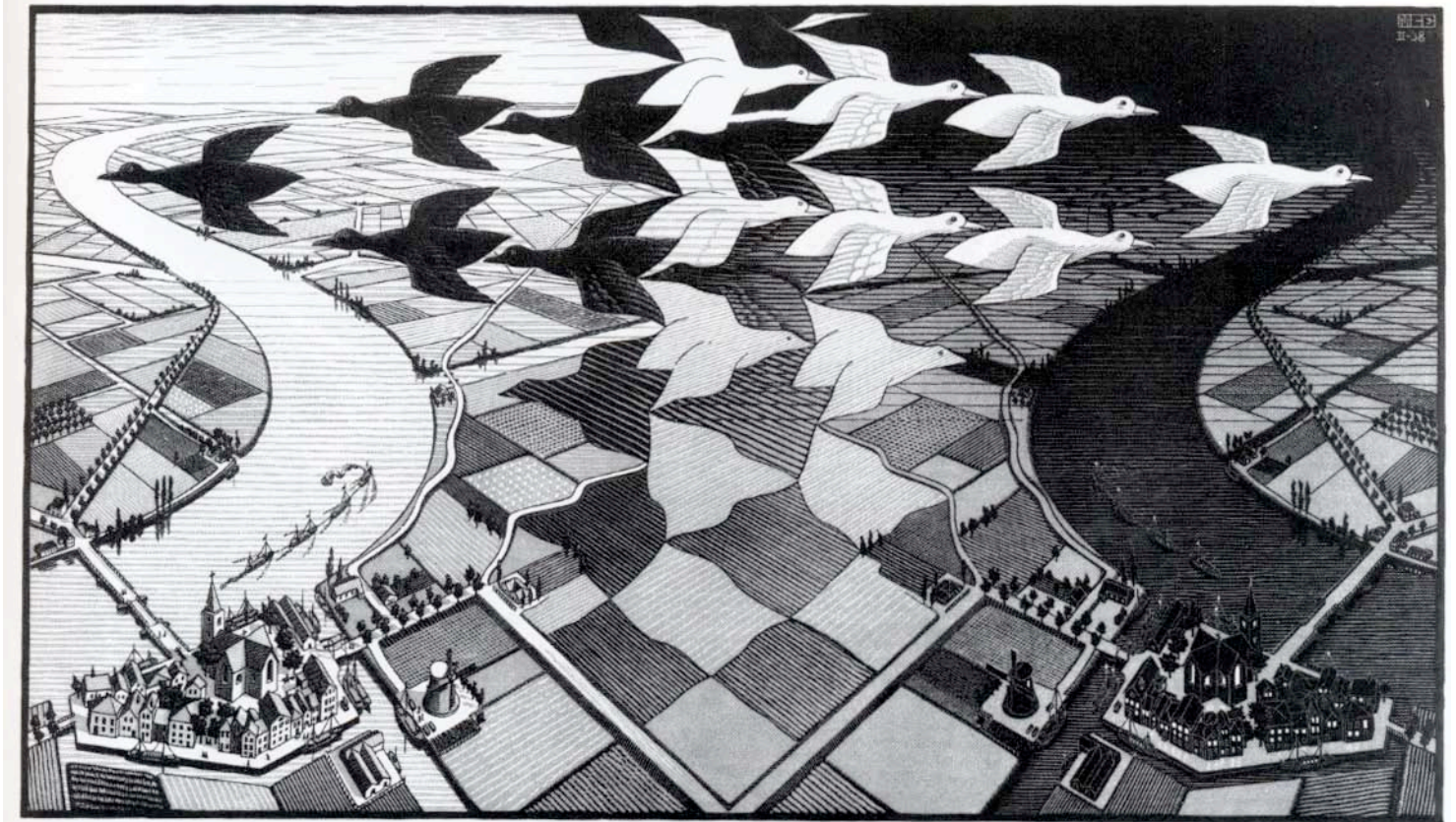
Josef Albers

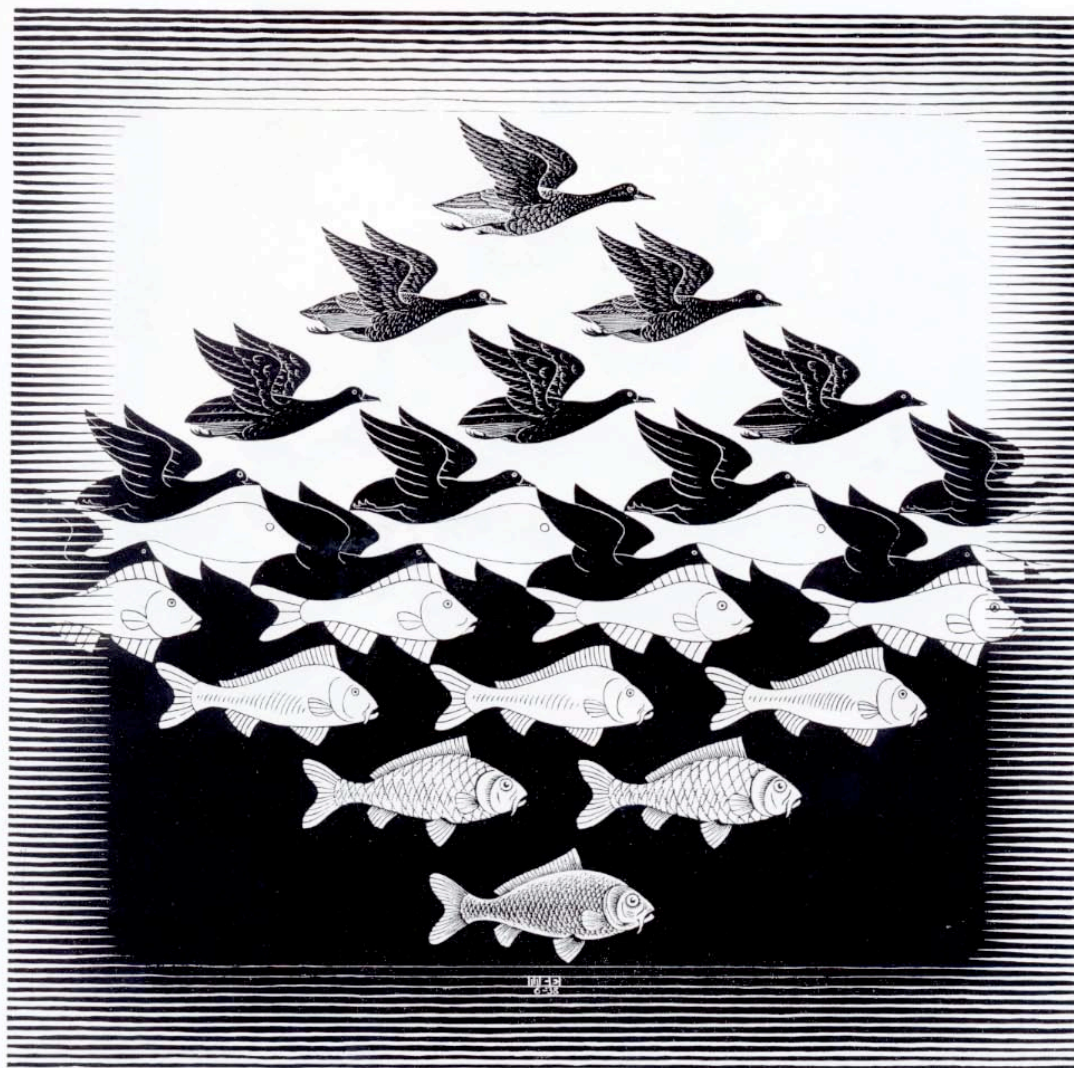


**Victor
Vasarely**



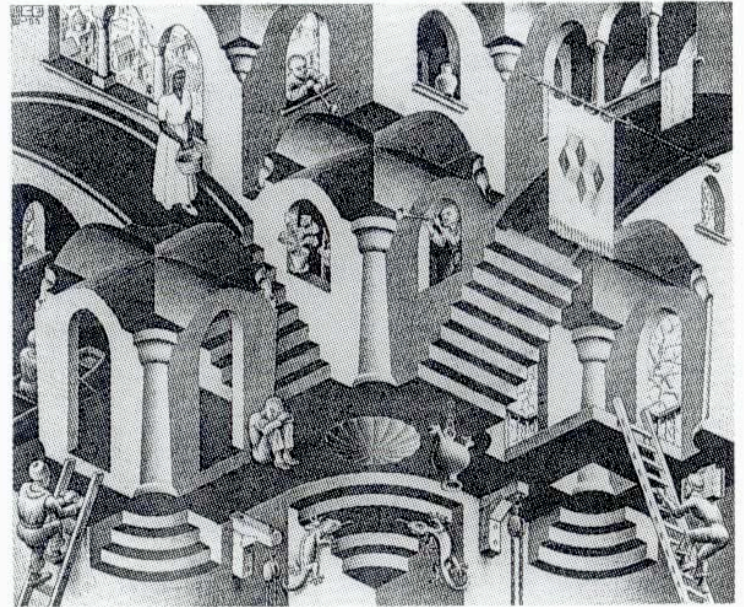
Development of the figure-ground relation into a dynamic composition







