

**BASIC ELEMENTS OF VISUAL**

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**COMMUNICATION**

# BASIC ELEMENTS OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

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- Whenever something is projected, sketched, painted, drawn, scrawled, constructed, carved, the visual substance of the work is composed from a basic list of elements.

## THE VISUAL ELEMENTS ARE THE BASIC SUBSTANCE OF WHAT WE SEE

- 1. Dot
- 2. Line
- 3. Shape
- 4. Direction
- 5. Tone
- 6. Colour
- 7. Texture
- 8. Dimension
- 9. Scale
- 10. Movement

# 1. DOT

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- Simplest visual communication unit.
- Great power of visual attraction over the eye.
- When we see dots, we automatically bind them together, which have a great affect in our gaze — it directs the gaze.
- In large numbers and juxtaposed, dots create the illusion of tone or color — mechanical reproduction machines use this visual attributes to print any tone or colours.







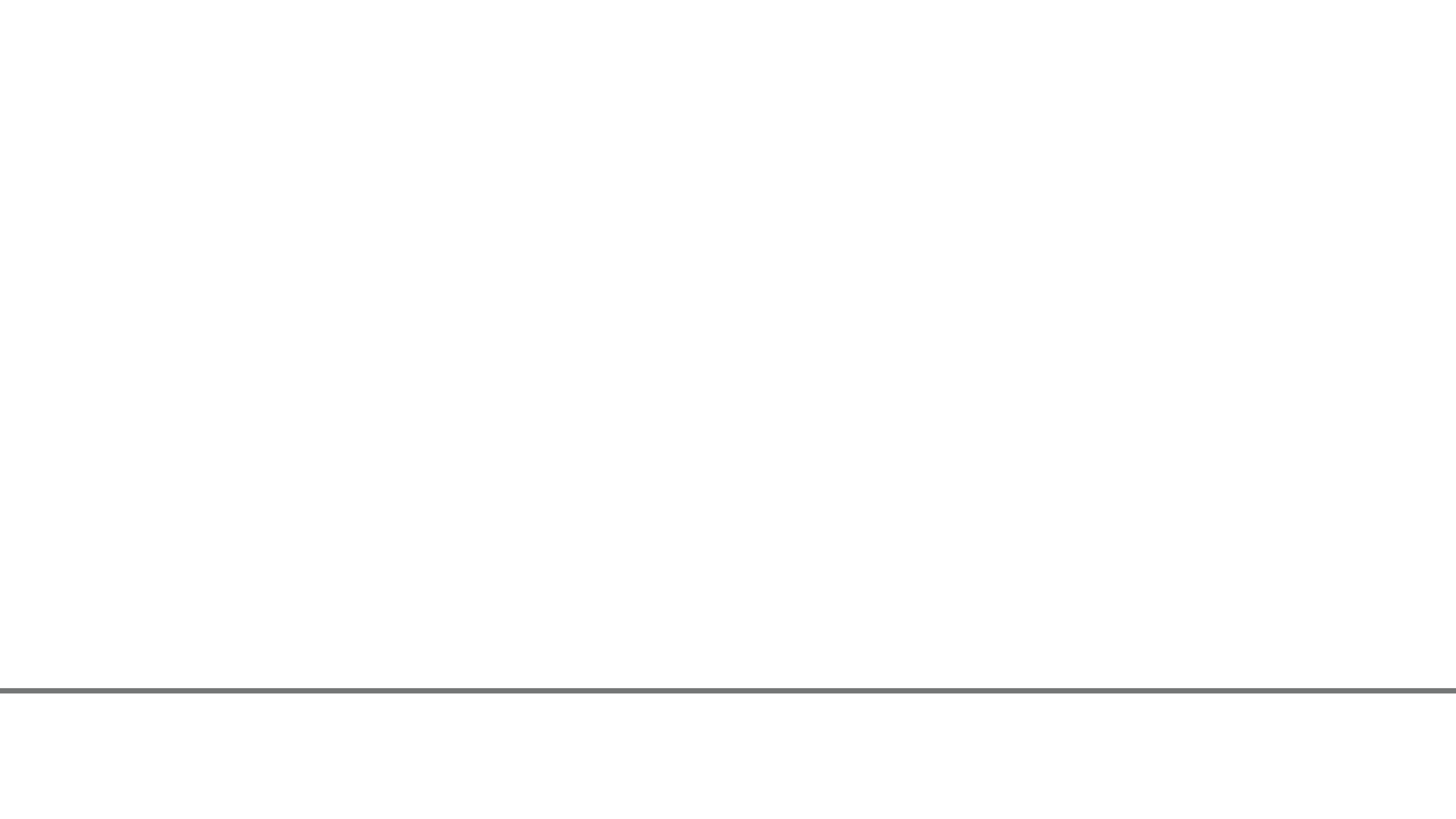


## 2. LINE

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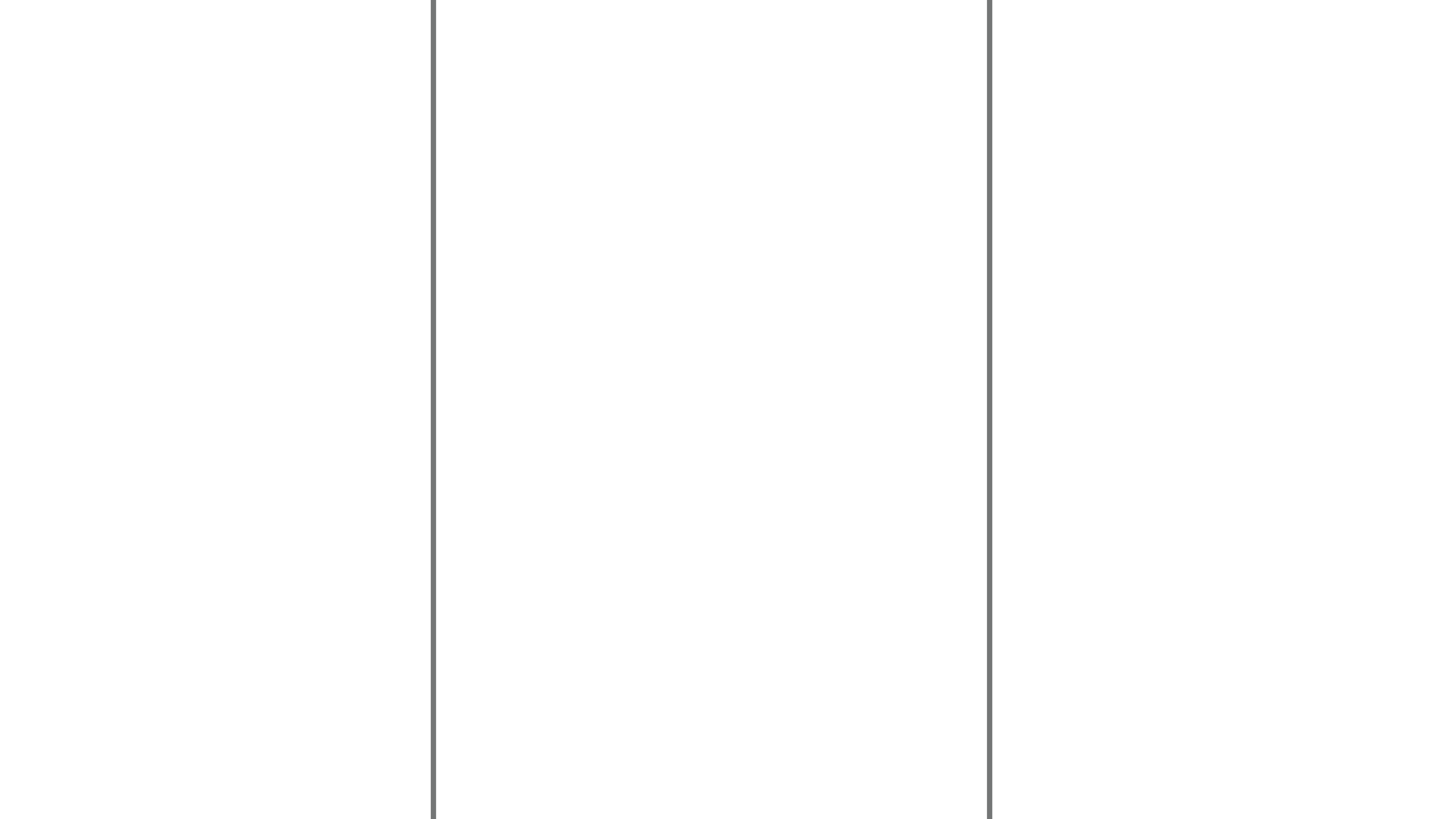
- When the dots are so close together that it is impossible to identify them individually, the sense of direction increases, and the chain of points becomes another distinct visual element: the line.

