



Contextualizing perception in design

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This paper discusses the role of form in our perception of the designed object. This is done by taking some assumptions about the designed object that are current in material culture and considering them in the context of psychology of perception. Essentially, in the context of material culture, it is assumed that our perception of the designed object is a result of our knowledge interpreting the physical form of that object. Stated in this way, this position suggests that the physical form of the designed object is fixed and merely informs the construction of our perception. Similarly, in the indirect approach to perception, our perception is described as a function of personal interpretation. However, in this academic context, it is asserted that the physical aspect of the object that is being observed informs us about the situation at hand, thus conditioning the knowledge filters that will be used in the interpretation of that physical aspect. This description of perception implies that the physical aspect of the observed object is an active and iterative contributor that informs and conditions the construction of perception. This occurs because when the physical form informs the understanding of the situation at hand, it conditions the visual information that will be picked up. This means that what we see informs us about the situation at hand and our understanding of the situation then filters what we see according to our prior knowledge. According to our understanding of the situation, we decide that we must prioritize certain physical aspects and ignore others. This means that certain physical object attributes will be enhanced and others will fade depending on what we understand the situation calls for.

This paper presents perception as interpretation and explains why the indirect account of perception can be helpful in the study of the role of form in perception of the designed object. It reveals that physical object attributes inform perception in an iterative relationship with knowledge. For this reason, visual perception of the designed object is ultimately a construction of the physical aspect that is being observed rather than a direct and linear result of it.