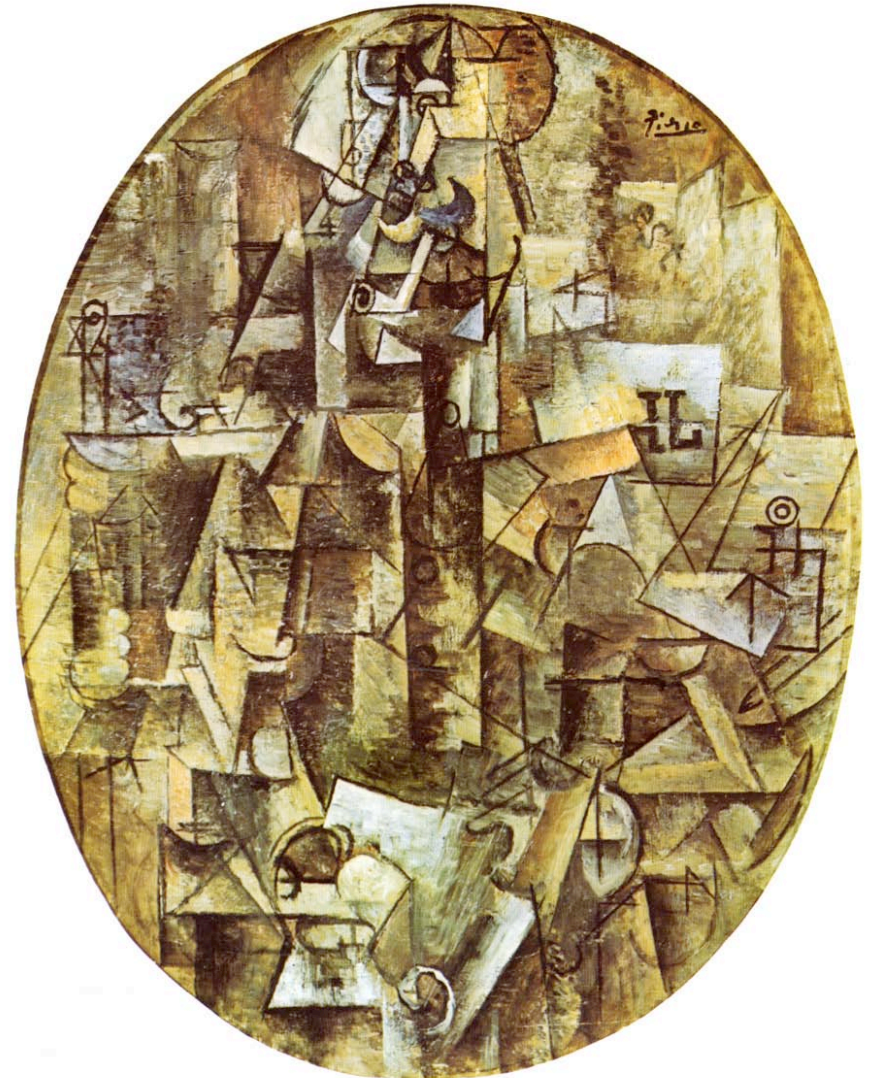
-
- We have spent some time looking at ambiguous figure-ground relations.
 - But there are many forms of ambiguity.
 - concave-convex ambiguity.
 - Some sections are concave and others are convex.



