Paul Rand is one of the world's leading graphic designers. He first published his 'Thoughts on Design' in 1947, with an introduction by McKnight Kauffer. For this edition he has revised both text and pictures, thus providing students and the general public with a new version of a work that has long been regarded as a classic on its subject.

Uncompromising and experienced, the author demonstrates that sound and serious theory is practical. He is aware of the complexity of the designer's function and has no patience with slickness or insincerity, which he regards as dead wood that must first be cleared away. Then 'copy, art, and typography are seen as a living entity'— a point that is made abundantly clear in the visual arrangement of this book. His advice is at all times helpful to the student who really wants to practise design seriously as well as to anyone interested in good design.

Paul Rand's vast experience has included magazine and advertising agency art direction, packaging, book illustration, and typography, as well as the fields of painting and art education. He has taught at Pratt Institute and Cooper Union. From 1956 to 1969 he was professor of graphic design at Yale University. He is presently design consultant for such major companies as IBM and Westinghouse.

In addition to many honors and awards from the AIGA and New York Art Directors Club, in 1966 he was awarded the coveted Gold Medal of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. In 1962 he received a citation from the Philadelphia College of Art, and he has also been named honorary professor of Tama University, Tokyo. He is a Benjamin Franklin Fellow of The Royal Society of Arts, London, a member of Alliance Graphique Internationale and the Industrial Designers Society of America, and he has served on the Fulbright Scholarship Jury and as an adviser in art education to N.Y. University, the school of the Boston Museum and the Philadelphia College of Art.

In addition to 'Thoughts on Design', he is the author of 'The Trademarks of Paul Rand' and numerous papers on design, advertising, and typography. In 1958 the book, 'Paul Rand', by Yusaku Kamekura, was published by Zokeisha Publications, Tokyo, and Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Thoughts on Design

Paul Rand

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This book attempts to arrange in some logical order certain principles governing contemporary advertising design. The pictorial examples used to illustrate these principles are taken from work in which I was directly engaged. This choice was made deliberately and with no intention to imply that it represents the best translation of these principles into visual terms. There are artists and designers of great talent whose work would be perhaps more suitable. But I do not feel justified in speaking for them nor secure in attempting to explain their work without any possibility of misrepresentation. This is not to say that this book is purely the result of my efforts alone. I am indebted to many people — painters, architects, designers of past and present — for many theories and concepts. Many philosophers and writers, particularly John Dewey and Roger Fry, have helped to crystallize my thinking on the subject and to accelerate such progress as I have made. I have tried to pay my debt by quoting some of them.

P.R. New York City
January 1946

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Graphic design—
which fulfills esthetic needs,
complies with the laws of form
and the exigencies of two-dimensional space;
which speaks in semiotics, sans-serifs,
and geometrics;
which abstracts, transforms, translates,
rotates, dilates, repeats, mirrors,
groups, and regroups—
is not good design
if it is irrelevant.

Graphic design—
which evokes the symmetria of Vitruvius,
the dynamic symmetry of Hambidge,
the asymmetry of Mondrian;
which is a good gestalt;
which is generated by intuition or by computer,
by invention or by a system of co-ordinates—
is not good design
if it does not co-operate
as an instrument
in the service of communication.

Visual communications of any kind, whether persuasive or informative, from billboards to birth announcements, should be seen as the embodiment of form and function: the integration of the beautiful and the useful. In an advertisement, copy, art, and typography are seen as a living entity; each element integrally related, in harmony with the whole, and essential to the execution of the idea. Like a juggler, the designer demonstrates his skills by manipulating these ingredients in a given space. Whether this space takes the form of advertisements, periodicals, books, printed forms, packages, industrial products, signs, or TV billboards, the criteria are the same.

That the separation of form and function, of concept and execution, is not likely to produce objects of esthetic value has been repeatedly demonstrated. Similarly, it has been shown that the system which

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regards esthetics as irrelevant, which separates the artist from his product, which fragments the work of the individual, which creates by committee, and which makes mincemeat of the creative process will, in the long run, diminish not only the product but the maker as well.

