DESIGN GLOSSARY

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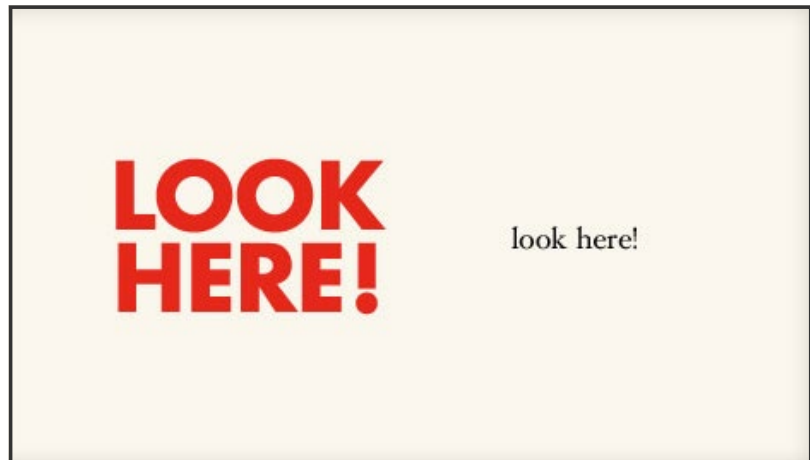Instructor Liz Lane
Purdue University

HIERARCHY

Figure 1
This simple graphic perfectly illustrates how intentional design decisions can influence the readers behavior. *http://chrome47.com/ build-hierarchy/*

When the reader's eyes hit a document they are immediately looking for something to focus upon. Hierarchy guides that process and helps control where the eye focuses on first, second, third and so on. Many different elements play into establishing a strong hierarchy including weights, spacing, shapes, sizes, and color. Hierarchy can best be judged by distinctive differences between elements on a page and a clear order of importants between each element. The most effective approach to achieve these results is to design with clear contrast between elements.

"Visual hierarchy is critical for any graphic design, whether it's a logo that must identify the ambition of a brand at a glance, or the easy navigation of an interactive interface. Our understanding of every element is based on a relation to its context. Elements are treated graphically with graphic tools in order to form visual relationships and thus establish visual hierarchy across a design." (Mundle)

An effective hierarchy can be achieved by analyzing the patterns and behaviors of humans when they first scan a page. Studies

have shown that there are two common scanning patterns found in western society. Due to text being read left-to-right and top-to-bottom the eye often starts in the upper-left corner of the page. From there it either scans in an "F" formation or a "Z" formation. Each formation trends with a different medium. The "F" formation is most common with long passages of text aligned down the page. The "Z" formation on the other hand is more prevelent on posters and website, places where information often lines the top. (Bigman)

By following common patterns designers can better predict the path of the eye and arrange the content on the page to take advantage of that predictability. A proper hierarchy should be tailored to the content and offer a gentle hand in guiding the reader to the information most relevant to them.
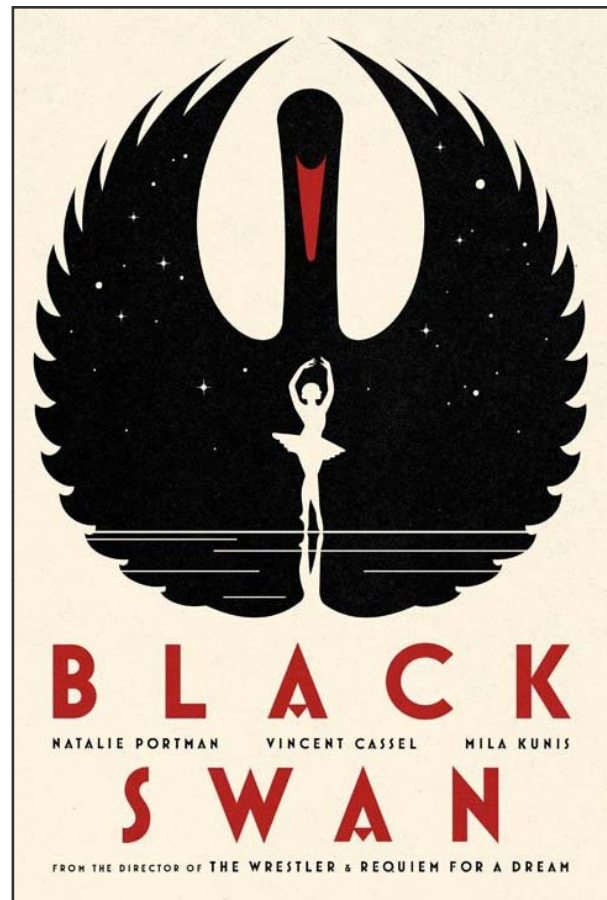