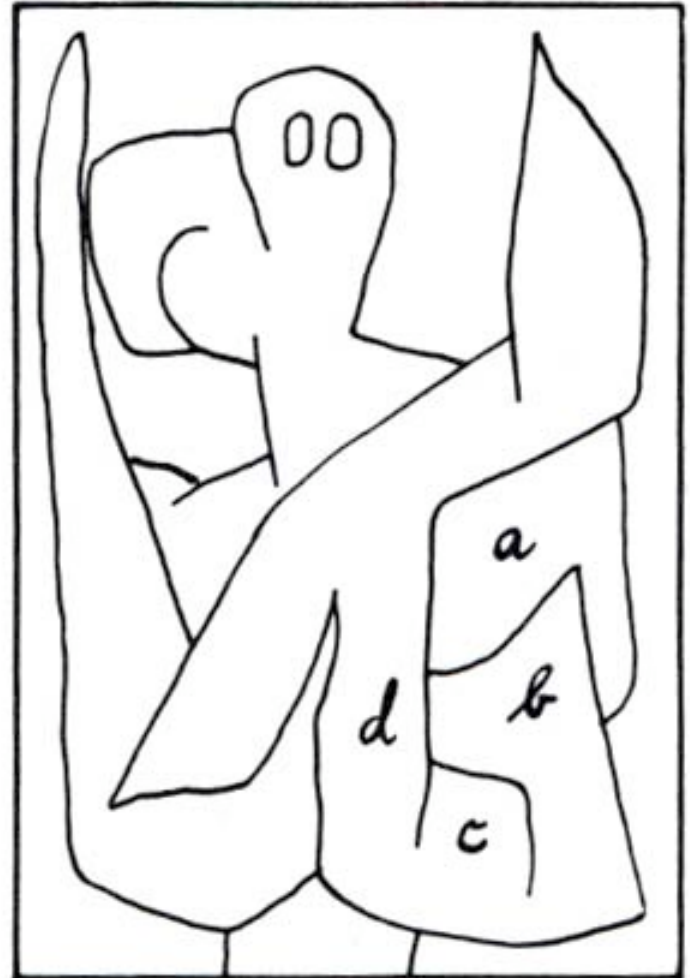
-
- Ambiguity is a powerful type of relation, because the image lacks a single interpretation.

Overlapping figures

- Two figures overlap if one hides all or part of another.
- The human eye tends to perceive the world in terms of depth: We interpret ambiguous images in terms of depth relations.



-
- Ambiguous overlap can generate visual conflict.
 - Different regions seem to be acting against each other.



-
- These lines form a cube, but the cube is not clearly visible.

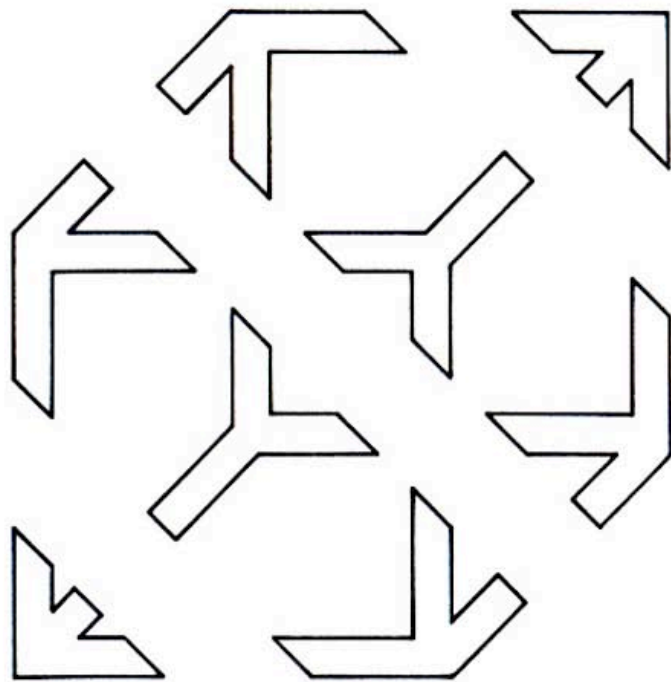


Figure 1.1a Seeing and thinking are clearly distinguishable activities. With these “pieces” we can *imagine* a cube, but it is very difficult to see it.

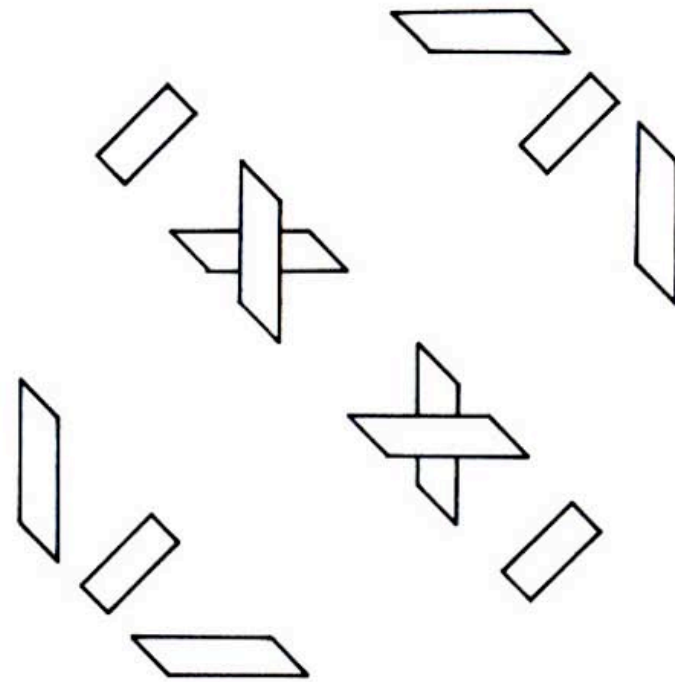


Figure 1.1b These also are fragments of a cube that is actually invisible.

