

terms there are many features of objects that give them foreground quality, and any object can have one or more of these features and in many cases to a greater or lesser extent. The accumulation of these characteristics then will determine the likelihood of us paying attention to the object. Of course our own mood and motivation also affect this, as we shall see later.

Verticality

The psychologists Hubel and Weisel, using some rather unpleasant experiments on cats, were the first to show that the brain actually contains specific locations that respond to certain geometric stimuli. More recently we have been able to scan the human brain painlessly and have discovered many specialized areas. The brain can thus be seen to be a sort of bureaucracy with departments responsible for straight lines, curved lines, triangles, squares, the colours red and green and so on (Latto 1995). In fact the brain processes visual information through a kind of modular structure, which is at least partly hierarchical in organization (Rose 1995). We can understand our ability to recognize common objects, for example, as being when a particular combination of departments get excited by the scene in front of us. In England, a post box will certainly interest the departments responsible for the colour red and rectangles and squares. Of course we have to learn all this; our brains do not come pre-packaged like a computer with Microsoft Windows! The way we build our perceptual bureaucracy depends upon the way we need to and want to see the world, and in this regard we are all different. We now know that no two brains are absolutely identical, and that we each have our own particular layout of specialized departments within the brain.

As with all bureaucracies, not all departments are equally powerful. It has been found that the vertical and horizontal line departments are particularly influential. This is pretty important as so much of the world around us depends on these two common angles. It is not just architects who need to be able to tell if something is vertical. Of course the right angle is a special angle and the upright a unique orientation. I remember learning this the hard way when as a young architect I complained to my builder that the perpends in the wall he was constructing were not upright. 'Upright!', he retorted, with a knowing grin 'they're more than upright them!' His paradoxical oxymoron confounded me in my naivety, and I foolishly and sheepishly moved on to inspect something else and he got away with his sloppy workmanship. Thankfully experience has made me just a little wiser, and it would not be so easy for him to fool me now!

Symmetry

Symmetry is another foreground-giving geometrical characteristic. We are ourselves largely vertical symmetrical objects, so perhaps we take a