Figure 2
Although the title of this movie poster is broken up the cast names, a clear hierarchy allows the reader to process the title first then focus on the details.
http://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/ graphic-design/how-top-studios-create-their- best-movie-posters-for-hollywood-indie-films/
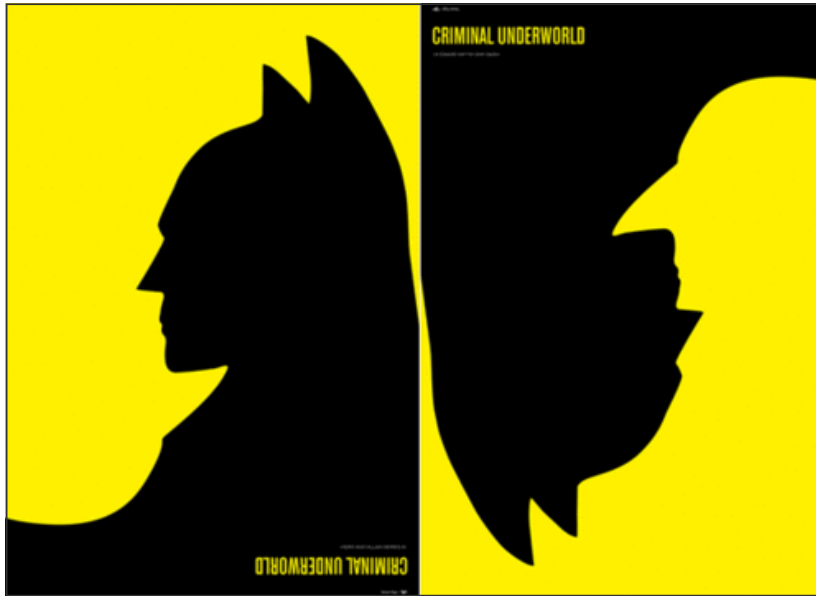
CONTRAST

Figure 3
Not only can contrasting shapes grab attention, they can reveal different meanings as seen in this Batman promo. *https:// designingthegreatperhaps. wordpress.com/2015/04/07/ color-figureground-framing- and-hierarchy/*

Making a bold statement and creating a point of emphasis are the jobs contrast excells at. Not only will a major difference between multiple draw the attention of the eye, it'll highlight statement that otherwise would have been overlooked. Just as a shadow cannot exist with light, contrast cannot exist with similarity. Figure 3 clearly demonstrates the co-dependence between similarity and contrast. Half of the space shares one color while the other half shares another. These two prominent shapes draw attention to the boundary between them revealing a stark juxtaposition between the two.

"The famous adverts for the iPod expertly used contrast to focus the viewers attention on the music player. The ads featured a silhouetted character on a brightly colored background. The iPod and earphones appear in white and stand out clearly against the silhouettes and colored backgrounds." (Farley)

Along with being used heavily in marketing materials meant to grab attention, contrast is found in signs and warnings. When trying to alert drivers of hazardous driving conditions agencies often employ several tricks regarding contrast. The reflective material that coats traffic signs offers outstanding contrast at night compared to the dark road ahead. The warning on the flammable products immediately draws the eye's attention to the dangers of use.

Contrast can be achieved through color, shape, size, and even alignment. When it comes to determining how to grab the reader's attention, designers have a handful of options to play around with to achieve a commanding and contrasting result.

Figure 4
Traffic signs are instrumental in ensuring the safety of drivers due to their high contrast and visibility. *http://theinspirationroom.com/daily/2008/guinness-traffic-signs/*

TENSION

Figure 5
These pool balls generate an tense, unnerving feeling as they sit on the edge of the glass
http://www.itsnicethat. com/articles/ben-woodeson-at-retrospex

T ension is the force that is responsible for the uneazy feeling that stirs in one's stomach. Without tension, design becomes stagnant and loses its edge. Designers purposefully put two elements or forces in stark opposition of each other. This opposition leads to an energy that allows the design to break free from a stale state. While shaking things up it also is very effective at drawing attention to a peculiar element or alternative meaning.