-
- When stripes are added, however, the cube becomes visible:
 - The cube now has a stronger **visual presence**. It is easier to see.

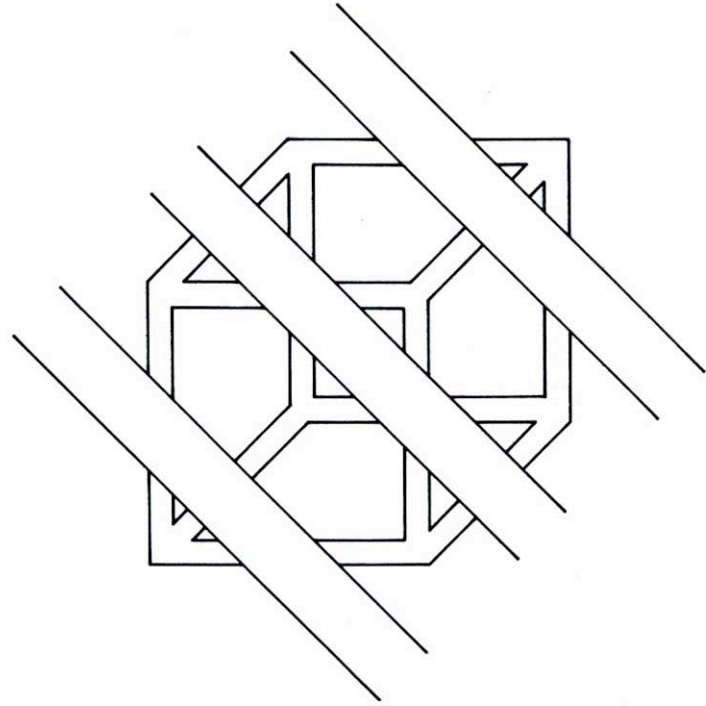


Figure 1.2b The cube is amodally completed behind the three opaque stripes and becomes perceptually *present*.

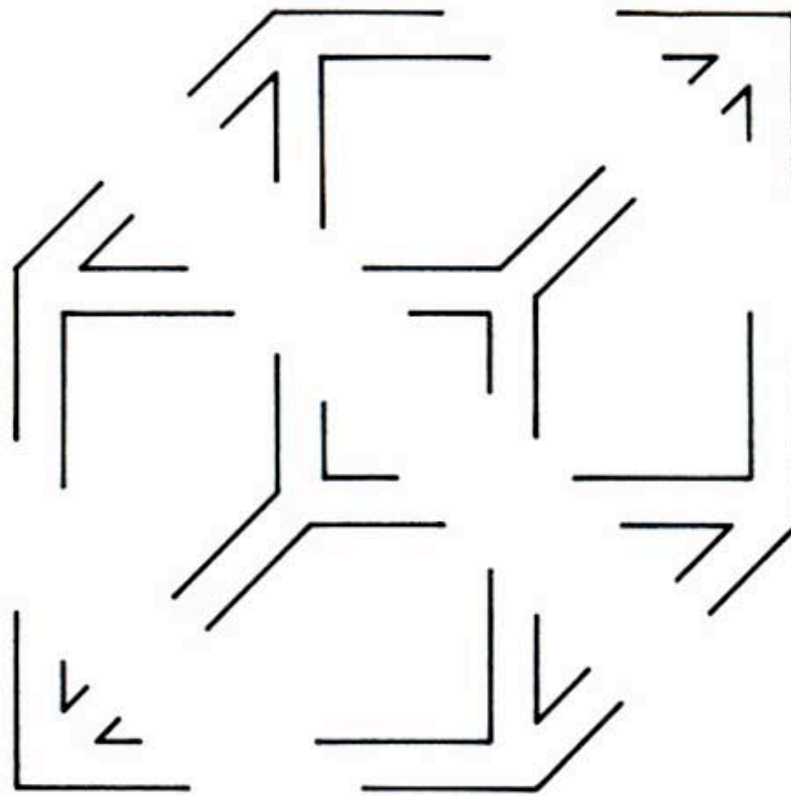


Figure 1.13 The *subtraction* of some parts from the patterns of Figure 1.1a makes them “incomplete”; that is, forces are released that allow the completion of the patterns. Now the cube has perceptual *presence*.

Overlapping can reduce ambiguity



Figure 1.6a A configuration that can be read either as the numeral 13 or as the character B (Bruner and Minturn 1955).

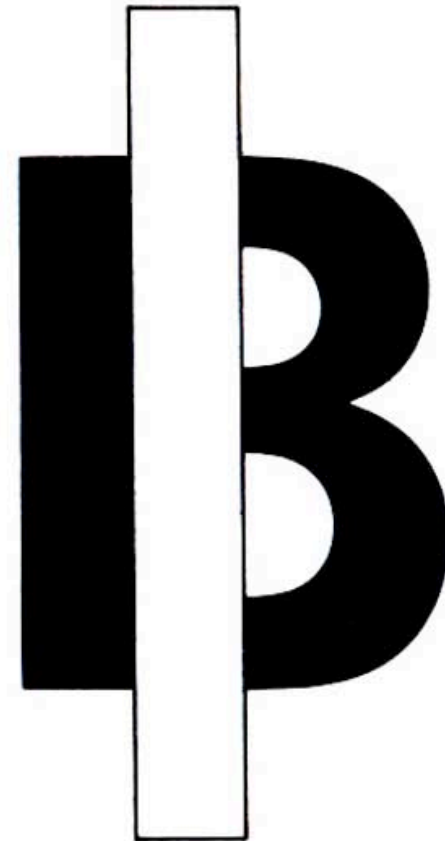


Figure 1.6b When amodal completion occurs, the outcome is more unambiguous: a partially covered B.

