

Mysteries of Photography #4: Edge Perception

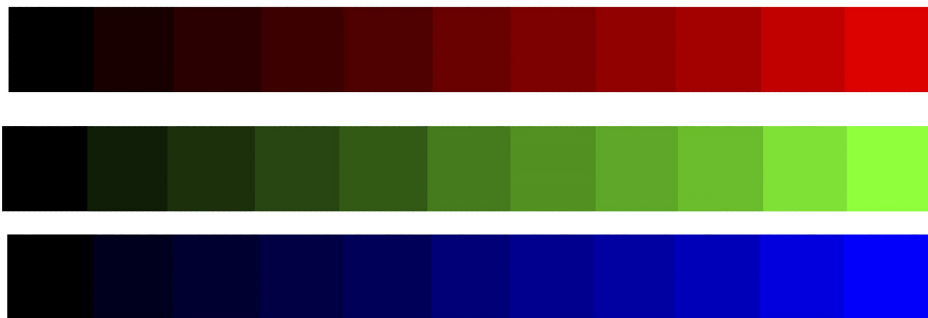
Take any graphics programme and make a series of squares (no outlines) and fill with a series of uniform grey fills of 100% to 10%. (No point in making a 0% grey. That is the same as the white background.)

A strange thing happens if we push them together.



Suddenly the uniform grey fills no longer appear uniform! Take your colour picker and they are still uniform but they appear lighter on the left and darker on the right (adjacent to the lighter square).

This is not just the case with grey fills. Take 10% increments from 0 to 255 (Adobe RGB colorspace) for red, green and blue and you see a similar apparent non-uniformity. To my “eyes”, there is a more pronounced edge effect with green with the least apparent effect with blue. Is it the same with you?



If you read the earlier editions of the Mysteries of Photography, this is just another case of us seeing with our brains, not with our eyes. However, what does this mean for photographic images – how we perceive them and how we process them optimally?

Our brains are looking for edges. Should we further emphasise them and will this enhance the appearance of our images? There are macros available for Photoshop and Affinity Photo that specifically emphasise this edge effect. (The Classic clarity slider option in CaptureOne also does this as well but interestingly the other three clarity options do not to anything like the same extent.)

The fact that skilled users of Photoshop and Affinity have gone to all the effort of constructing complex macros to exaggerate this edge effect suggests that many experts in image processing consider that its use will enhance the attractiveness of their images. Personally I like to use it with greyscale images (CaptureOne Classic clarity) but not with colour images.

However, like everything in aesthetics it is totally personal.

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