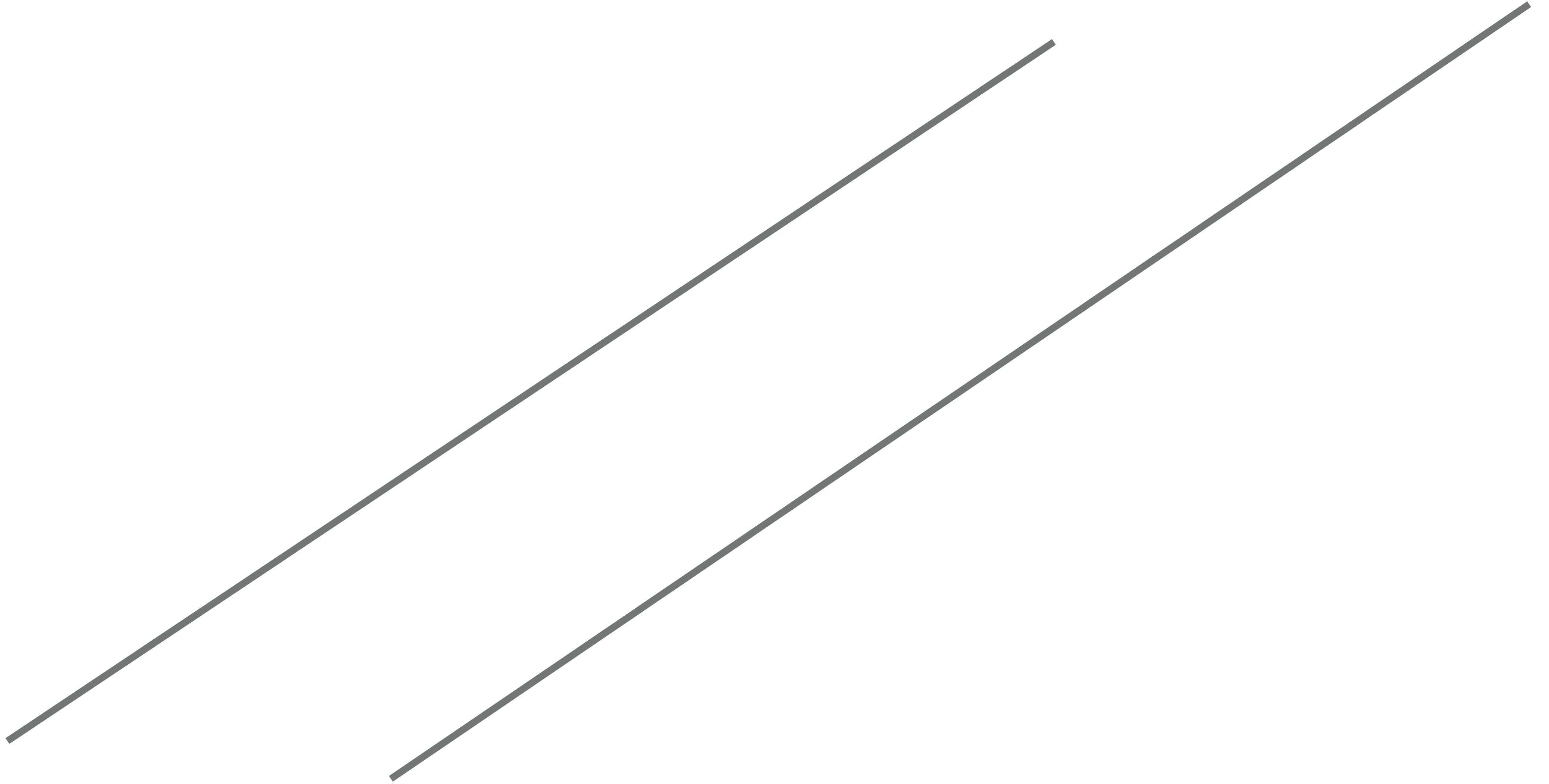








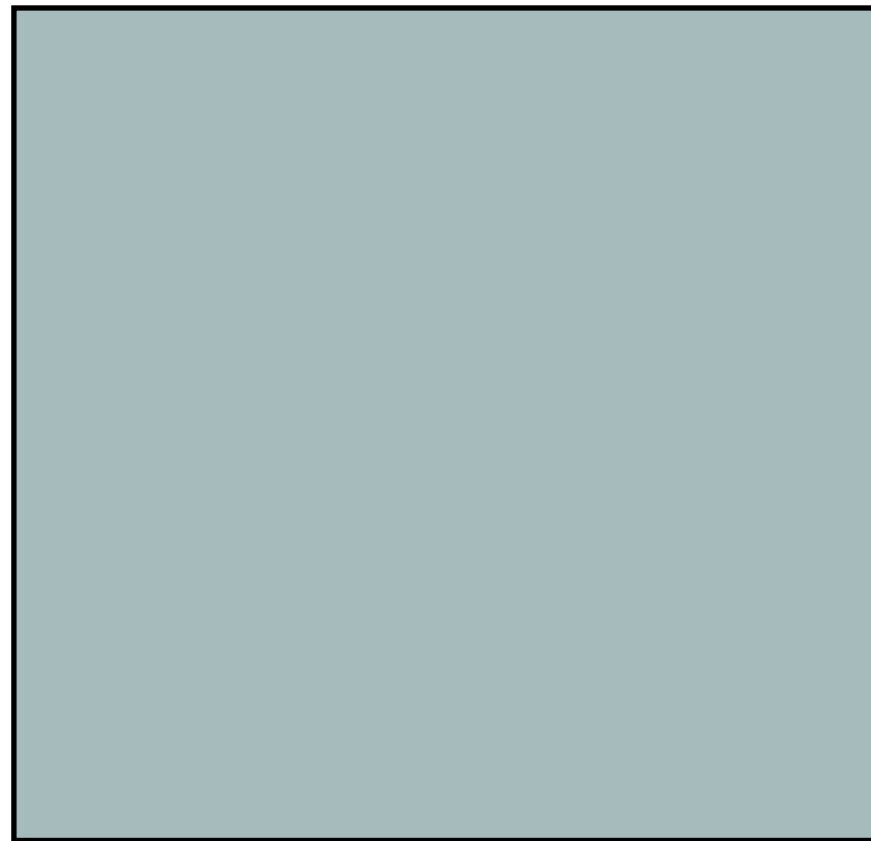




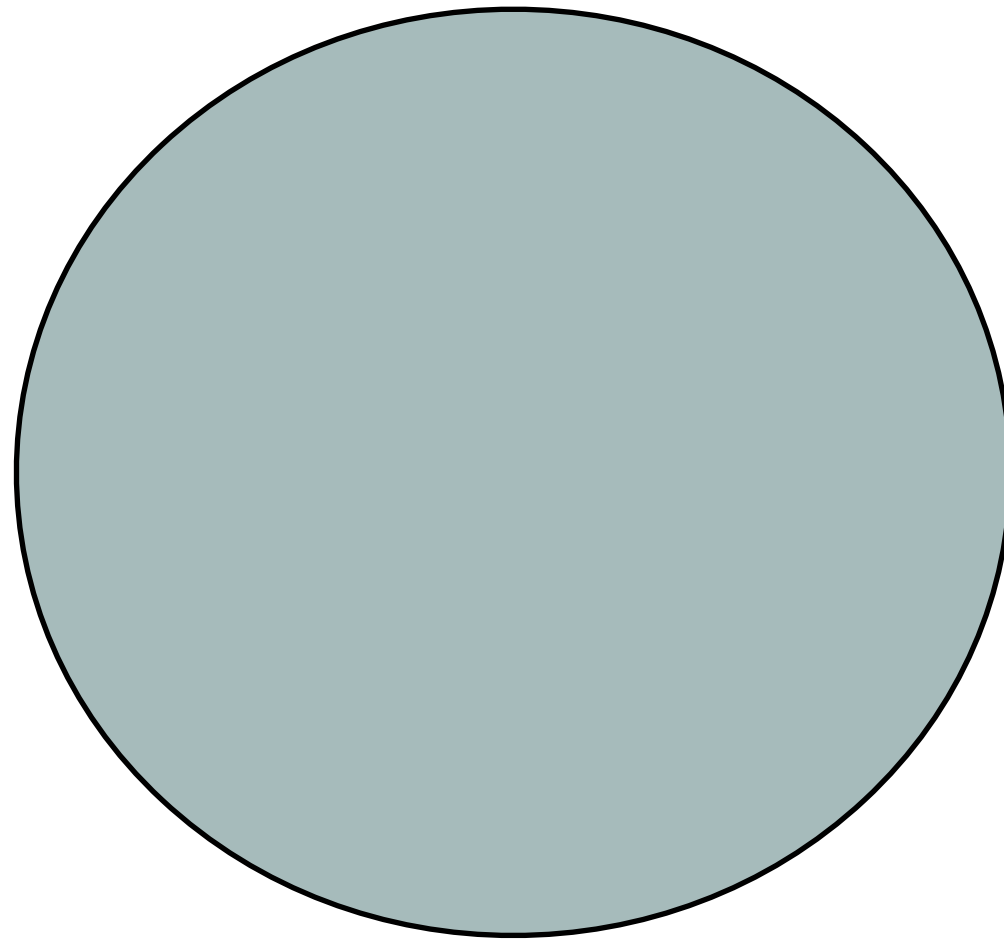
### 3. FORM

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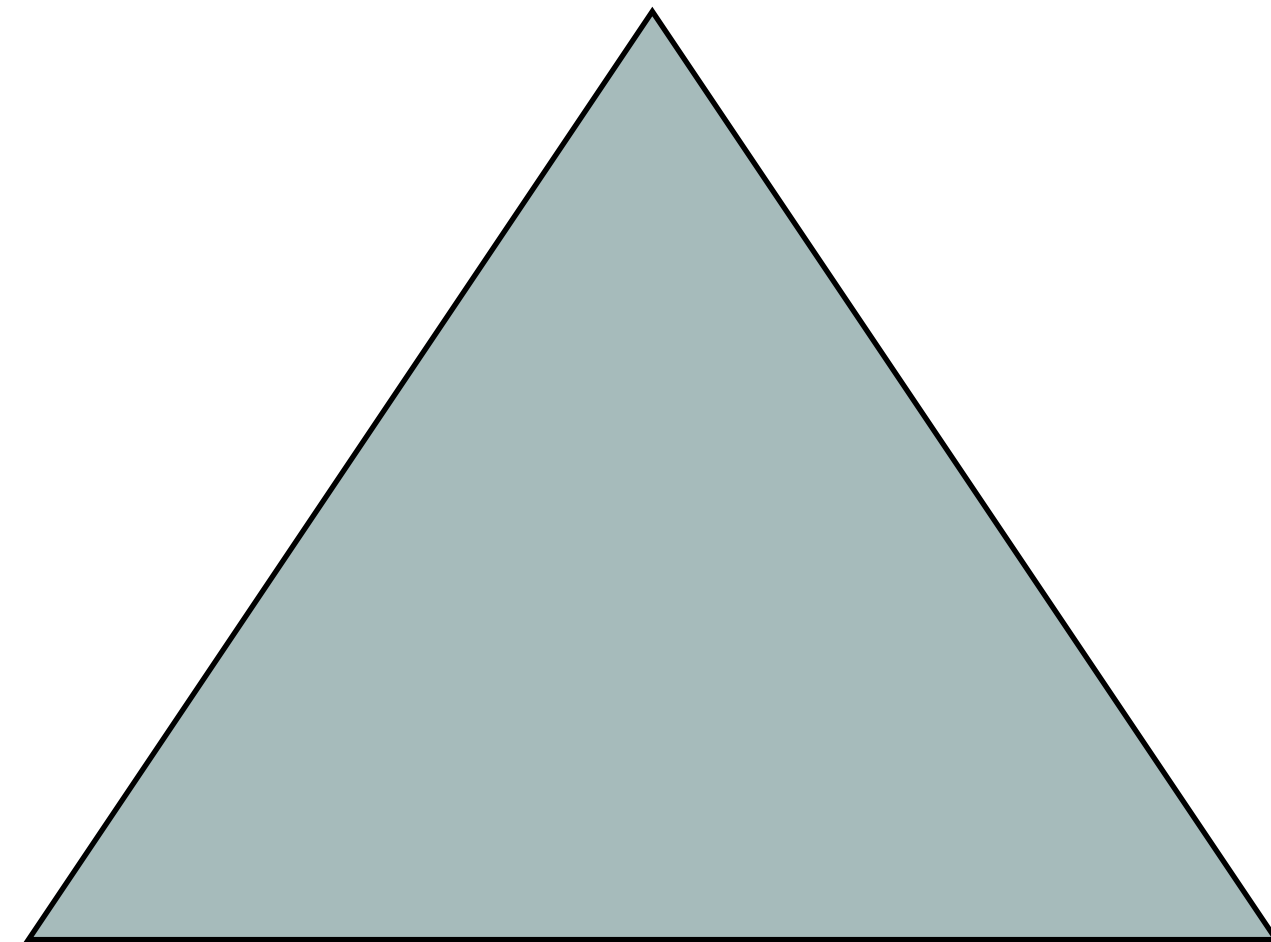
- A line describe a shape. There are 3 basic shapes:



square



circle



equilateral triangle

- From infinite combinations and variations of these 3 basic forms, we derive all physical forms from nature and human imagination.

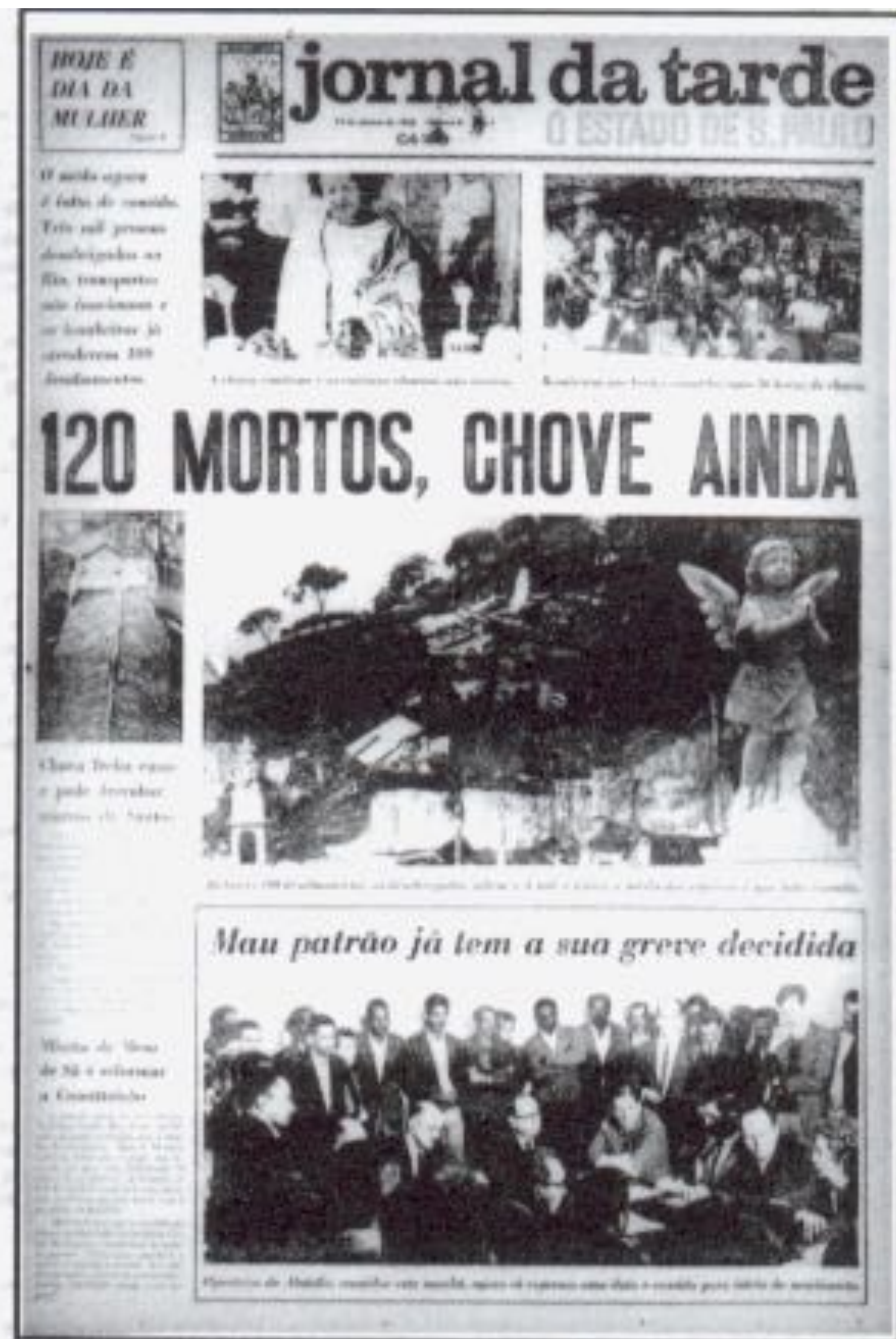
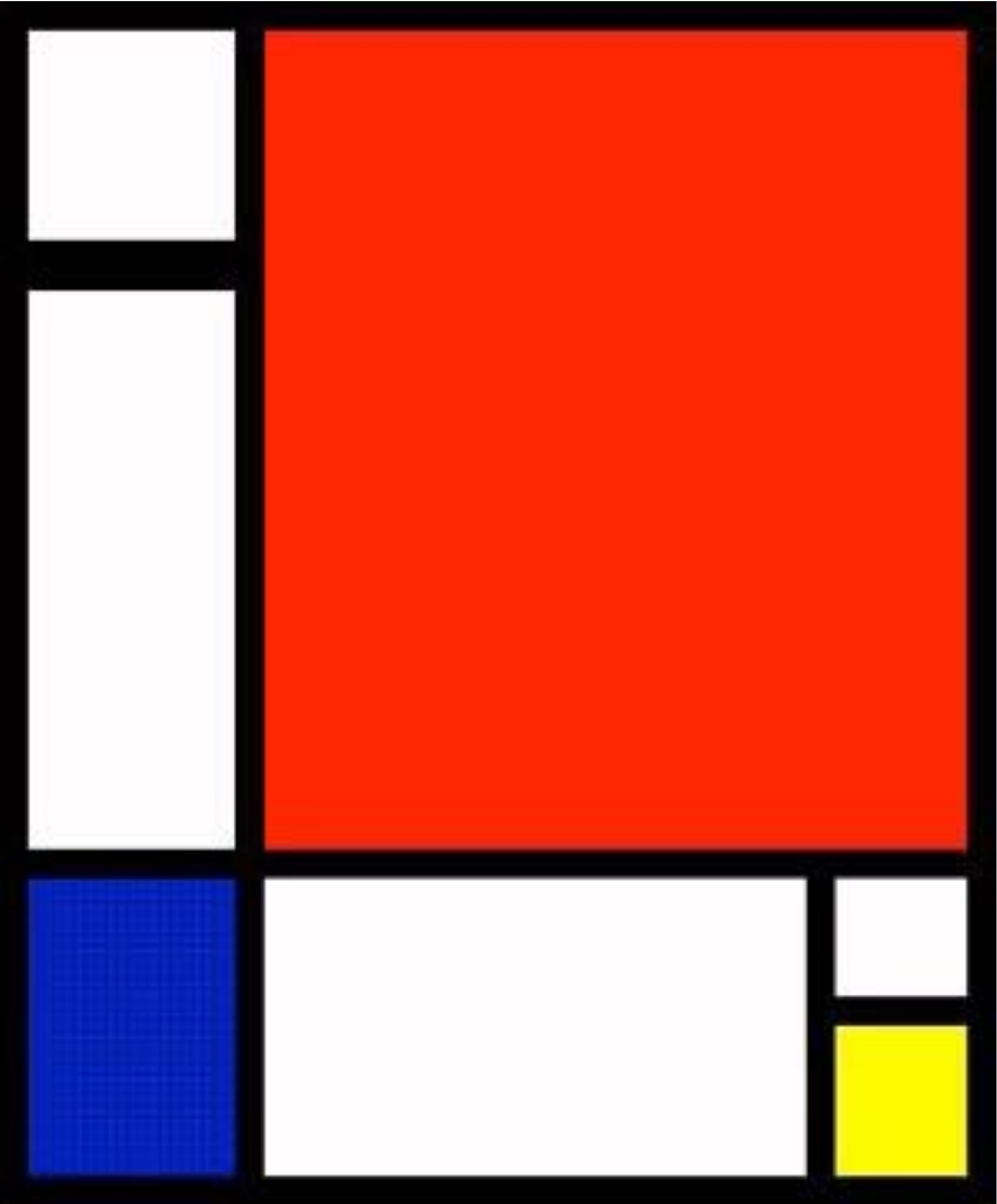


Figura 13. 12 de janeiro de 1966



Mondrian – 1872 - 1944

# SQUARE – CIRCLE – TRIANGLE

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- Each of the 3 basic forms has its specific characteristics.
- Each is attributed a large number of meanings, some by association, others by arbitrary linkage, and still others by our own psychological and physiological perceptions.

# SQUARE

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- Honesty
- Righteousness
- Sobriety
- Angry