Tension can be achieved in several ways, the most prominent is taking an element out of it's natural resting state, just as the stack of pool balls are in Figure 5. On a normal table there would be no tension, no edge, no energy. When placed right at the edge of a long plane of delicate glass they suddenly demand attention. At first tension tends to promote fear and hesitation, but once studied it suddenly transitions to a feeling of amazement and delight that the impossible is happening.

"One point to keep in mind is that like everything else hierarchy, we need to use tension sparingly. Too much visual tension every-

where will pull the eye in all directions at once and hurt your design." (Bradley)

In order to achieve tension it's common to do the opposite of what is most commonly desired. Whether placing a dot slightly off centered or purposefully skewing the balance between several components on the page, tension comes from the imperfections of elements. Tension can also be created through purposefully unbalanced, competing elements such as the circle and text in Figure 6.
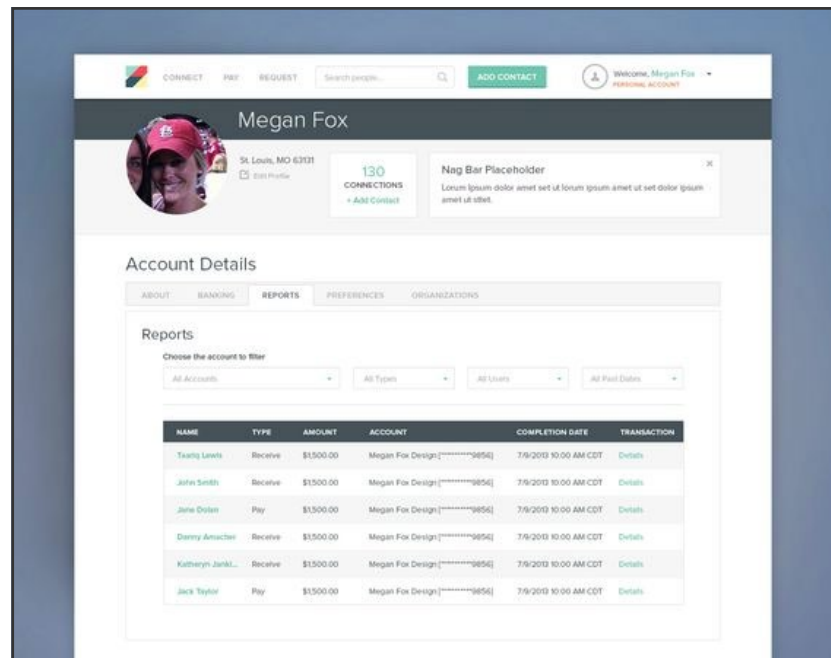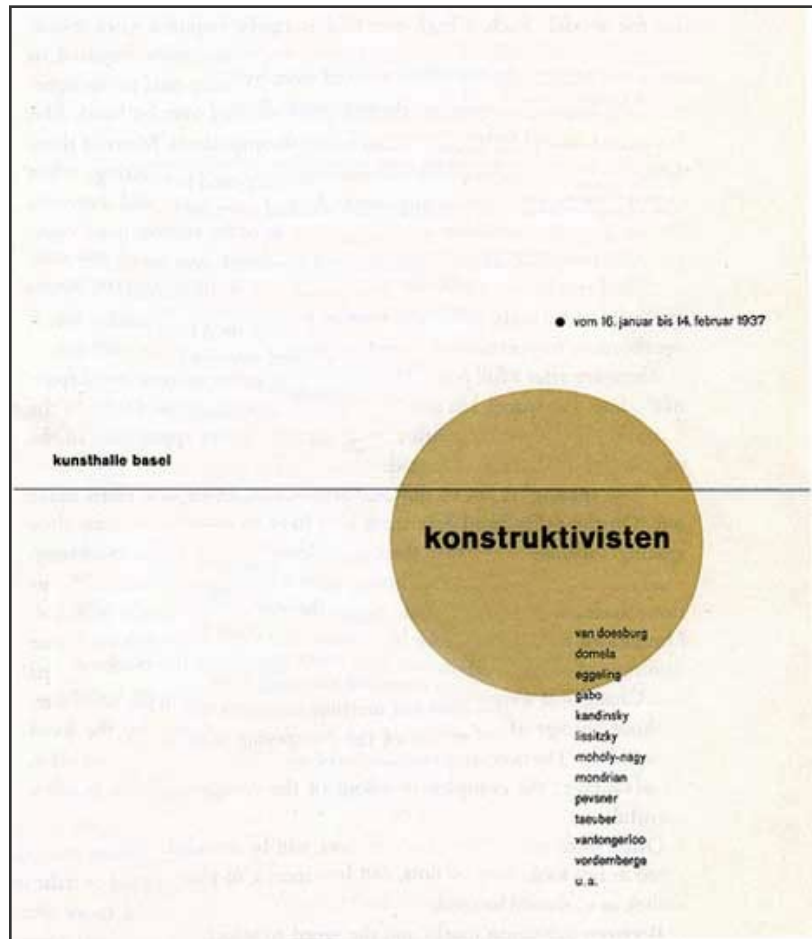