- Compare the following two figures:
 - The black sections are the same in both...
 - And yet we perceive them differently.

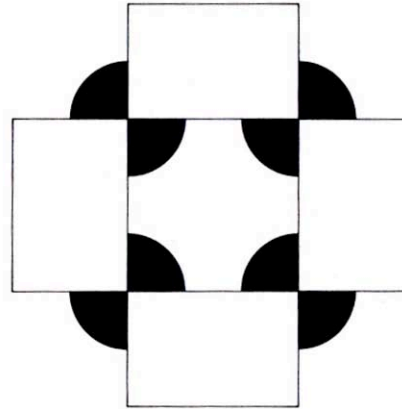


Figure 1.3a Four black disks partially hidden by rectangles (see Figure 1.3d).

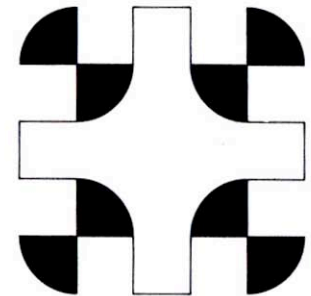


Figure 1.3b A black square partially hidden by a cross (see Figures 1.3c and 1.3e).

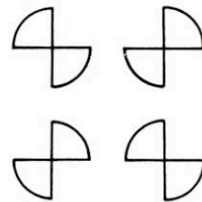


Figure 1.3c

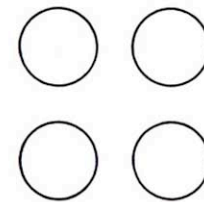


Figure 1.3d

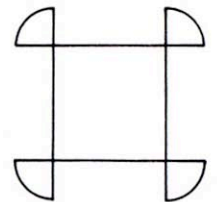
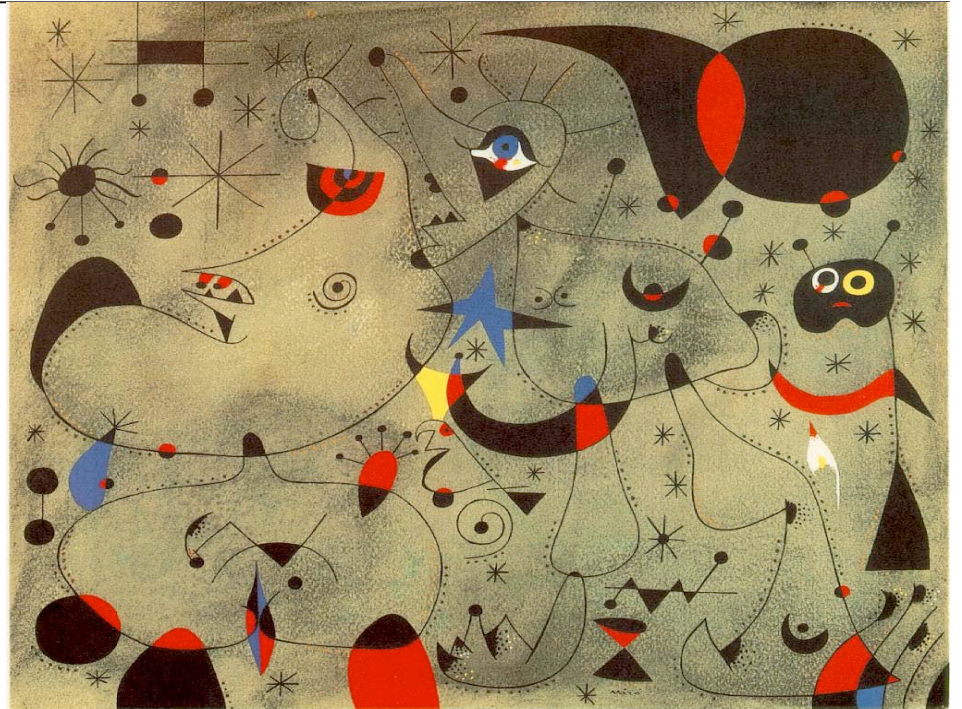


Figure 1.3e

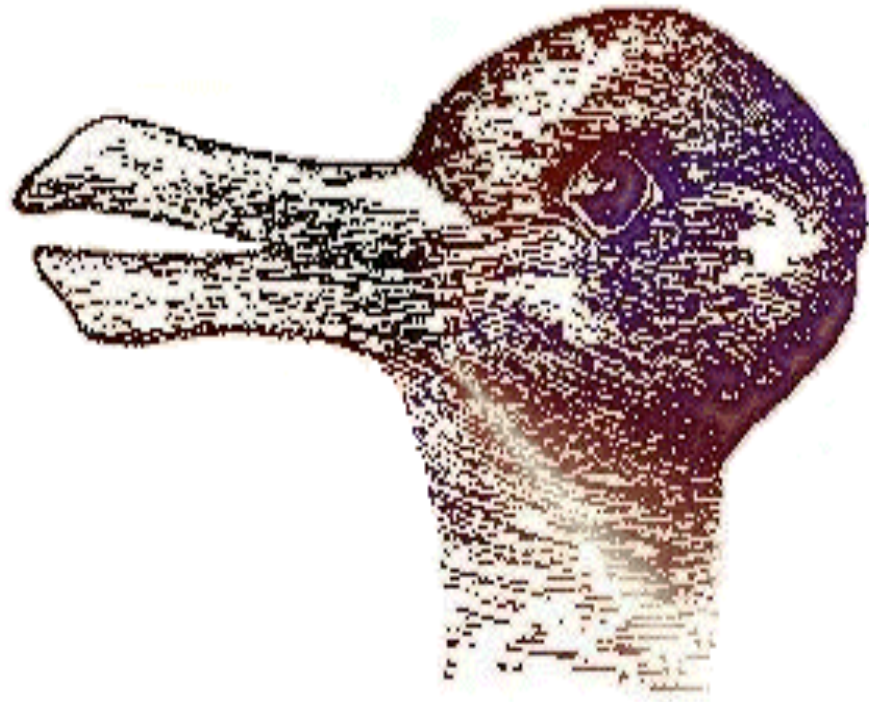
-
- The painter Joan Miro was a master in the creative use of overlap:
 - Notice what happens when figures overlap in his paintings.