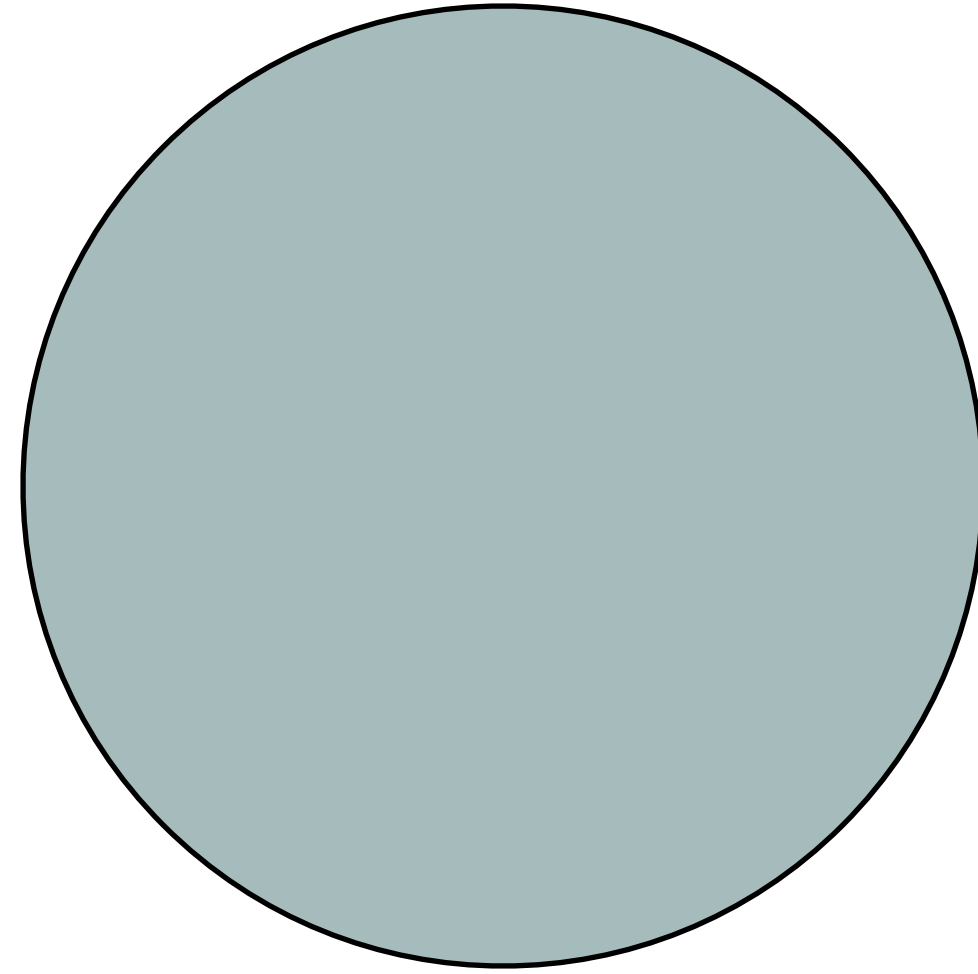




# CIRCLE

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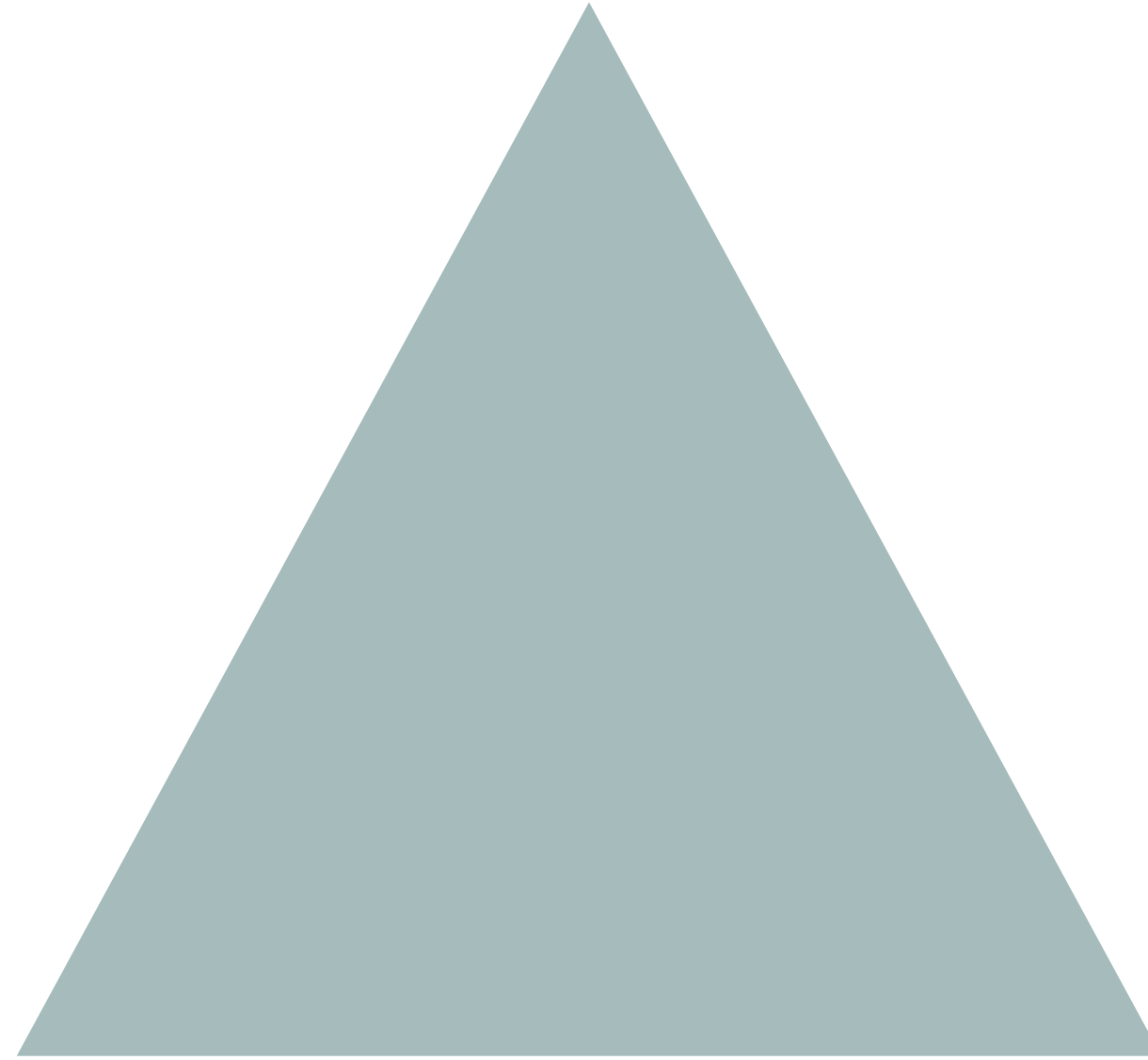
- Infinity
- Warmth
- Protection



# TRIANGLE

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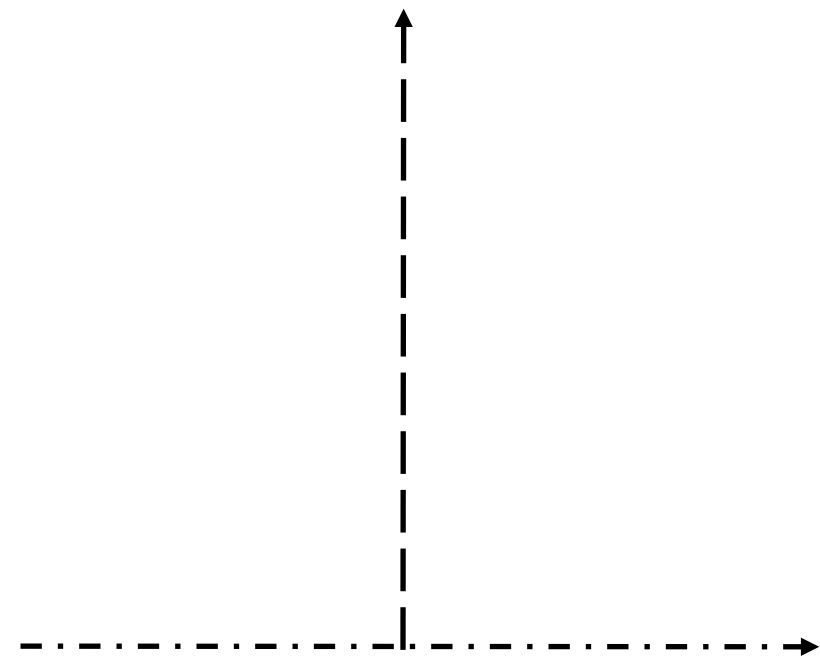
- Conflict
- Tension
- Action



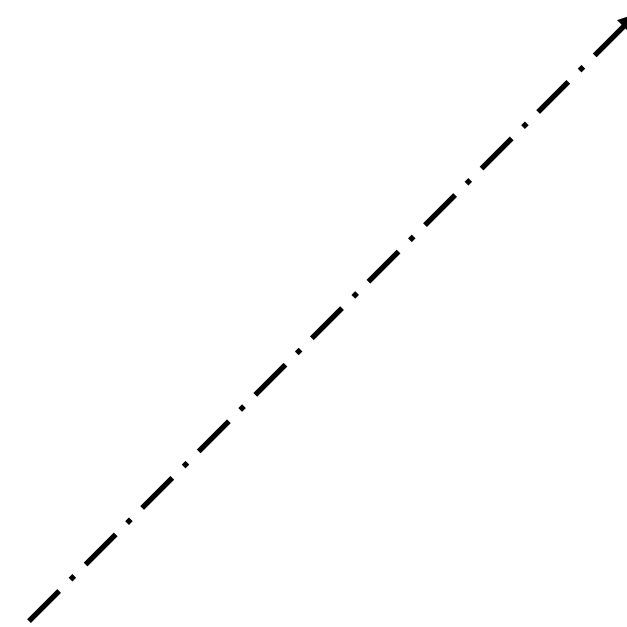
## 4. DIRECTION

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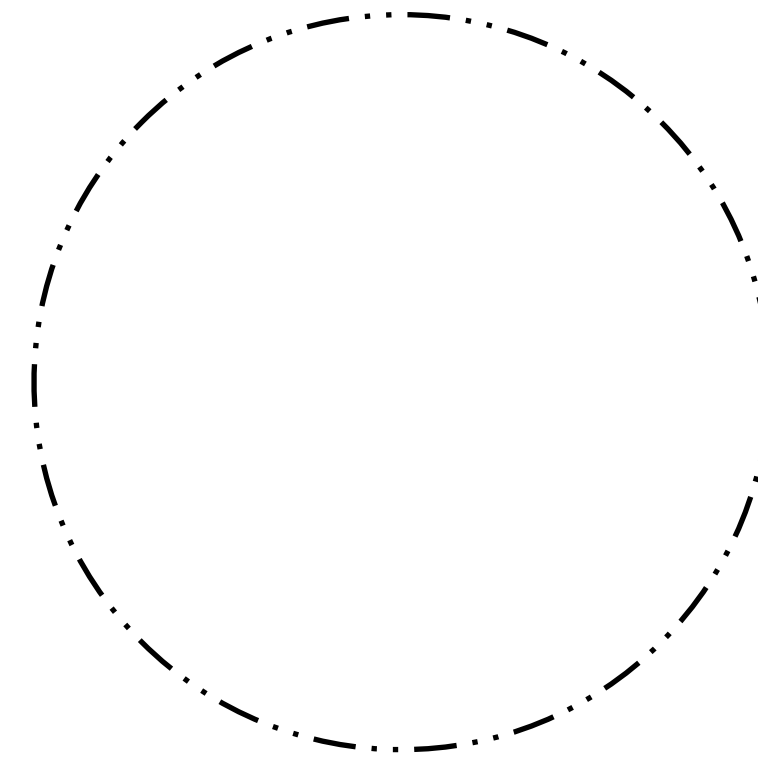
- Each of the basic forms expresses the basic directions that will demonstrate the intentions of the author.



Square:  
horizontal e vertical



Triangle:  
diagonal

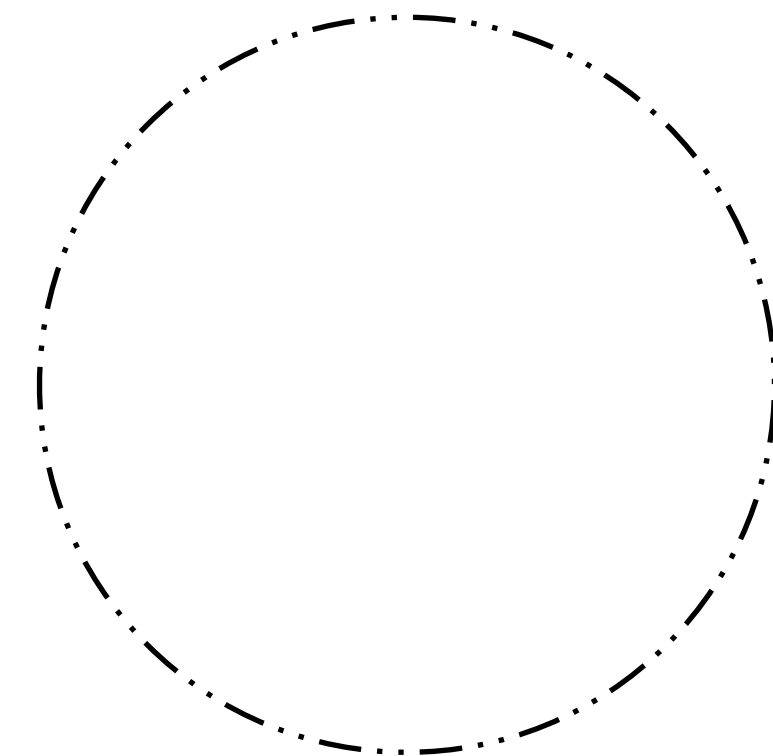
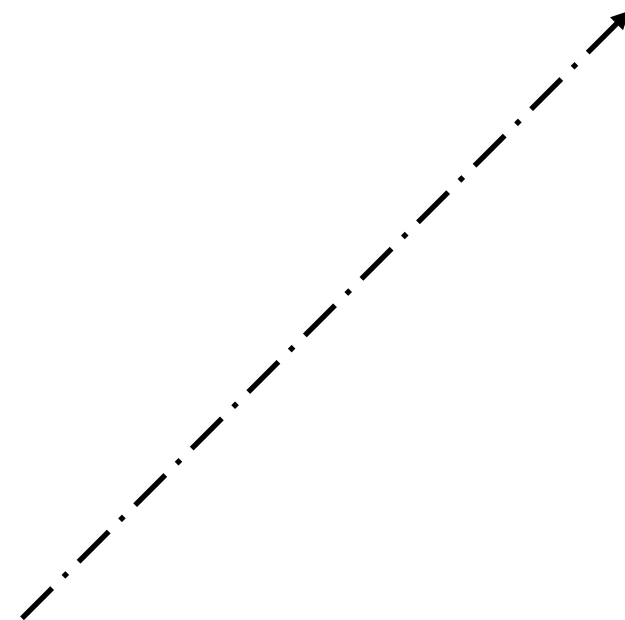
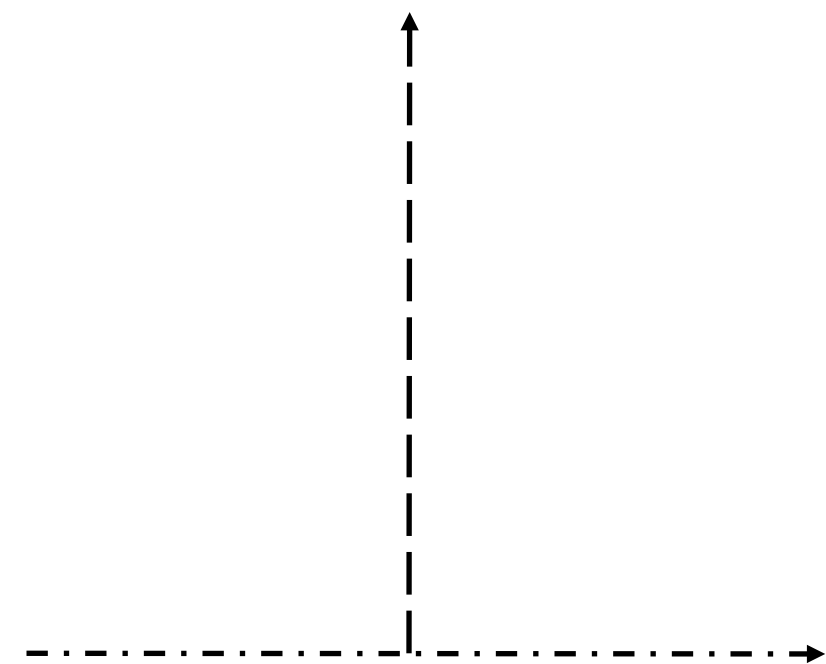


Circle:  
curve

# THE DIRECTIONS HAVE A STRONG ASSOCIATIVE MEANING FOR THE CREATION OF VISUAL MESSAGES

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- Horizontal and vertical: balance and stability
- Diagonal: instability and, consequently, the most provocative of visual formulations.
- Curves: comprehension, repetition, acceptance.
- All directional forces are of great importance for compositional intent geared to a defined effect and meaning.