Figure 6
Overlapping text with visual elements is an easy way to generate tension. *http://vanseodesign.com/web-design/visual-tension/*

ALIGNMENT

When faced with vast amounts of information, designers have to be careful not to overload the reader with too much at once. Alignment is a simple approach to prevent that problem from happening. Having elements organized and aligned in clear and intuitive patterns helps the brain digest information better and faster. Another principle which works very closely with alignment is repetition. By repeating structures on a page, there are less individual objects to process. Take for example the table in Figure 7. By lining up columns under a single header the brain can apply the header's meaning to 6 different bits of information at once.

"The design aligns a number of design objects both horizontally and vertically to show their relationship as belonging to or parallel with. Used carefully, alignment can help organize the different parts of a page, making it easier for

Figure 7
The careful alignment of all the content on this website allows the reader to quickly digest the information. *https://dribbble.com/ shots/1153542-Payment-Application-Reports/ attachments/149252*

users to manage the many different design objects that can appear by creating a unified system of page design." (Kimball, Hawkins)

Alignment also helps direct the reader throughout the page. When text is lined up straight the eye naturally follows that edge. Through the purposedul positioning of elements across the page, a designer can provide a road for the reader's eyes to travel on. This gives the designer more control over the way in which the reader experiences the document and ultimately the comfort in knowing that the message was clearly conveyed.

Lastly alignment can be used to create contrast. In Figure 8 we can see that placing a single element out of alignment, a designer can purposefully draw attention to that point on the page.
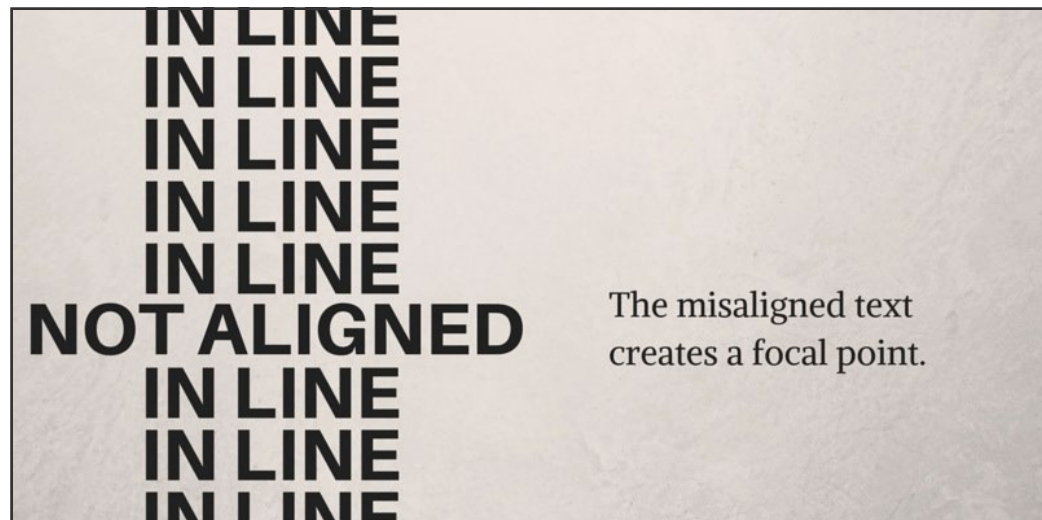

Figure 8
The purposeful misalignment in this list quickly draws attention to the outlier. *http:// blog.thepapermillstore.com/design-principles- alignment/*

MOTION

Figure 9

The diagonal lines inherit the movement of gravity, bringing life to the static image. *https://art.calarts.edu/graphic-design/specialization-motion-graphics*

Motion in a still image can best be described as the illusion of movement. Generally movement is a product of varying lines, curves, shapes and event text. A vertical line will produce the feeling of standing still and a horizontal line looks as if it's lying flat. A diagonal line, like the ones in Figure 9, though has a sense of movement. The inherit feeling that if you were to drop a ball on it, that it would roll all the way down.

