Chapter IV

How to Use Photoshop to Improve the Gestalt of an Image

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ABSTRACT

Visual communication through images depends upon the composition of forms within the image having a structure, or Gestalt, to carry the content through the end-user’s perception process to a state of understanding. Looking at an image while squinting the eyes and thus suppressing color information and detail can easily identify composition problems. Visually disruptive problem areas can be selected in Photoshop, and the value and color corrected using Adjustment Layers. Directions are included for cleaning up of distracting visual trash such as dust, hair, scratches or unwanted objects. Step-by-step directions and examples explain the entire process.
INTRODUCTION

Form is the visible shape of content.
- Ben Shahn

These step-by-step directions constitute a pragmatic approach to looking at an image, analyzing the composition, identifying compositional disruptions, and correcting them using Photoshop 7. First, the Gestalt (the German word for shape or form) theory of visual psychology and perception will be discussed as it is decidedly helpful in understanding how an image is received by the end-user. Then, a value (lights and darks) analysis will be made of the image to identify disruptions to the composition and focal point. In Photoshop 7, the problem areas will be selected and corrected, thus achieving a greater simplicity of forms and a greater chance that the image is perceived as intended. Also included is a brief description of basic color correction and basic image clean up.

Photoshop 7 offers sophisticated tools for controlling composition, value and color correction, mask making, compositing, special effects, and more. It is heavily used for precise image control in industries such as advertising, offset printing, industrial design, film and video postproduction. It is also an essential tool for professionals in many other fields such as multimedia, website design, computer graphics, and photography.

THE GESTALT THEORY OF VISUAL PERCEPTION

The Gestalt theory of psychology, a major influence at the Bauhaus, was first developed by Dr. Max Wertheimer in Germany in 1912. Through experimentation in visual perception, Wertheimer found that the end-user’s perception of an image is influenced by the physical attributes of color cones and rods in the eye, the complex pattern of dendrites in the abstract shape reading area of the brain and, further, by the individual’s already established framework of knowledge and culture. Every person sees and analyzes the same image in his or her own particularly individual way. “All perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention,” states Arnheim (1974, p. 5). The viewer of an image seeks simplicity in visual organization, just as computer programmers seek elegance in code. When a
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