## 5. TONE

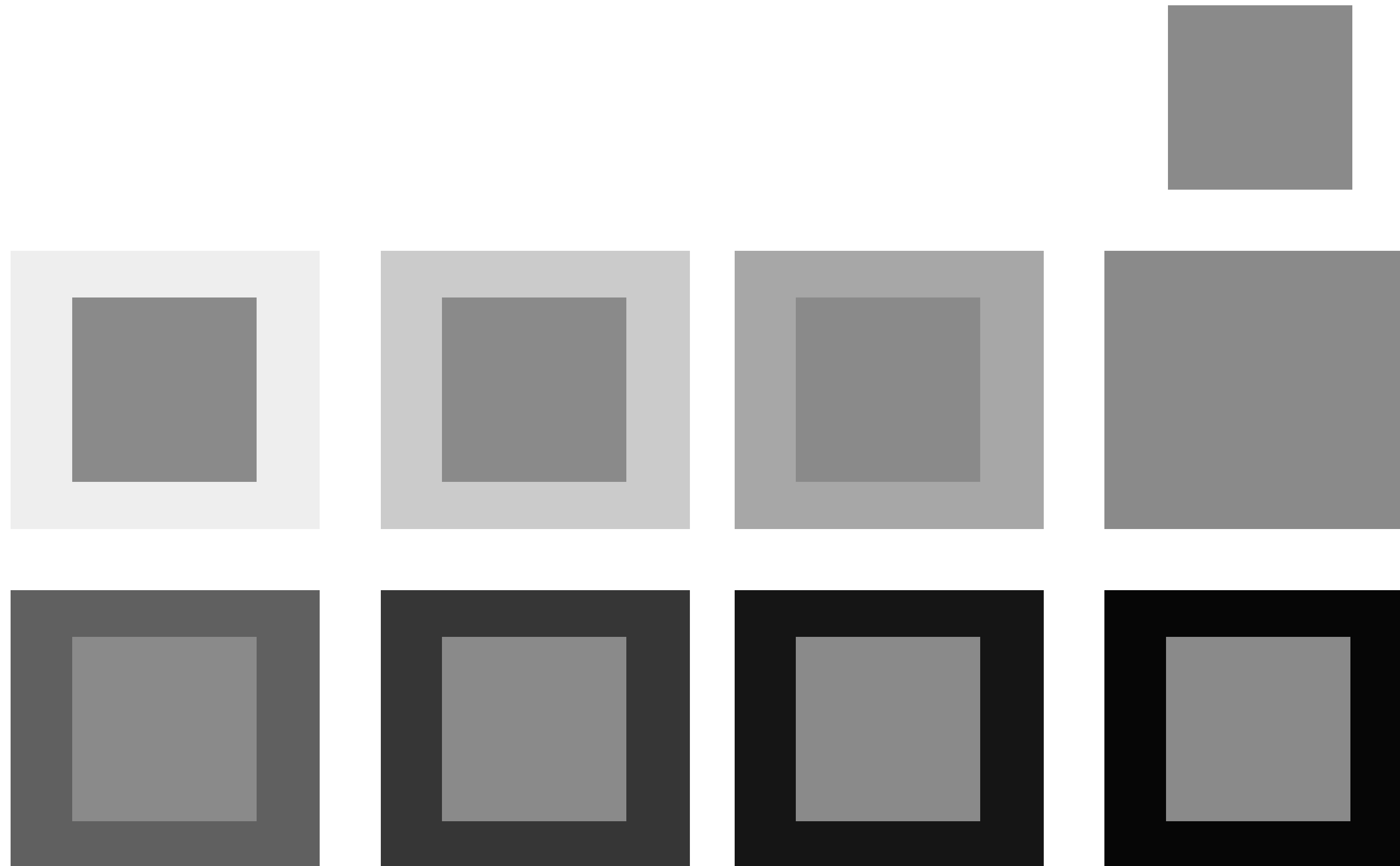
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- Variations in light or tone are the means by which we optically distinguish the complexity of information from the environment.
- The tone gives complexity to visual information.
- When we speak of tonality in the graphic arts, painting, photography and cinema, we make reference to some type of pigment, ink or silver nitrate, which is used to simulate the natural tone.
- The world we see is dimensional and the tone is one of the best instruments available to the viewer to indicate and express this dimension.

# ARTIFICIAL GRADATIONS ARE LIMITED

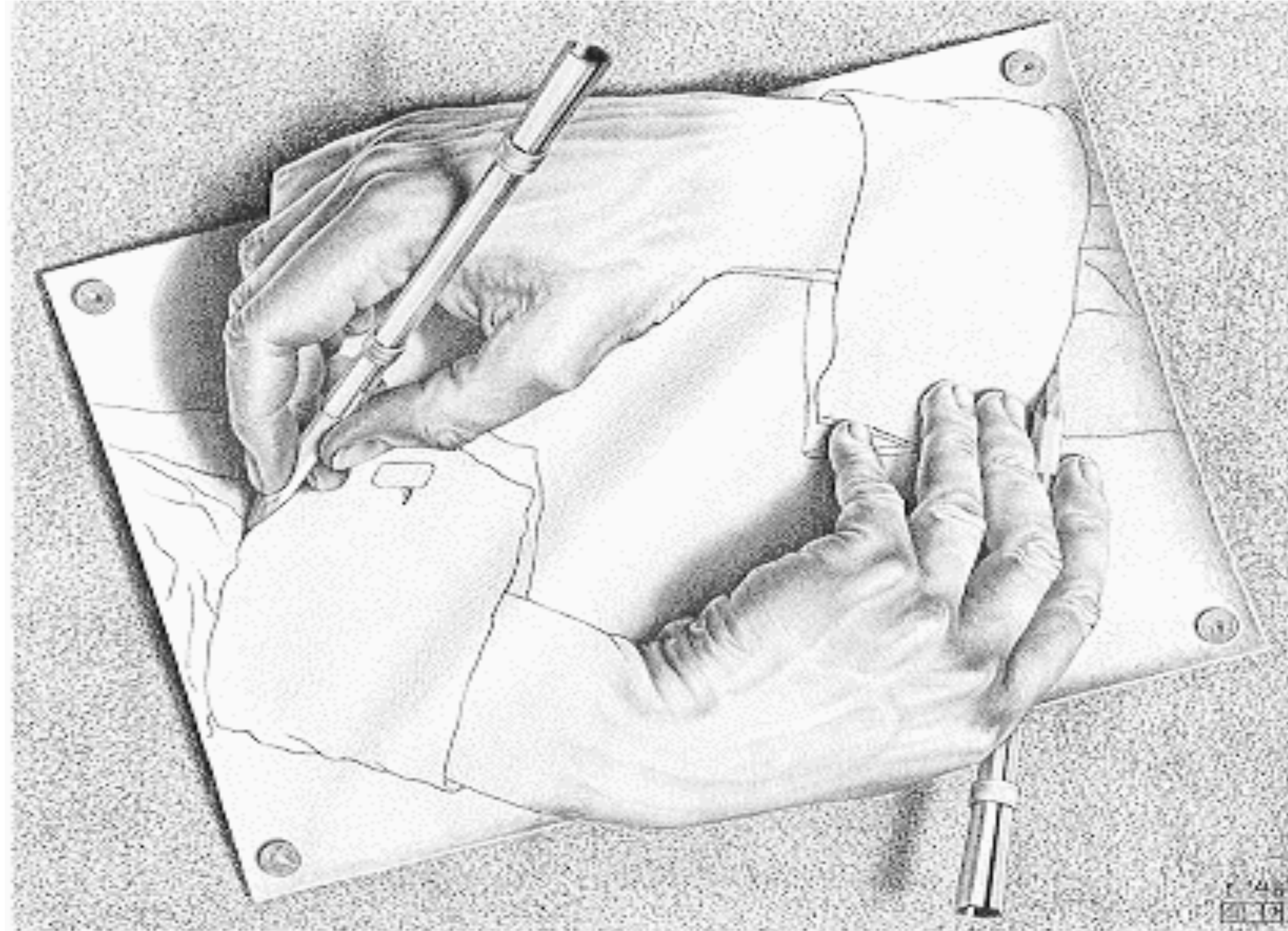
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- To increase the scope, or the number of possibilities, we can use juxtaposition.



# TONE ALSO INFLUENCES THE PERSPECTIVE

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Escher (1898 – 1972) Dutch Graphic Artists

# tone also influences the perspective

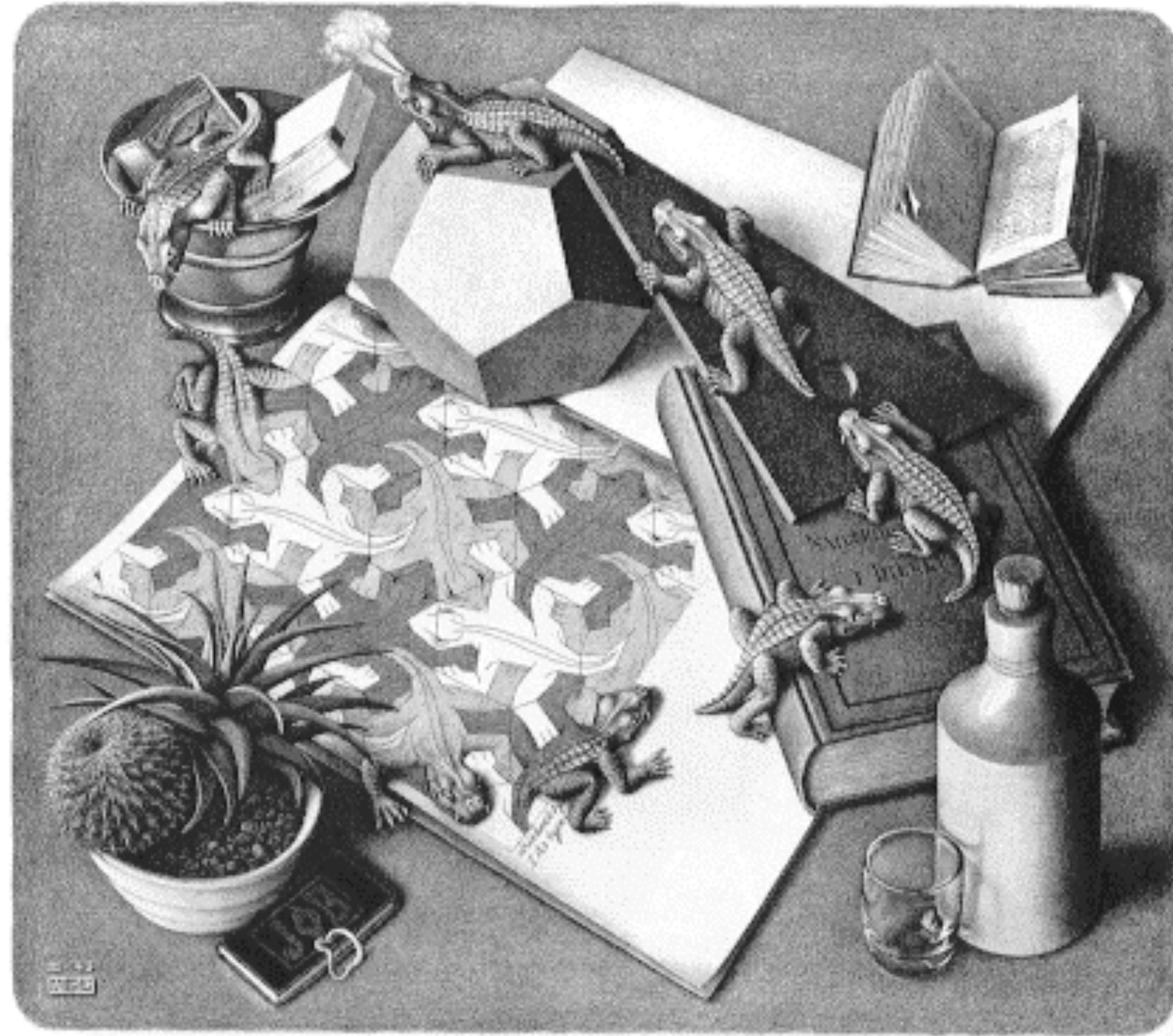
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# TONE ALSO INFLUENCES THE PERSPECTIVE

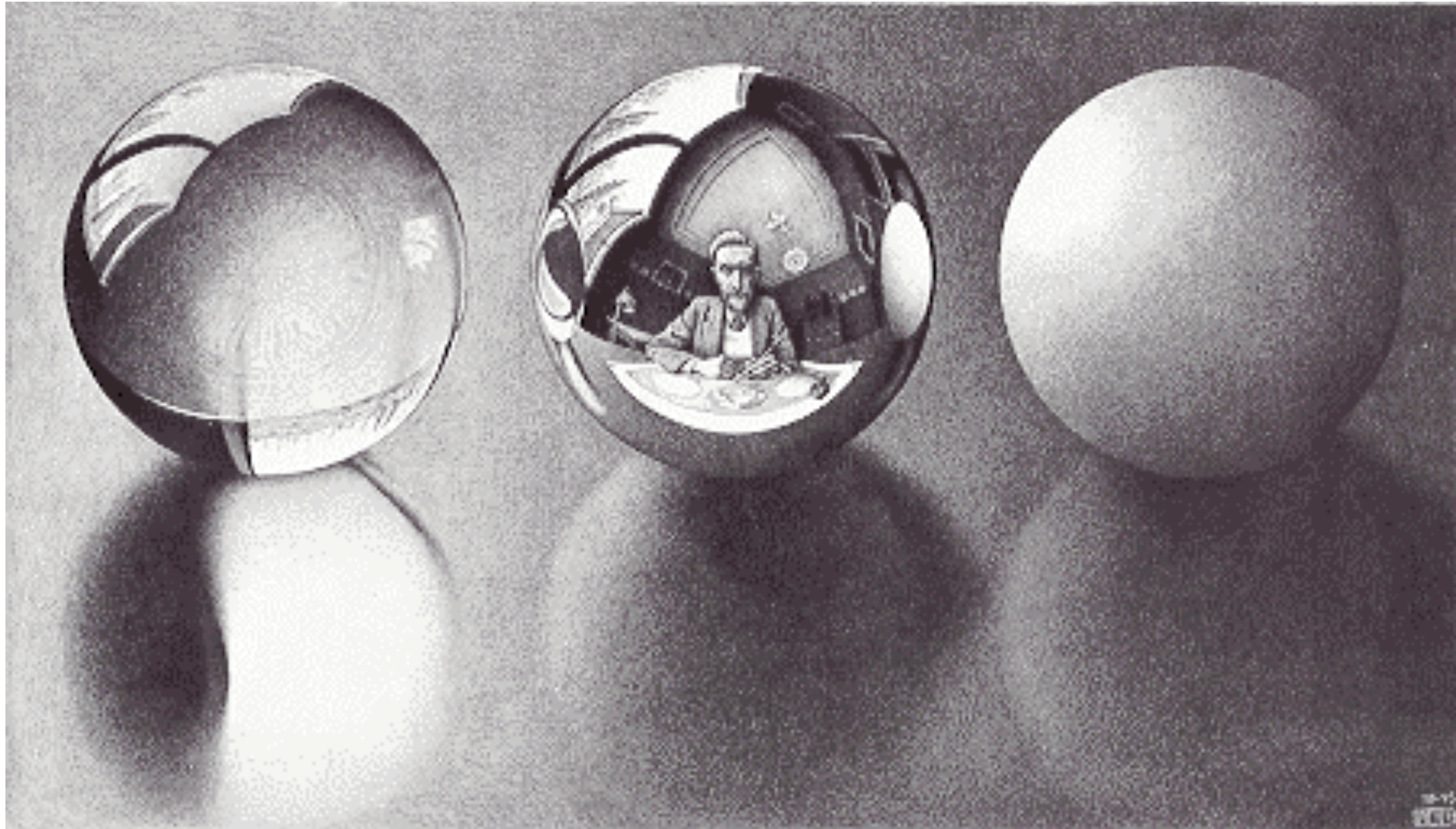
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Maurits Cornelis Escher