Gestalt switching

- There is another kind of ambiguity, known as “gestalt switching”.
- In this case, we can see two figures, but not at the same time.
- We must switch from one “pattern” (gestalt”) to another pattern.
- We can switch voluntarily (we can control when and whether we switch).





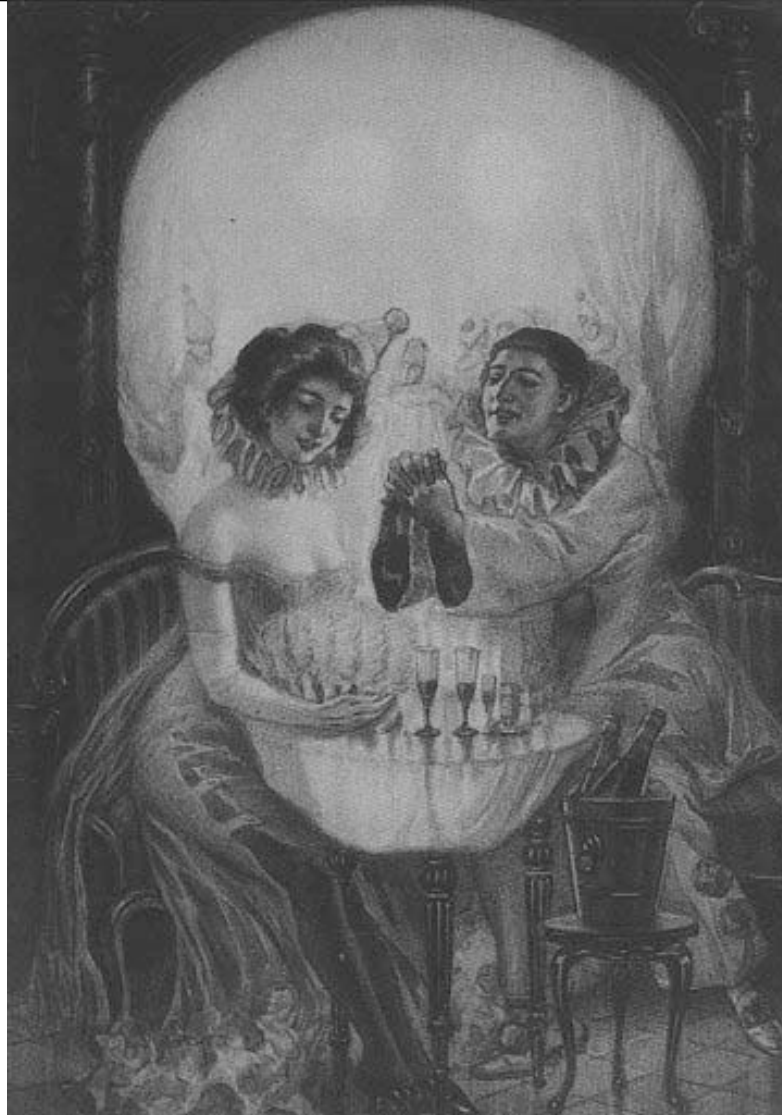
-
- A woman's face or a man playing the saxophone?

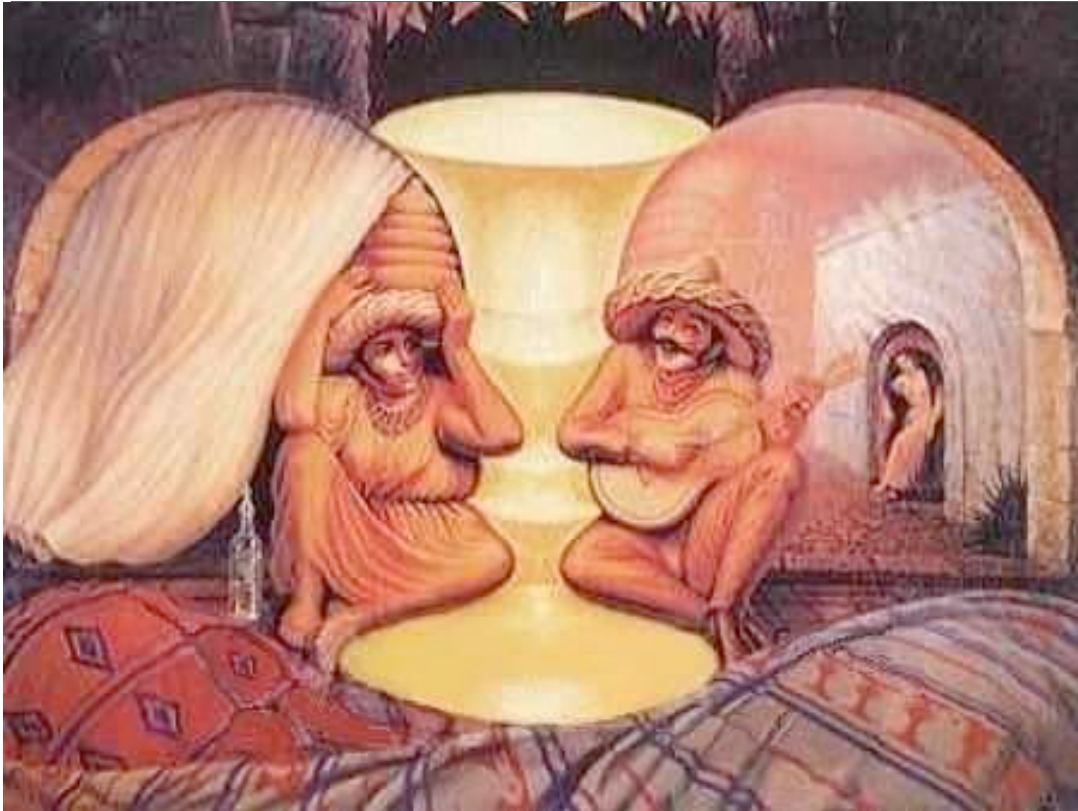


This effect depends on the existence of double figures:

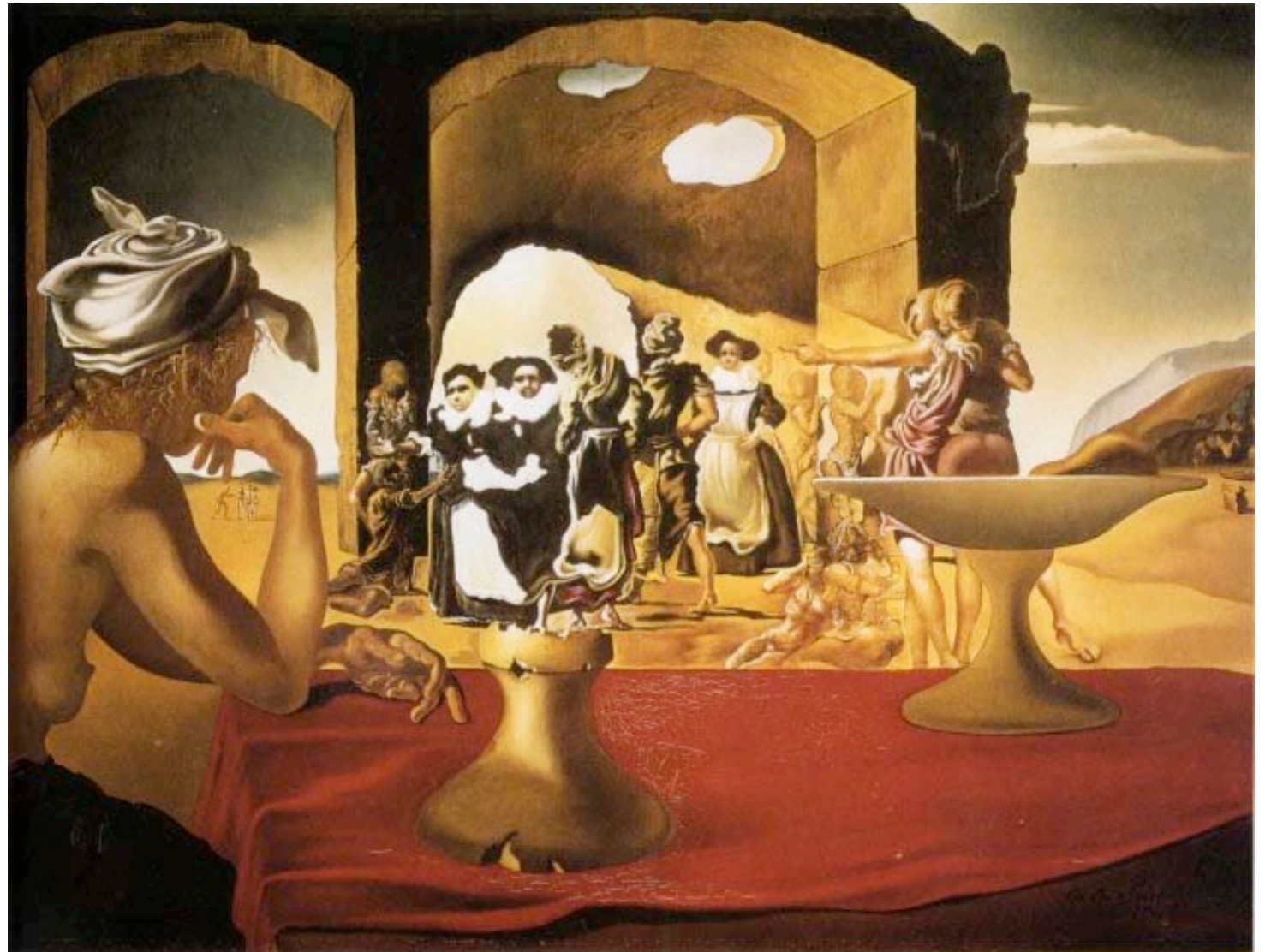
- The same lines form the contours (outlines) of two different figures.
- The two figures are incompatible with one another: we can either see one or the other.
- This is why we must switch.