This technique is a means to gracefully draw the reader's attention and guide them throughout the work. Behind every design there's a purpose and when the designer can control the order in which the reader wanders about the work, it's much easier to convey that purpose. By utilizing curves and authentic flows of elements, a design can guide the reader's attention to wherever they please.

Motion is often used to convey emotion. Humans tend to sympathize with more authentic experiences and a square-ish graphic

A FILM BY
CHRISTOPHER NOLAN
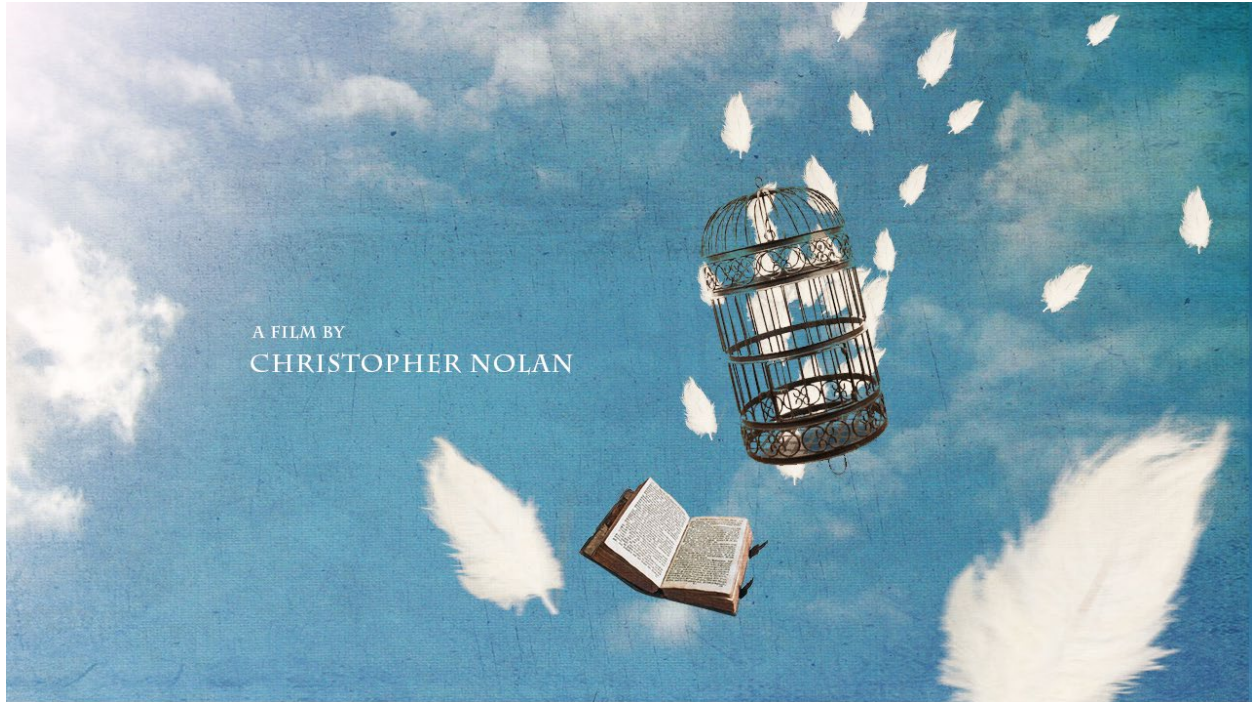
doesn't quite do the trick. With motion designers are able to create a authentic and genuine experience for the reader, inspiring a sense of safety and comfort in the natural movement of the work.

Figure 10
The alignment of the feathers perfectly illustrates the movement falling through the sky. *https://art.calarts.edu/graphic-design/specialization-motion-graphics*