# TONE ALSO INFLUENCES THE PERSPECTIVE

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Maurits Cornelis Escher

## 6. COLOUR

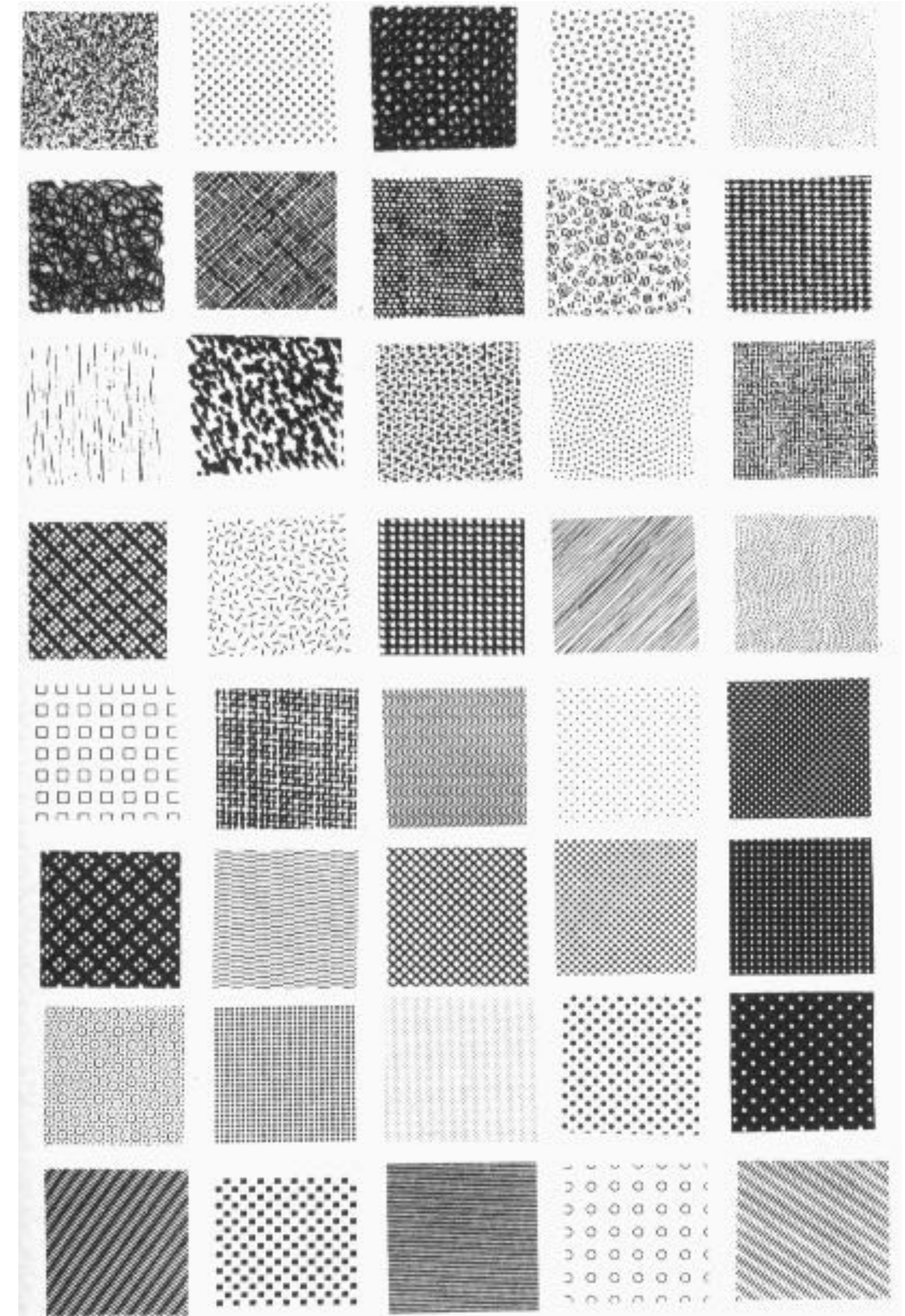
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- The colour is impregnated with information and is one of the most penetrating visual information. It is a source of inestimable value for visual communicators.
- Colour is known for its vast category of symbolic meanings.
- Because colour perception is the most emotional of the elements of the visual process, it has great strength and can be used with great benefit to express and intensify visual information.

# 7. TEXTURE

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- Texture is the visual element that often serves as a substitute for the qualities of another sense: touch.
- We can recognize texture both through touch and sight.



## 8. SCALE

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- The fundamental factor in establishing the scale is the measure of the human being, that is, ourselves.
- In architecture and design issues involving comfort and suitability, everything that is designed or manufactured is associated with the average size of human proportions.

# ALL THE VISUAL ELEMENTS ARE CAPABLE OF MODIFYING AND DEFINING EACH OTHER

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- The elements are interdependent, that is, everything depends on the referential.
- Size is always related to the goal and the meaning one wants to give, even if it is illusory.



Even when establishing the big through the small, the whole scale can be modified by the introduction of other visual information.

# SCALE IS ALSO OBTAINED THROUGH THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FIELD OR THE ENVIRONMENT

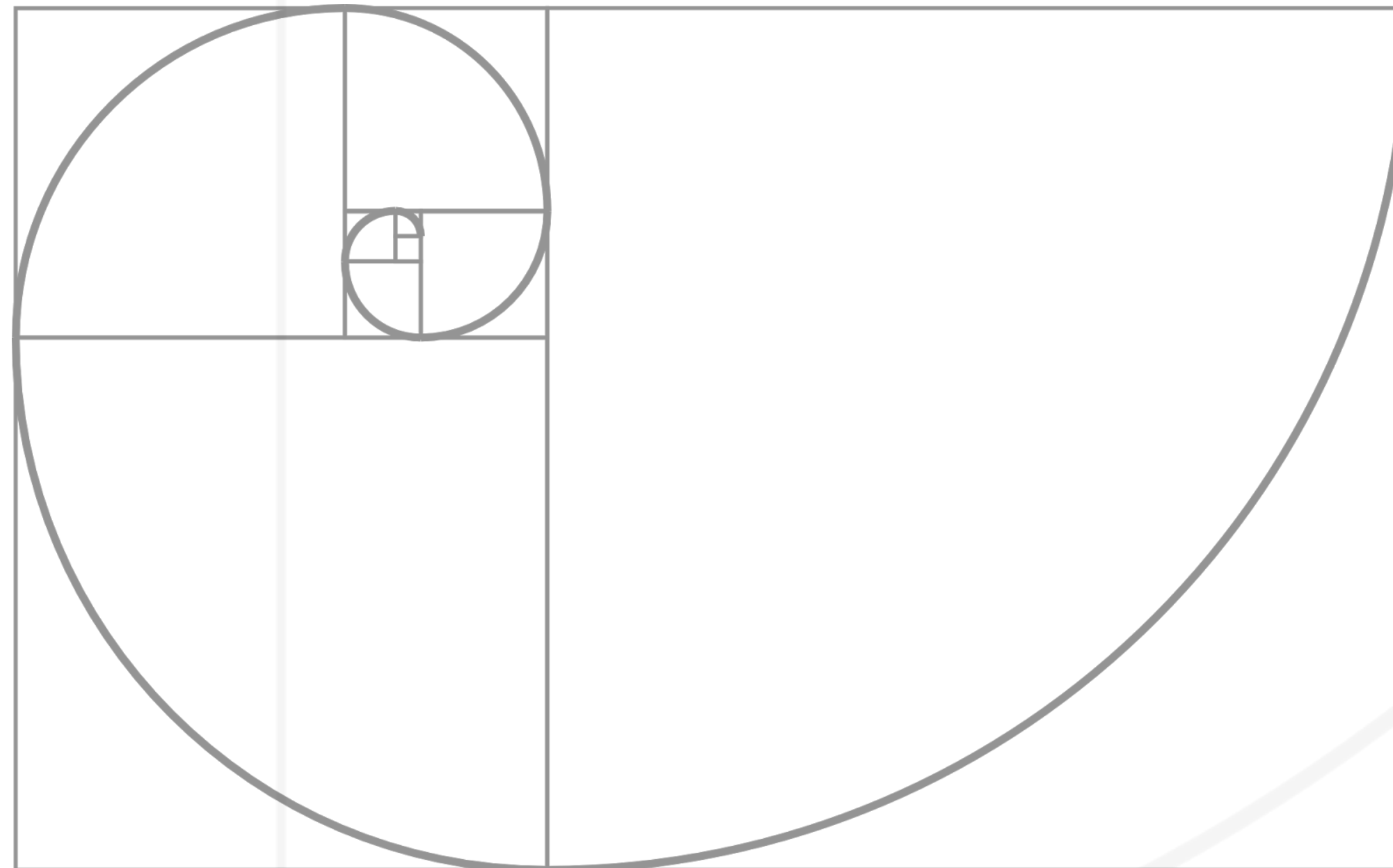
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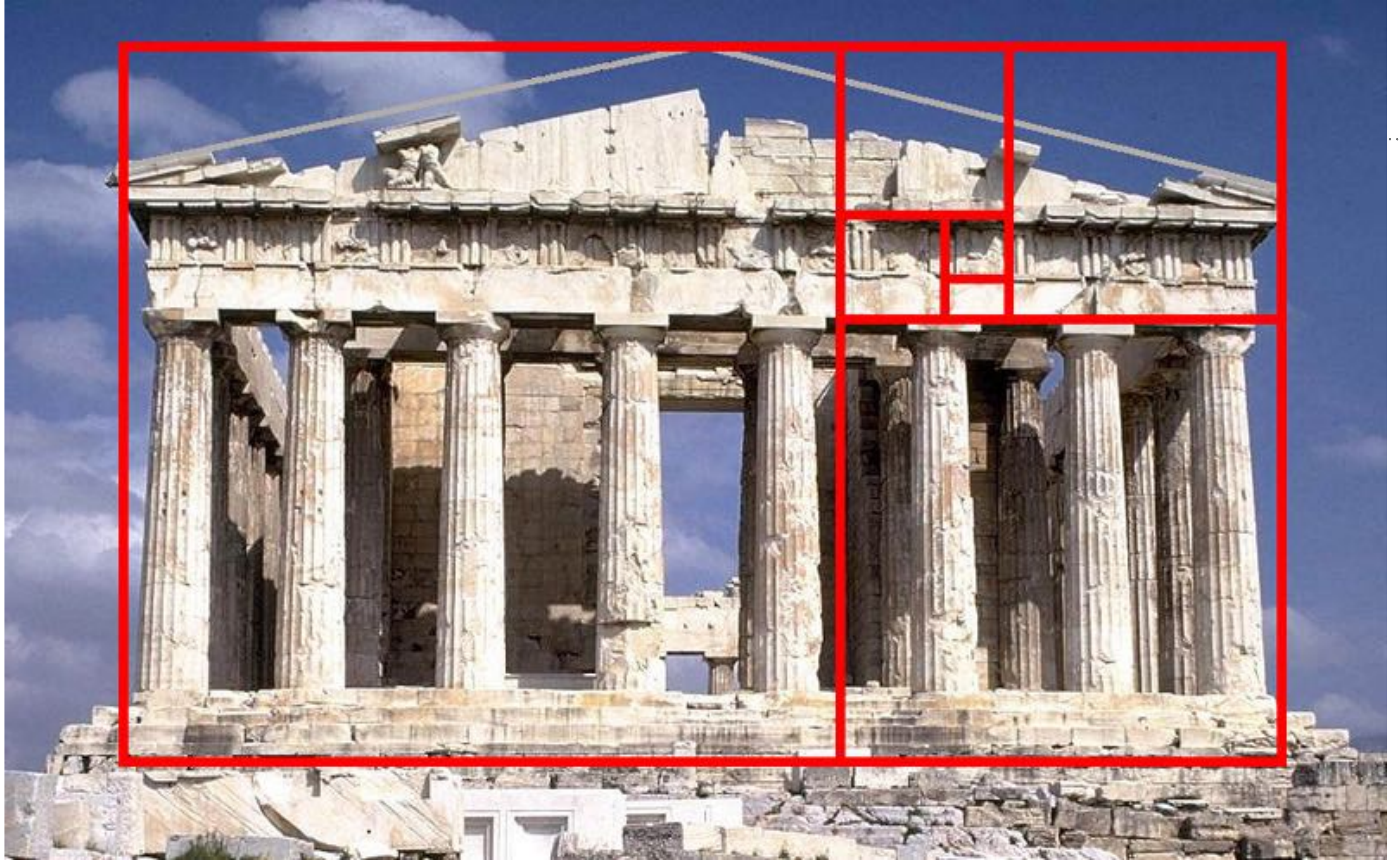
# GOLDEN RATIO

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- To achieve this, the wisemen of Classical Antiquity have defined the following formula: by dividing a line segment into two unequal parts, the ratio (or proportion) between the largest part and the smallest part must be equal to the proportion of the whole with respect to the larger part = 1.618 ... (gold number)







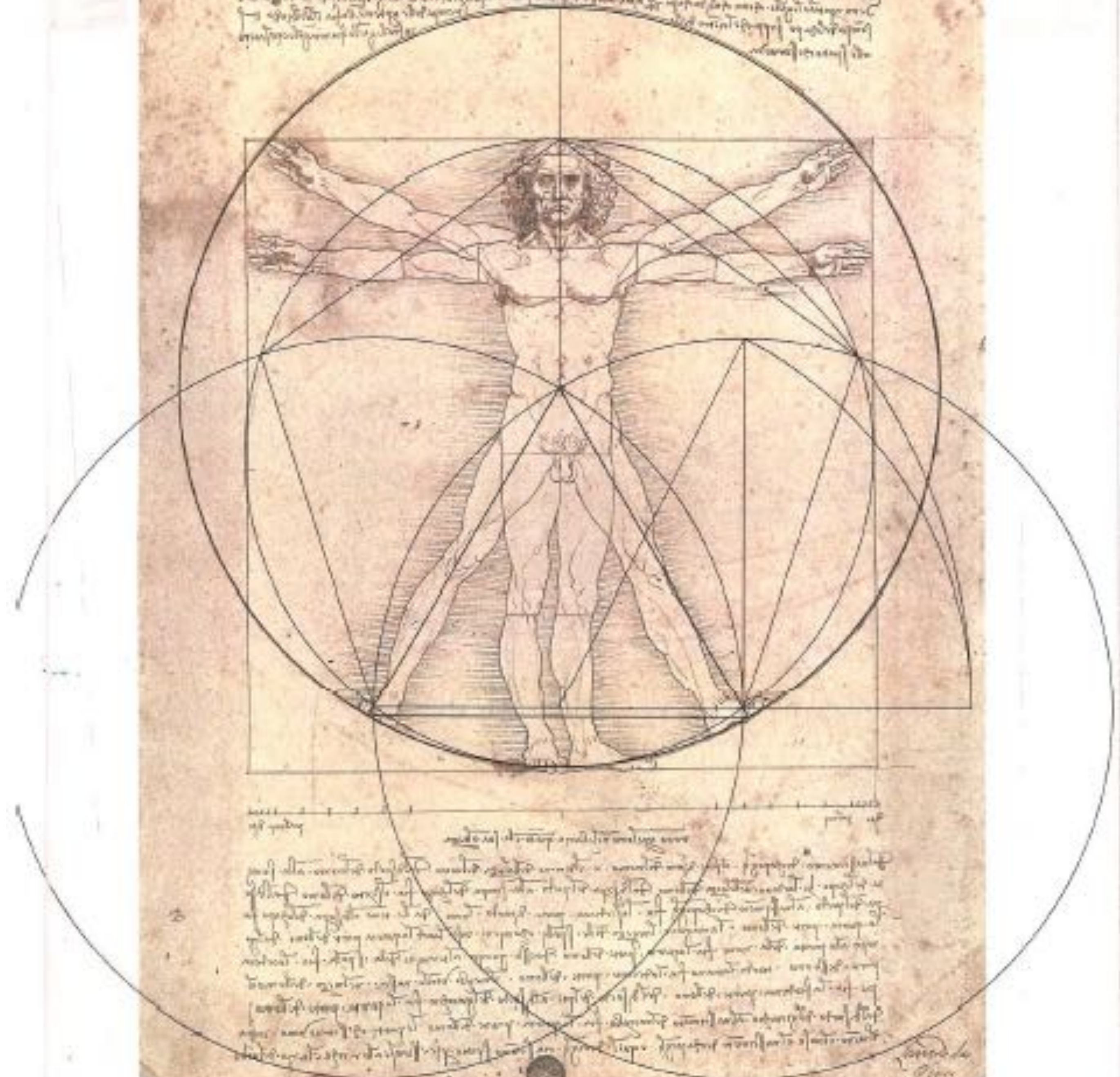


ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST C.1513  
MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