Dali

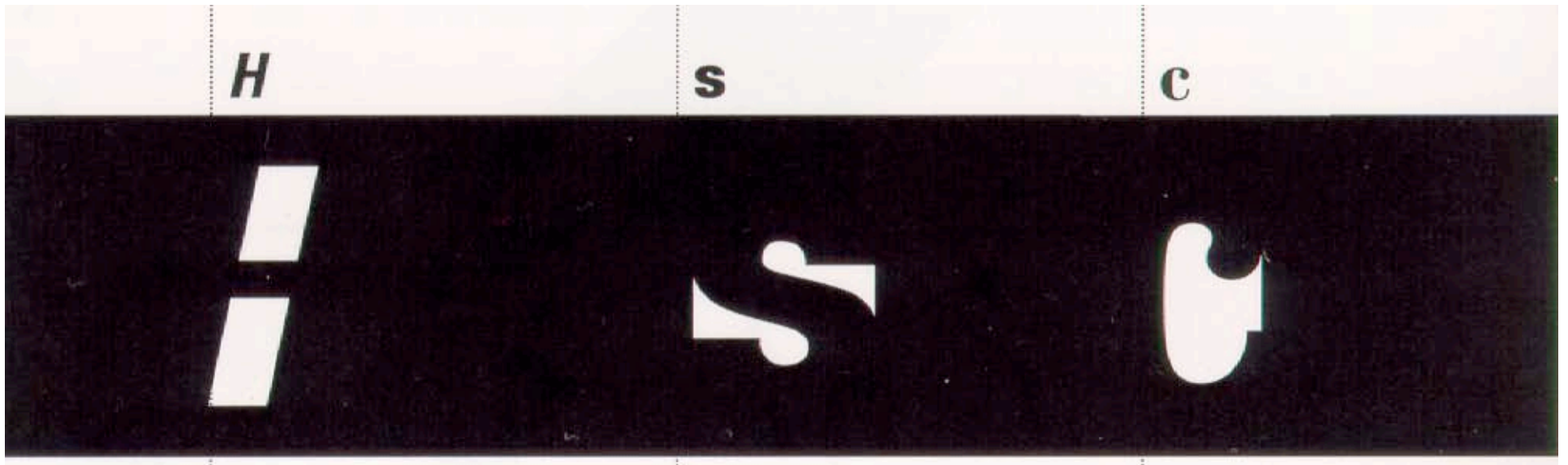


Create and evaluate effective figure/ground tension

- Train your eye to carve out white space as you compose with forms.
 - Learn to massage the positive and negative areas as you adjust the scale of images and typography.
 - Look at the shapes each element makes and see if the edges frame a void that is equally appealing.
 - Notice how as the value of a text block becomes darker, its shape becomes more defined when composed with other elements.
 - Recognizing the potency of the ground, designers strive to reveal its constructive necessity.
- > The power to create—and destroy—form

Letterforms

- appearance of the individual letter
- white space around



Letter

New configurations, negative space, form and counterform

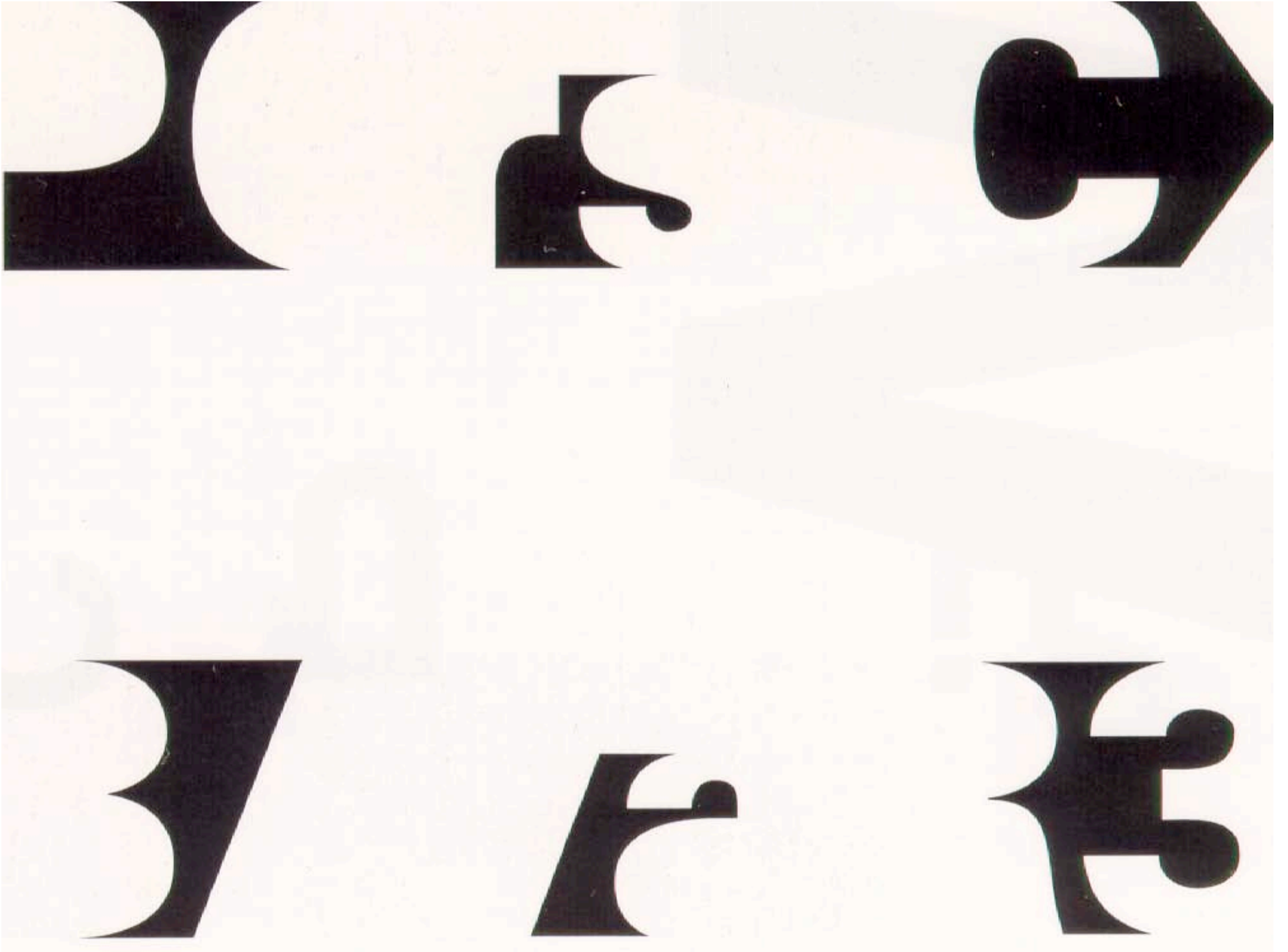


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Typography II

Logotype Forms

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