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# CONTINUITY

**Continuity is the perception of visual similarities across time and space. It implies repetition and consistency in the application of elements, stylistic qualities, or compositional structures across formats that include multiple components.**

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Imagine that you are watching a film and the action in a scene moves from one camera angle to another. You notice that when the angle shifts, the main character in the film is now wearing a different shirt, the sky outside the window indicates a very different time of day, or there is a new object on the table that was not there before. These are breaks in the visual continuity of the film and they attract attention precisely because they are unexpected and inconsistent with the viewing experience at the beginning of the scene. They interrupt the narrative and take you out of the experience of the film.

On the other hand, we can tolerate interruptions in continuity if they move the story forward. Film editors splice together scenes shot at different times and

angles for expressive impact. A well-placed shift in the action of a film (a jump cut) heightens the drama. Even though it is a change in viewpoint or content, it rarely breaks the continuity of the viewing experience or our understanding of the story.



Figure 3.65

**SPIN Magazine, 2012 Design: ETC (Everything Type Company)**

**SPIN Creative Director: Devin Pedzwater**

ETC's redesign of SPIN maintains continuity through the use

of theme and variation in treating recurring elements.

Frames, overlapping photography, color, and common typographic treatments hold together a diverse set of images and articles. The design provides enough invention to make it interesting without sacrificing unity.

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Designing series and sequences of images and/or text, therefore, requires maintaining some features across the reading or viewing experience and using breaks in continuity for expressive purposes or to garner attention. In the design of multi-page documents—books and magazines, for instance—typographic and graphic systems determine how designers treat recurring elements. Folios (page numbers), column widths, and caption-to-photograph relationships may be consistent from spread to spread, regardless of content. Grids maintain proportional relationships even though elements change. This approach allows readers to focus attention on the information that is particular to the article, interpreting the recurring elements through “habit.” The specific content of each spread may be different, but the repeating visual characteristics hold the publication together as a single experience.

Designers strengthen continuity through other visual strategies. For example, gradually increasing the scale of objects or the playfulness of layouts can build predictability and anticipation in how elements will be treated in the next spread. Readers notice a break in this gradient and interpret it as significant to the overall narrative. Visual similarity among images (for example, colors, shapes, focus, or repeated content) recall earlier layouts in the publication, thereby linking content that is otherwise separated in time and space.

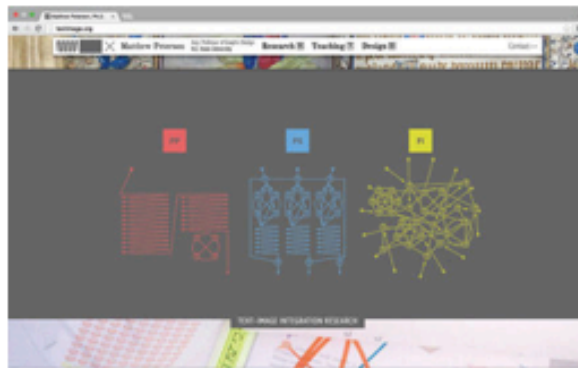
Everything Type Company's redesign of *Spin Magazine* is an example of establishing continuity through *theme and variation* ([Figure 3.65](#)). Repeating visual elements are familiar but slightly reinterpreted throughout the publication. The large open rectangle repeats at a smaller scale in the same color in a later spread. The designer reinterprets the overlapping photographs on an early spread as overlapping color blocks in a later layout. The alignments of square blocks of caption type are offset from the article in the same way that pictures extend beyond the perimeter of the open boxes. And centered quotes echo centered headlines, while the rest of the text is justified.



Website users look for continuity in behavior as well as visual form. Designer Matthew Peterson's website (<http://textimage.org>), for example, consistently uses vertical scrolling to produce changes in content categories and horizontal scrolling to explore individual projects and essays in greater depth ([Figure 3.66](#)). Supporting diagrams “hide” behind examples and open like drawers. Interaction with the site feels like continuous movement over a single, large landscape of information, despite the changing imagery, and users access sections through repeating behaviors that are reserved for specific types of information. This is in contrast to website interaction that changes content only through menus or clickable sections of the homepage—that is, in which one screen disappears and is replaced by another that looks completely different from the first.

Continuity, therefore, is not only a strategy for maintaining visual similarities from one page or screen to the next, but also a means for reinterpreting the form in ways that surprise and delight. The task for the designer is to develop a vocabulary of form that uses recurring elements in different combinations to speak

with different inflections.



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### **Figure 3.66**

#### **Research Website, 2016 Matthew Peterson**

College professor Peterson achieves continuity in his research website through a consistent vocabulary of navigational movement, despite very diverse content elements. Vertical scrolling moves readers through topical sequences, each preceded by an explanatory diagram, while horizontal movement drills down into the textual detail of articles. The result is continuous travel across a landscape of information, rather than flipping among sequential screens.

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