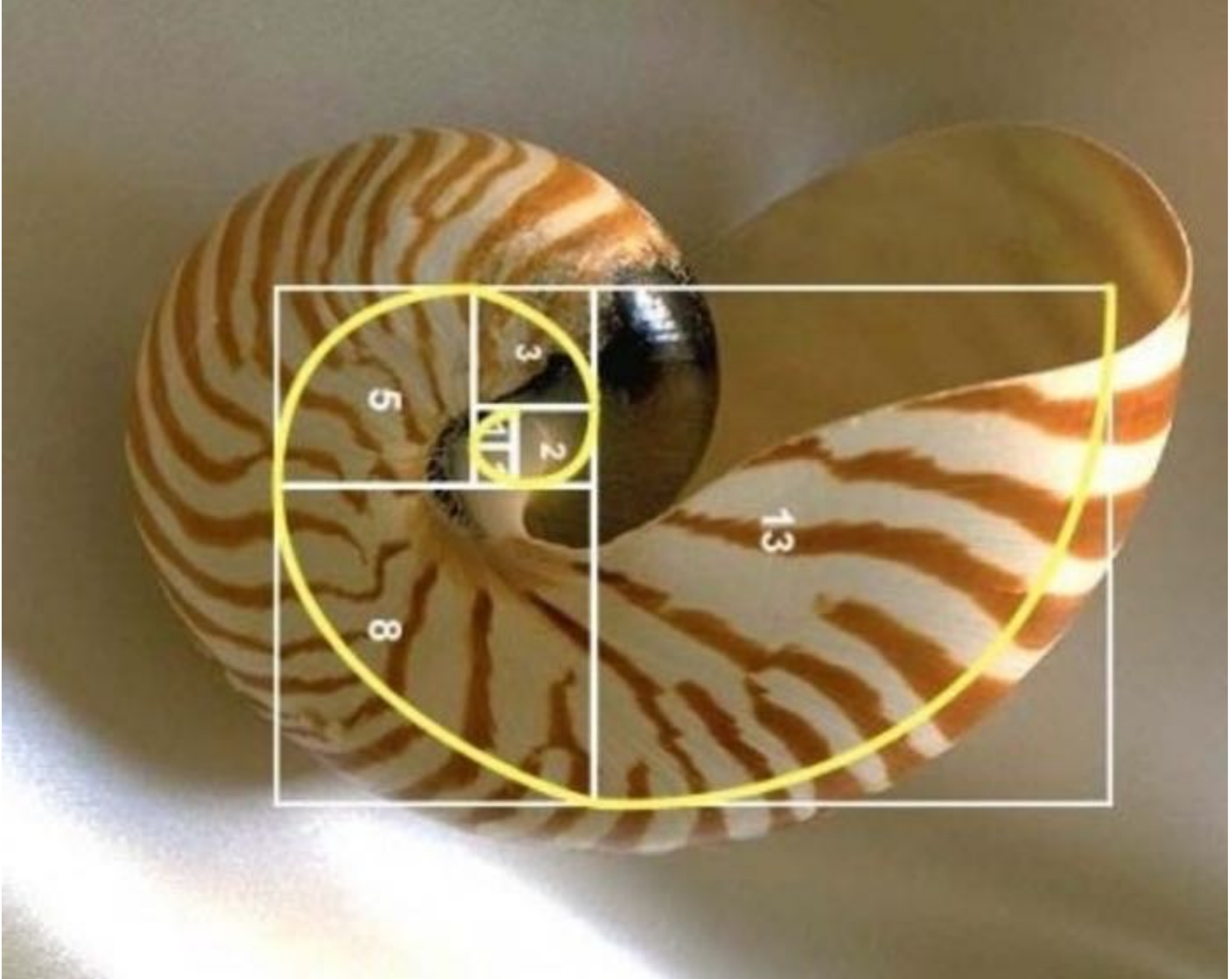


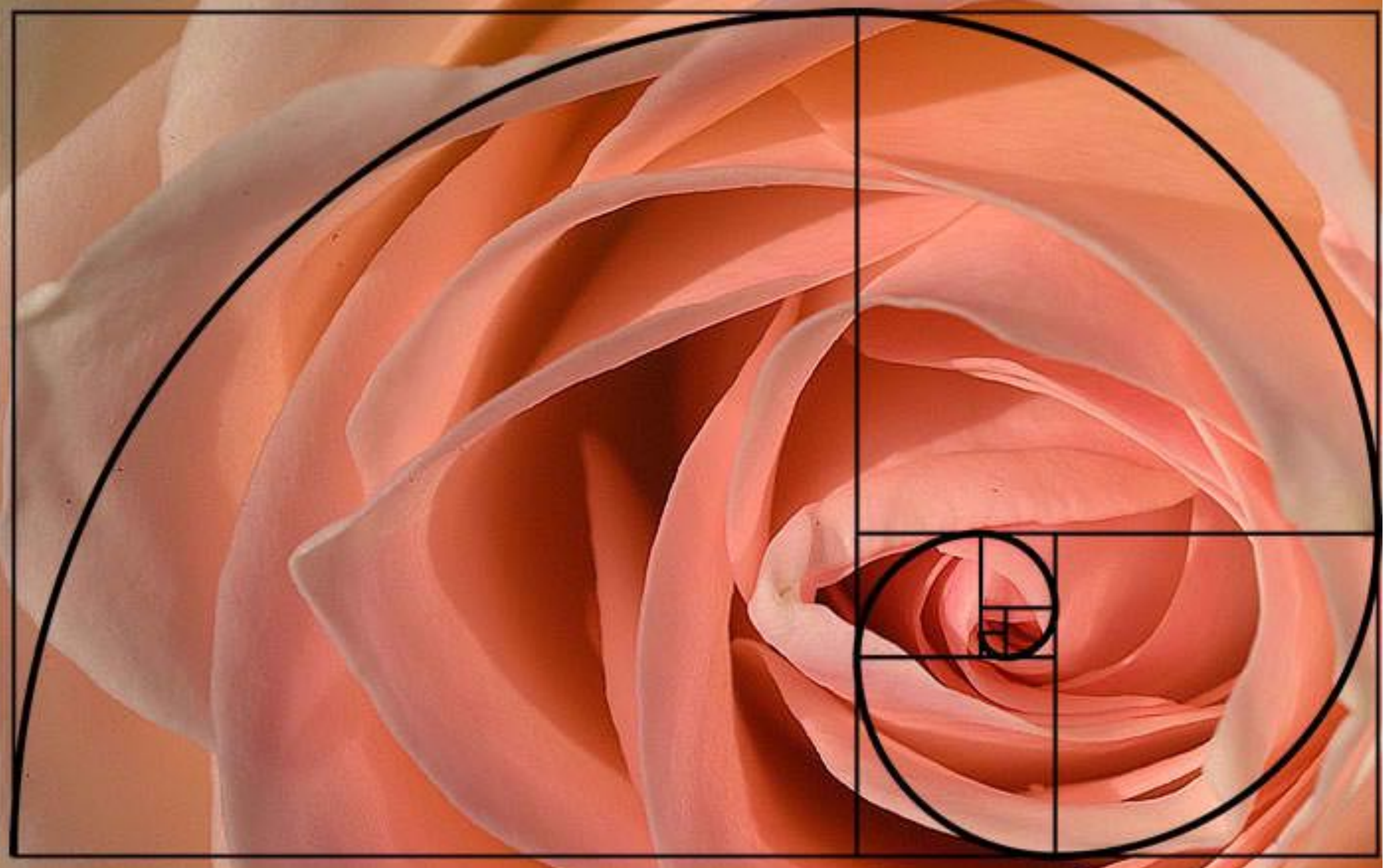
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST C.1513  
MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

Handwritten text in Italian, likely a preface or introduction to the study of proportions, discussing the relationship between the human body and mathematical geometry.



Handwritten text in Italian, likely a continuation of the study of proportions, discussing the relationship between the human body and mathematical geometry.





## 9. DIMENSION

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- The dimension exists in the real world and we can see it - we see in 3D.
- But in none of the two-dimensional representations of reality (drawing, painting, photography, film and television) is there a real dimension.
- The main artifice to simulate it is the technique of perspective, through tonal manipulation, and lights and shadows.

# PERSPECTIVE

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- The main paradox of two-dimensional art (painting, photography, engraving, etc): how to represent a world that is three-dimensional in only two dimensions (height and width but without depth)?
- The Egyptians, in antiquity, solved this problem by making two-dimensional representations.



# PERSPECTIVE

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- Subsequently, artists found that employing certain visual "tricks" is enough to induce the viewer to think that there is depth in the image.



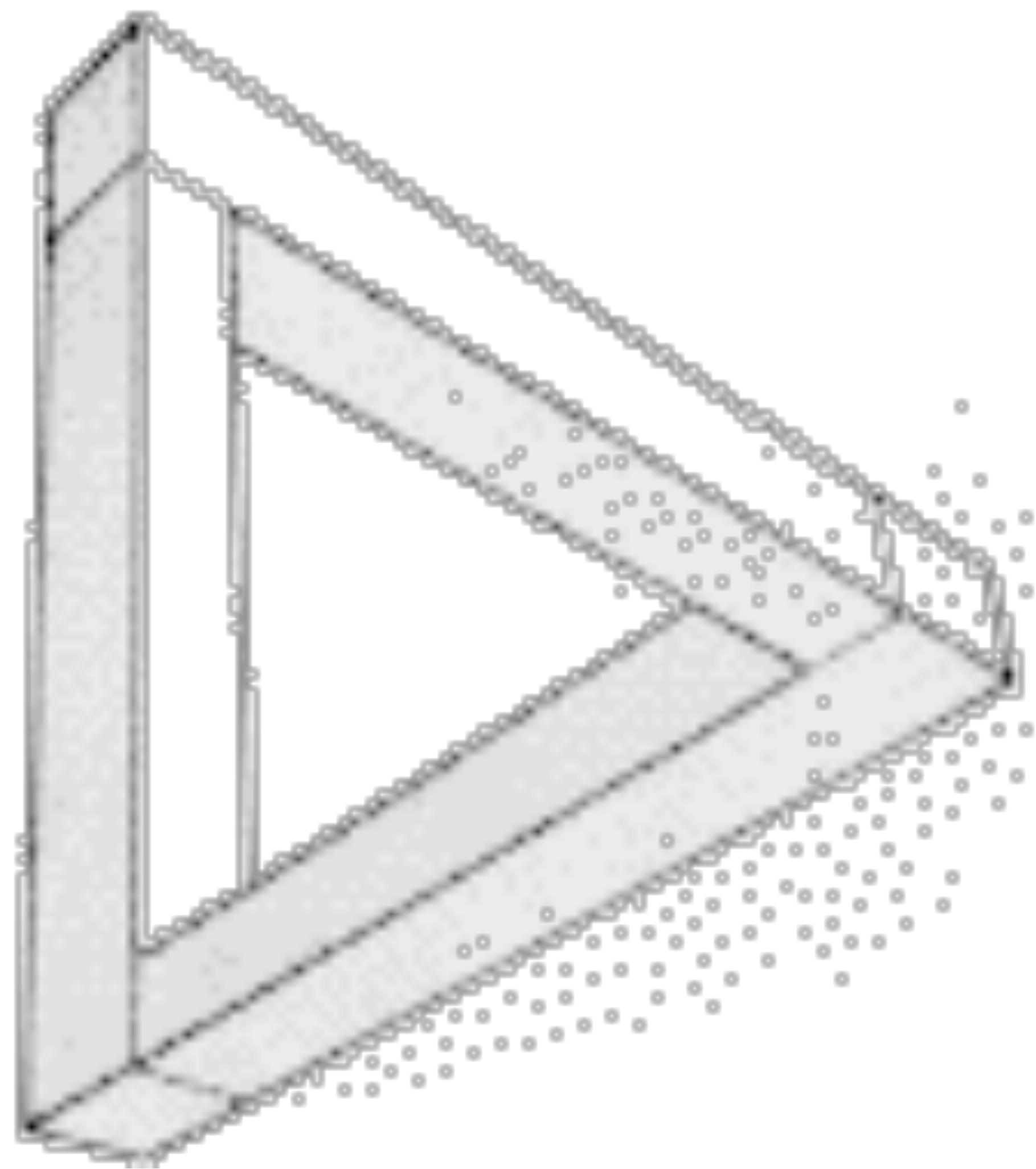


# PERSPECTIVE

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- In this painting, as in so many others, the tridimensionality is induced through "invisible lines" that make the brain think that the dog is "in the background".







## 10. MOVEMENT

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- Just like dimensions, it can also be simulated.
- It depends on the composition
- It depends on the way that time is registered in space (Chronotopic Anamorphosis)

# MOVEMENT

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- This photo is static two-dimensional record of an instant of time. But you can influence the movement of the human eye by guiding the gaze, and thus creating an **illusion** of movement.



# CHRONOTOPIC ANAMORPHOSIS

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# BASIC ELEMENTS OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

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- All these elements, the dot, the line, the form, the direction, the tone, the colour, the texture, the scale, the dimension, and the movement are the irreducible components of visual media.
- They are the basic ingredients that we rely on for the development of thought and visual communication.
- They have the potential to transmit information easily and directly, messages that can be easily understood by anyone who can see.



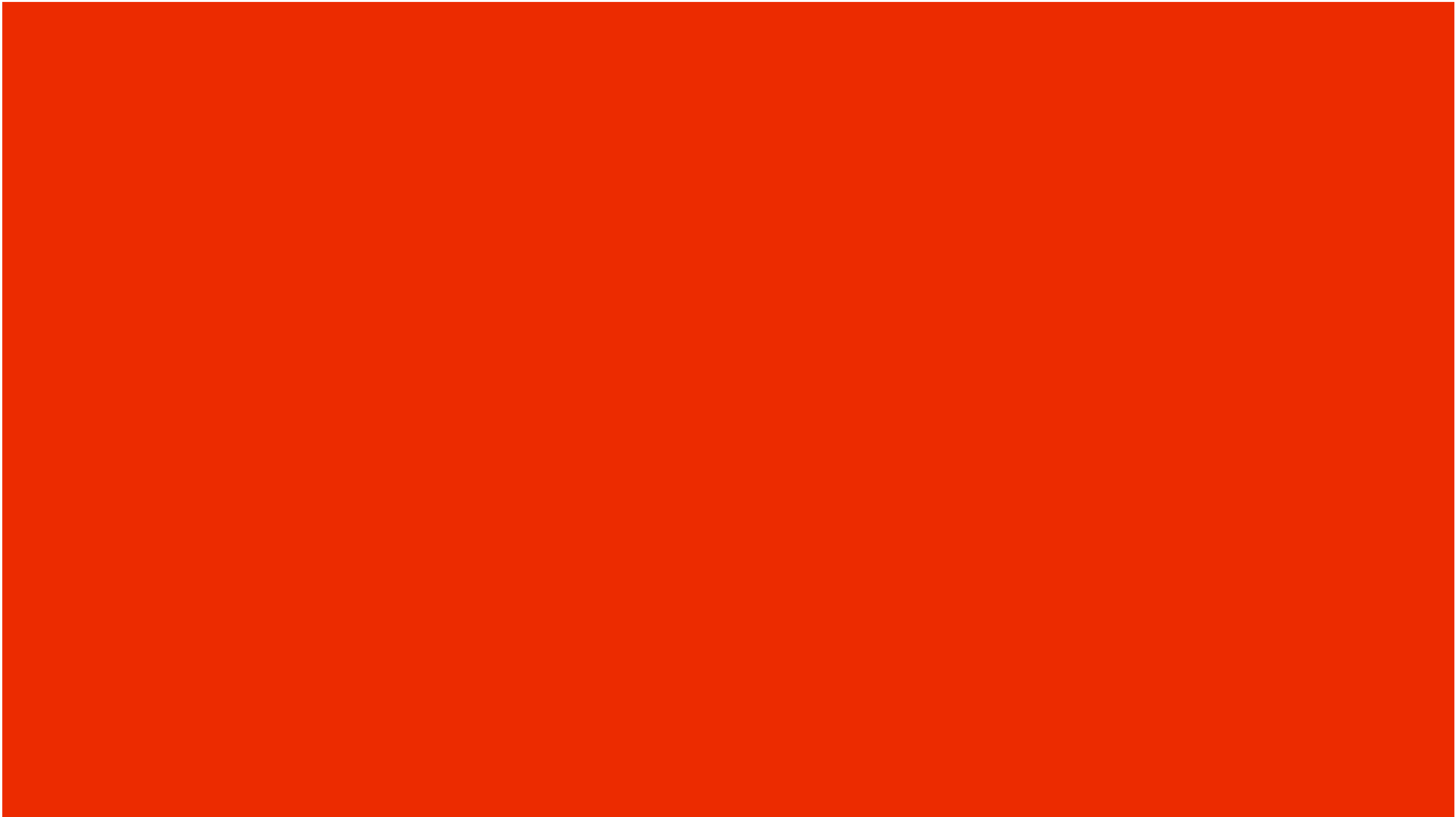
**“HOW DOES MEANING  
GET INTO THE IMAGE?”**

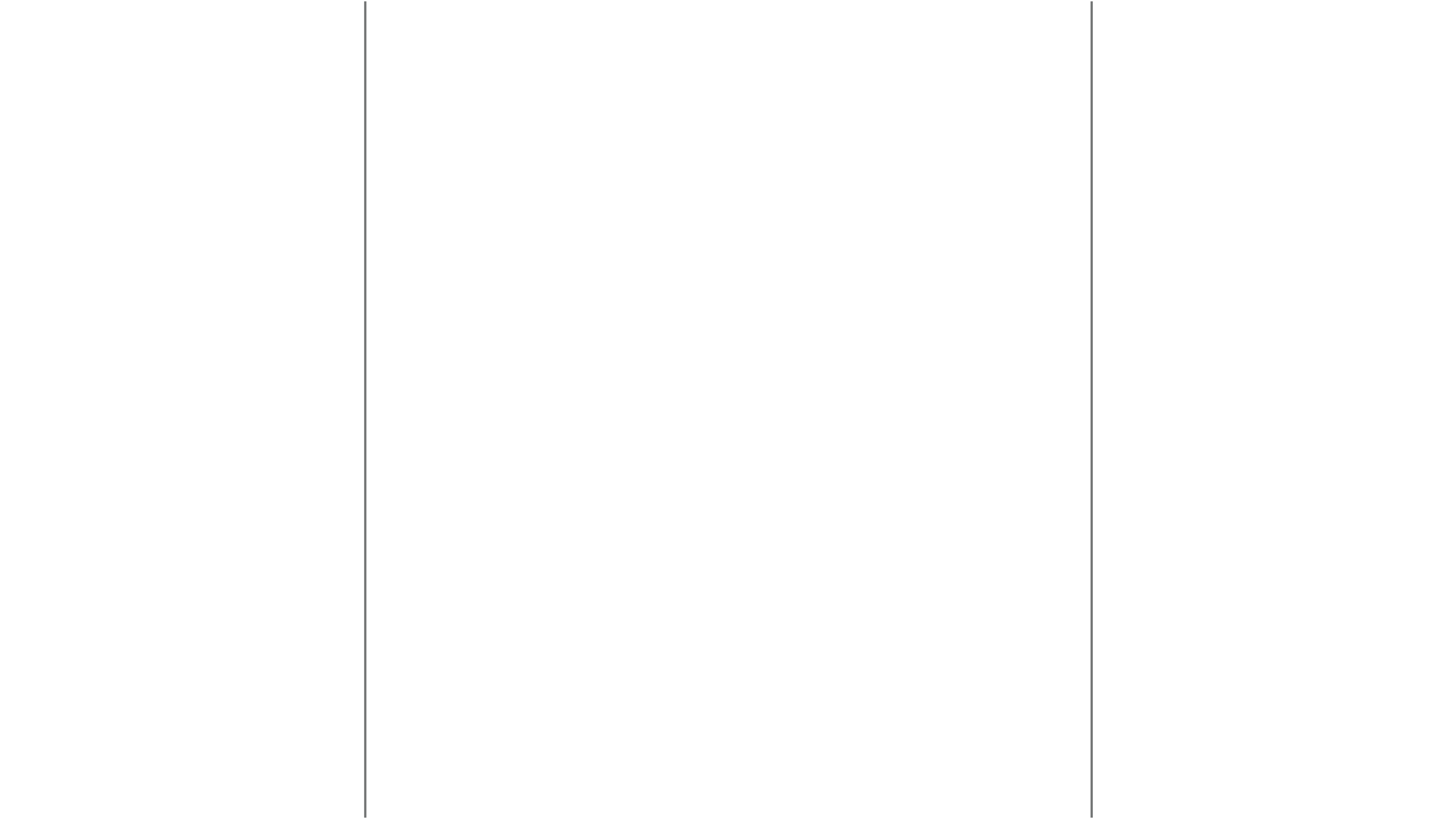
# SEMIOTICS

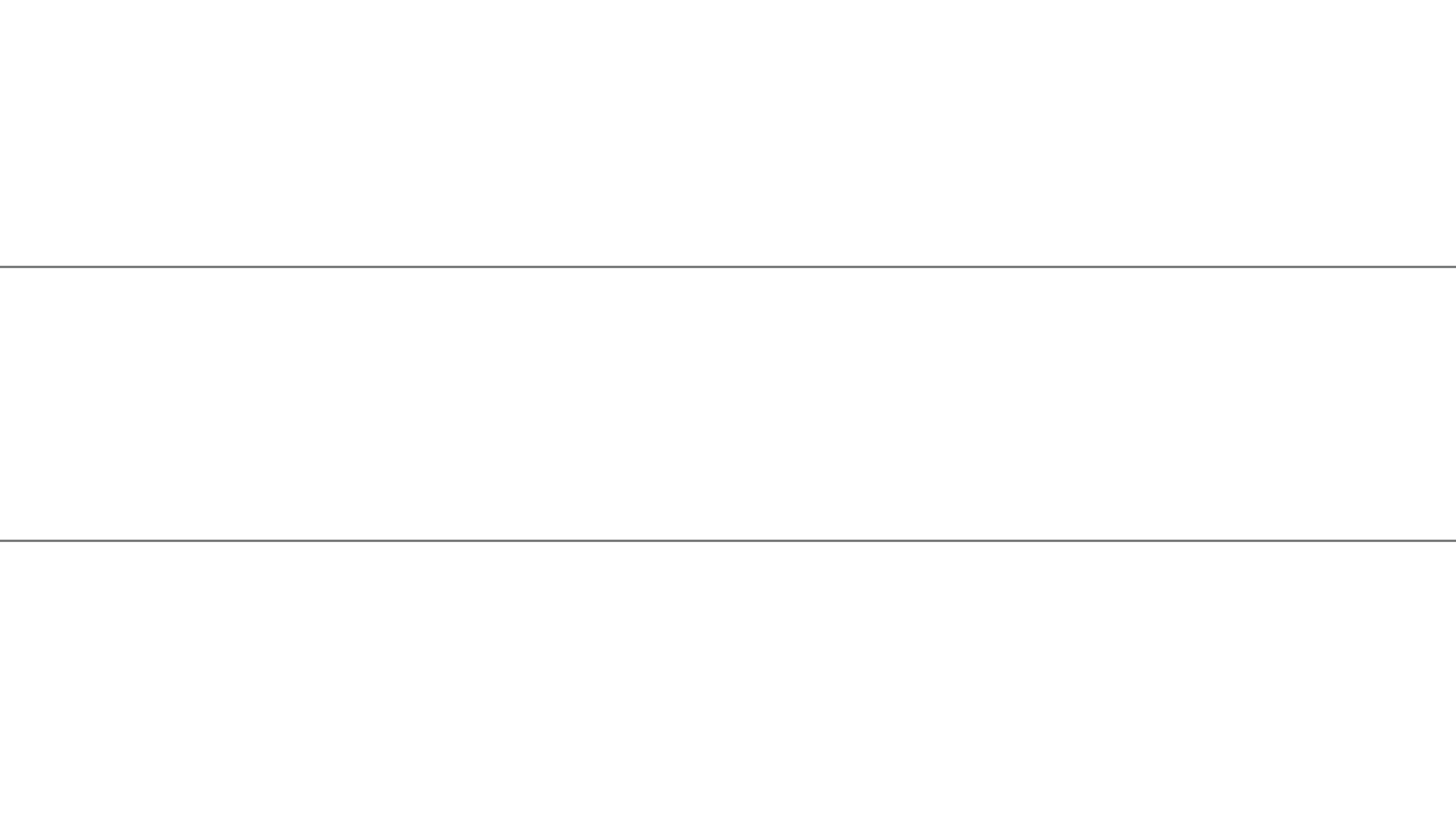
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# WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU?

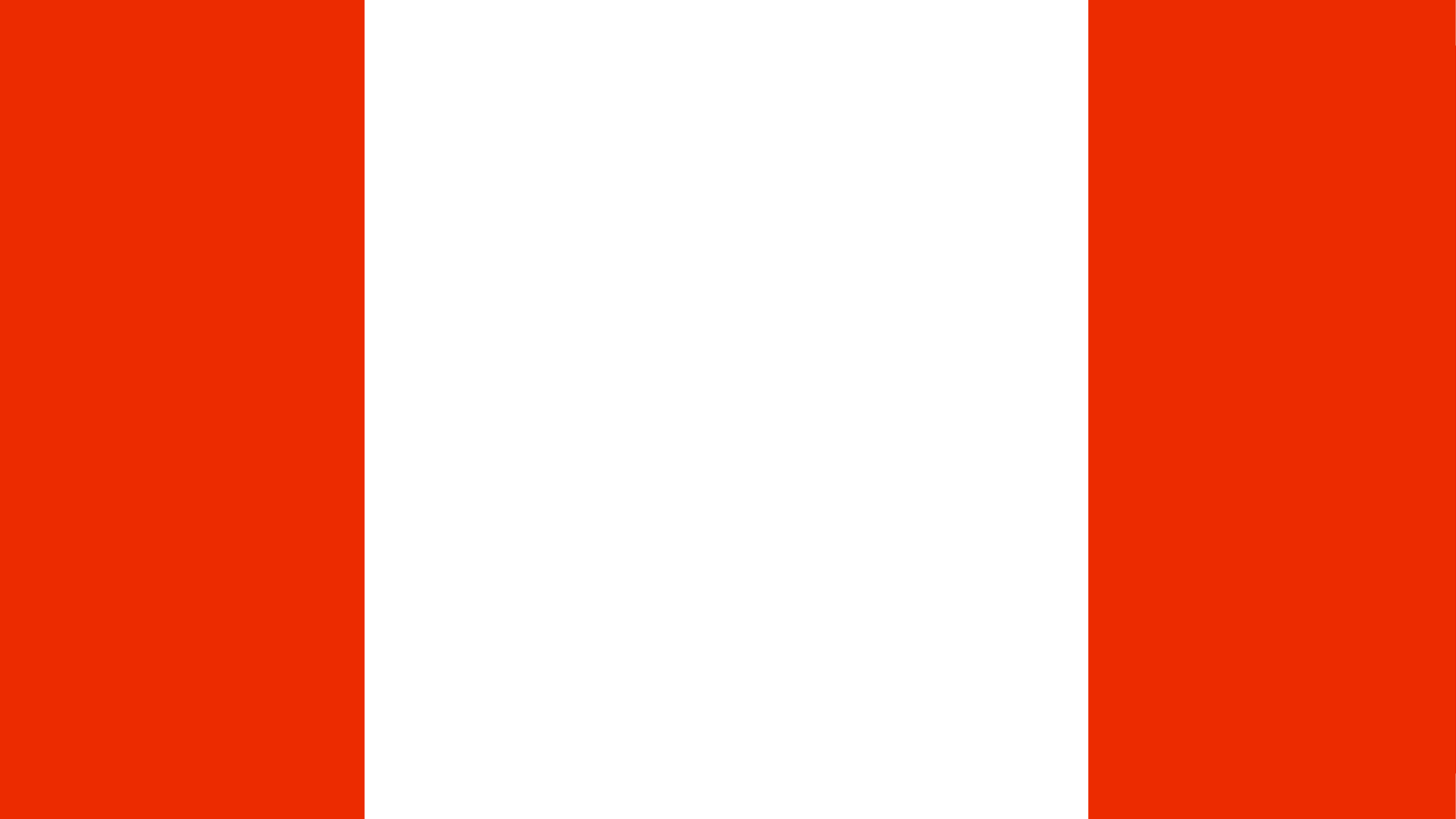
A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a user to write their response to the question above. The box is currently blank.













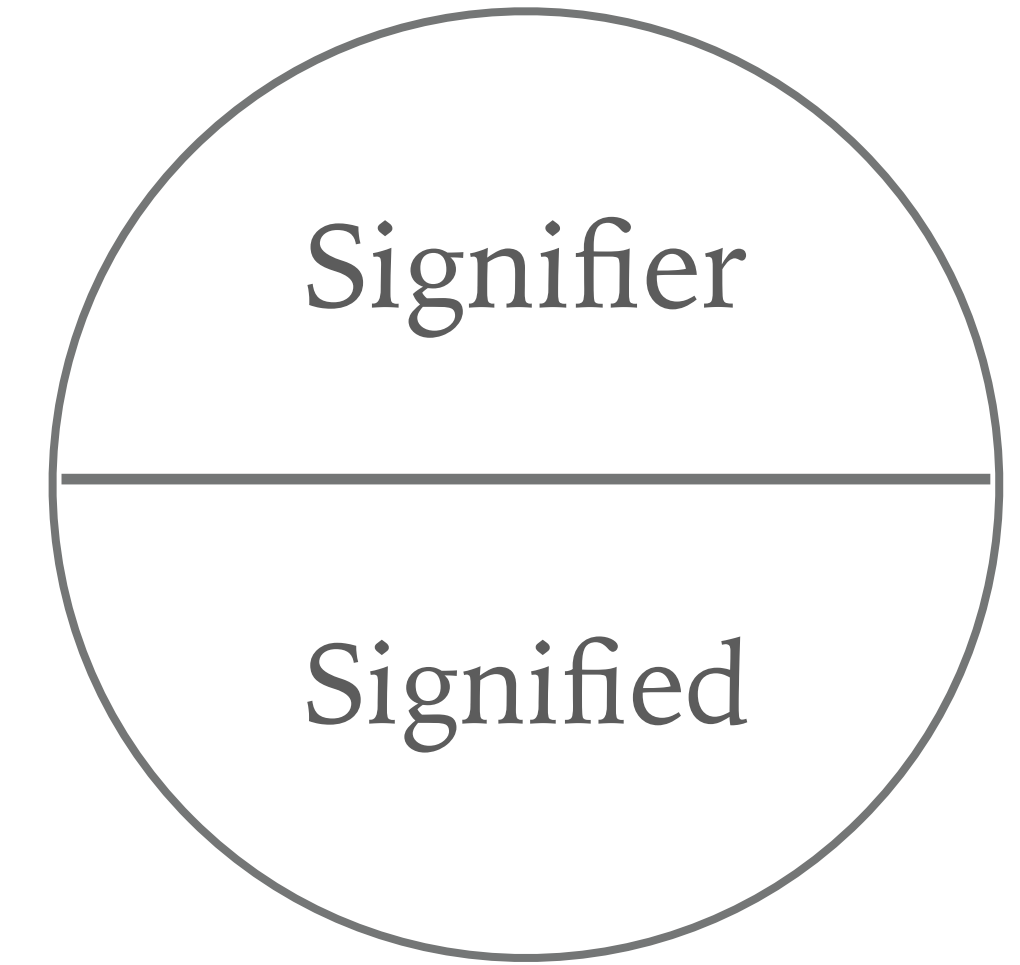


# SEMIOLOGY (FERDINAND SAUSSURE)

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- Signifier: a sound, a word, an image, a visual element.
- Signified: meaning attached to the signifier.
- Together, they form a sign.

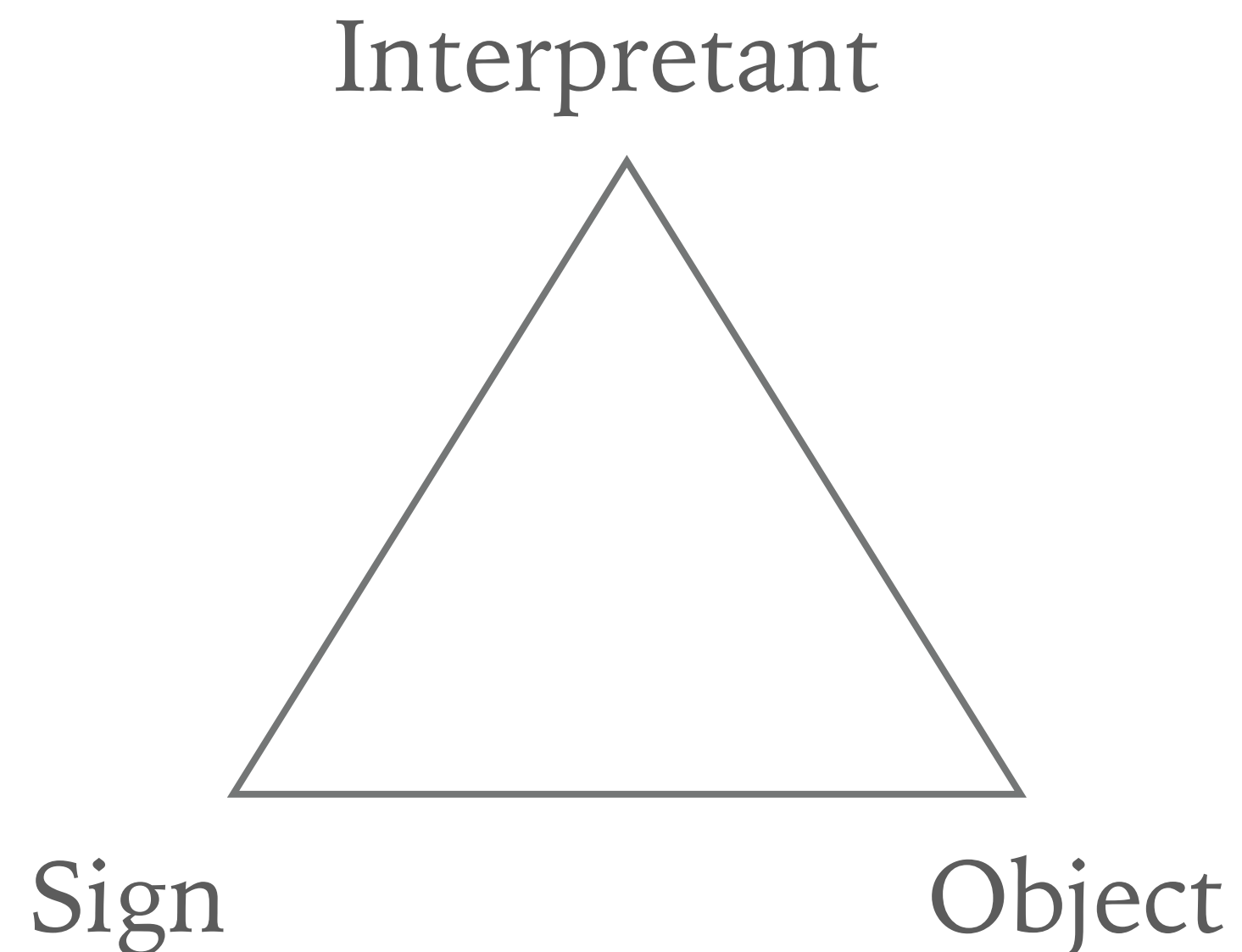


# SEMIOTICS (C.S. PIERCE)

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- Sign: Object that can be interpreted, a representation of something (a word, an image, a colour)
- Object (semiotic object) is the idea, the model of the object being represented.
- Interpretant: what interprets the sign, that is, the meaning.



# SEMIOTICS (C.S. PIERCE)

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- Example
  - Sign: word cat
  - Semiotic object: the abstract idea of a cat — any cat.
  - Interpretant: The cat that has been talking about — a specific cat.

**CAT**

# SEMIOTICS

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# CAT

# SEMIOTICS

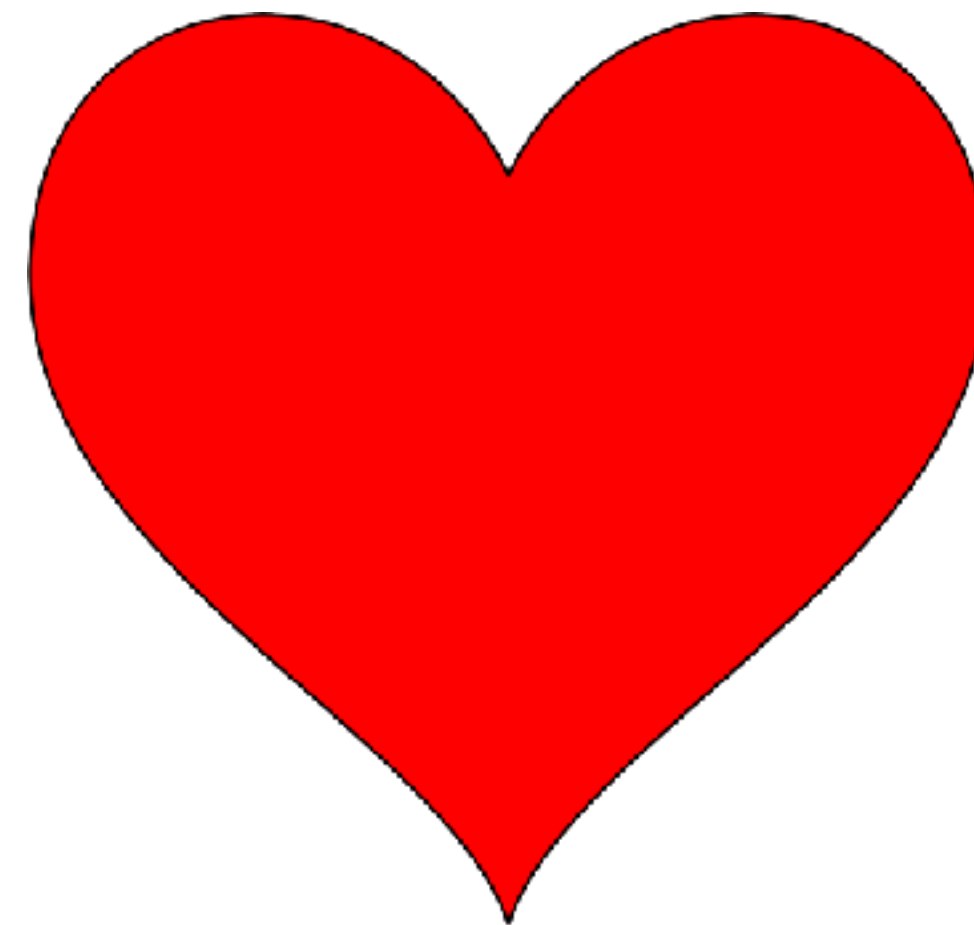
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- 3 different types of signs:
  - Iconic
  - Indexical
  - Symbolic

# ICONIC SIGN

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- The easiest to interpret
- Simplification of things being represented.
- Graphic icons, photographs, movie.



# INDEXICAL SIGN

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- Logical connection to the idea they represent.
- Takes more time to learn what they mean: we learn by experience.





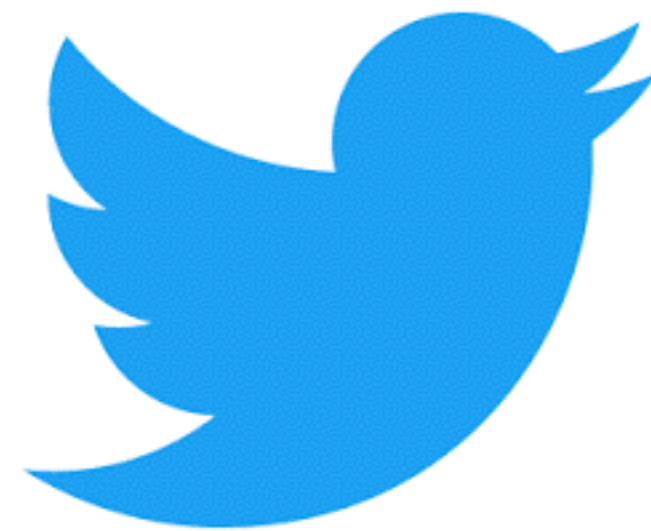
# SYMBOLICAL SIGN

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- The most abstract.
- No logical or representational connection between them and the things they represent.
- They are social and cultural conventions that we must learn.
- E.G., Words, number, colours, gestures, flags, costumes, logo, music, and so on.

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VISUAL



# SEMIOTICS

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- Semiotic inspired a number of other scholars like Roland Barthes: the rhetoric of the image.
- Over the years semiotics evolved into theory of perception that involves the use of images in many different ways:
  - The rhetoric of the image (Barthes)
  - Graphic Design
  - Theatre
  - Puppetry
  - Music
  - Chemistry
  - Space (De Certeau)

# BARTHES

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- Chain of associations: relationships between various elements and levels of representation (meanings) of an image (polysemy).
- Textual representation
- Coded iconic image
- Non-coded iconic image
- Code is the collection of meanings a graphic element can have.

# ASA BERGER

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- Four types of codes
  - Metonymic Code
    - Assumptions about what is seen.
  - Analogical Code
  - Displaced Code
  - Condensed Code

# METONYMIC CODE

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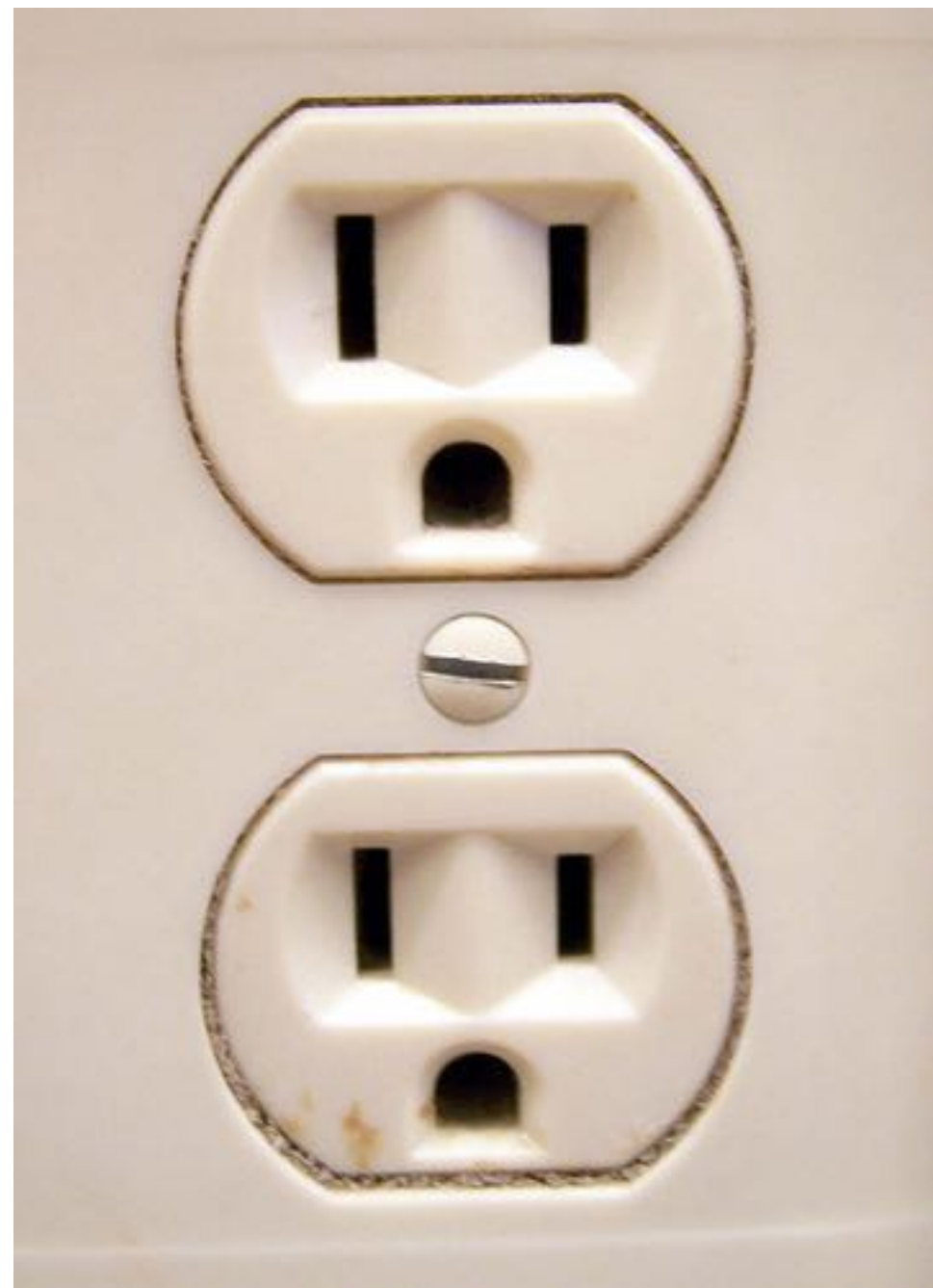
- Assumptions about what is seen.
- E.g. Ad of a happy family



# ANALOGICAL CODE

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- Mental comparisons
- E.g. Faces every where



# DISPLACED CODE

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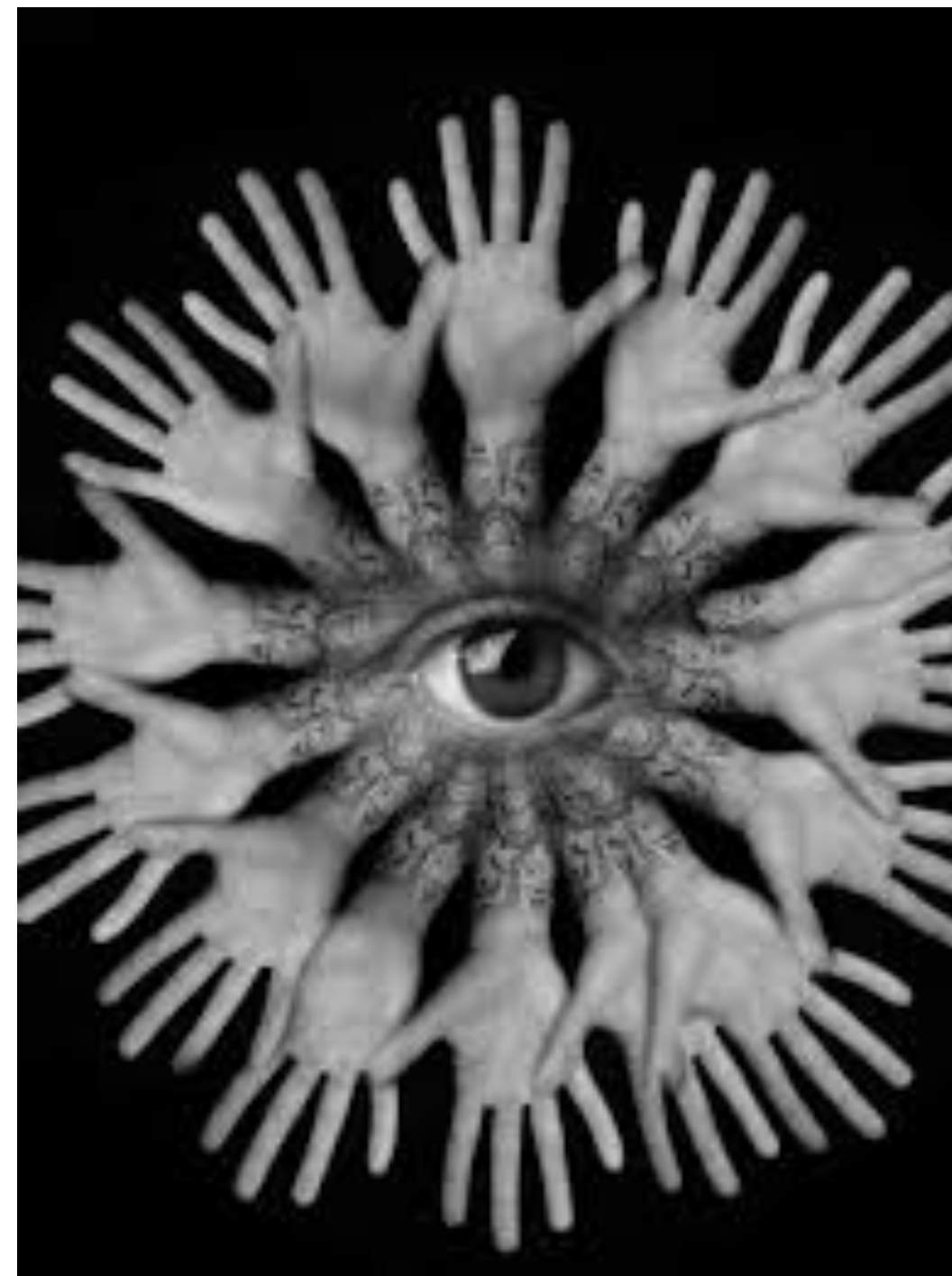
- Whenever there is a transfer of meaning from one set of signs to another.



# CONDENSED CODE

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- Several signs combined to make a new composite message.



Jerry Uelsmann