John Dewey, commenting on the relationship between fine art and useful or technological art, says: "That many, perhaps most, of the articles and utensils made at present for use are not genuinely esthetic happens, unfortunately, to be true. But it is true for reasons that are foreign to the relation of the 'beautiful' and 'useful' as such. Wherever conditions are such as to prevent the act of production from being an experience in which the whole creature is alive and in which he possesses his living through enjoyment, the product will lack something of being esthetic. No matter how useful it is for special and limited ends, it will not be useful in the ultimate degree—that of contributing directly and liberally to an expanding and enriched life."[1]

The esthetic requirements to which Dewey refers are, it seems to me, exemplified in the work of the Shakers. Their religious beliefs provided the fertile soil in which beauty and utility could flourish. Their spiritual needs found expression in the design of fabrics, furniture, and utensils of great esthetic value. These products are a document of the simple life of the people, their asceticism, their restraint, their devotion to fine craftsmanship, and their feeling for proportion, space, and order.

Ideally, beauty and utility are mutually generative. In the past, rarely was beauty an end in itself. The magnificent stained glass windows of Chartres were no less utilitarian than was the Parthenon or the Pyramid of Cheops. The function of the exterior decoration of the great Gothic cathedrals was to invite entry; the rose windows inside provided the spiritual mood. Interpreted in the light of our own experiences, this philosophy still prevails.

1. John Dewey
   Art as Experience, p. 26
   Etherial Things

Parthenon, Athens
447-432 B.C.

The Designer's Problem

An erroneous conception of the graphic designer's function is to imagine that in order to produce a "good layout[1]" all he need do is make a pleasing arrangement of miscellaneous elements. What is implied is that this may be accomplished simply by pushing these elements around, until something happens. At best, this procedure involves the time-consuming uncertainties of trial and error, and at worst, an indifference to plan, order or discipline.

1. Because of its popular acceptance, the term layout is used. Unfortunately, a layout is deprecatingly interpreted as a blueprint for an illustration, I should prefer to use composition in the same sense in which it is used in painting

The designer does not, as a rule, begin with some preconceived idea. Rather, the idea is (or should be) the result of careful study and observation, and the design a product of that idea. In order, therefore, to achieve an effective solution to his problem, the designer must necessarily go through some sort of mental process.[2] Consciously or not, he analyzes, interprets, formulates. He is aware of the scientific and technological developments in his own and kindred fields. He improvises, invents or discovers new techniques and combinations. He co-ordinates and integrates his material so that he may restate his problem in terms of ideas, signs, symbols, pictures. He unifies, simplifies, and eliminates superfluities. He symbolizes — abstracts from his material by association and analogy. He intensifies and reinforces his symbol with appropriate accessories to achieve clarity and interest. He draws upon instinct and intuition. He considers the spectator, his feelings and predilections.

2. The reader may wish to refer to R.H.Wilenski. The Modern Movement in Art for a description of the artist's mental processes in creating a work of art

The designer is primarily confronted with three classes of material: a) the given material: product, copy, slogan, logotype, format, media, production process; b) the formal material: space, contrast, proportion, harmony, rhythm, repetition, line, mass, shape, color, weight, volume, value, texture; c) the psychological material: visual perception and optical illusion problems, the spectators' instincts, intuitions, and emotions as well as the designer's own needs.

As the material furnished him is often inadequate, vague, uninteresting, or otherwise unsuitable for visual interpretation, the designer's task is to re-create or restate the problem. This may involve discarding or revising much of the given material. By analysis (breaking down of the complex material into its simplest components...the how, why, when, and where) the designer is able to begin to state the problem.

The Symbol in Advertising

Because advertising art, in the end, deals with the spectator, and because it is the function of advertising to influence him, it follows that the designer's problem is twofold: to anticipate the spectator's reactions and to meet his own esthetic needs. He must therefore discover a means of communication between himself and the spectator (a condition with which the easel painter need not concern himself). The problem is not simple; its very complexity virtually dictates the solution — that is, the discovery of an image universally comprehensible, one which translates abstract ideas into visual forms.

It is in symbolic, visual terms that the designer ultimately realizes his perceptions and experiences; and it is in a world of symbols that man lives. The symbol is thus the common language between artist and spectator. Webster defines the symbol as "that which stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental but not intentional resemblance; especially, a visible sign of something invisible, as an idea, a quality or totality such as a state or a church; an emblem; as, the lion is the *symbol* of courage; the cross is the *symbol* of Christianity. 'A *symbol* is a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction.' (Goblet d'Alvielle)."

Words like simplified, stylized, geometric, abstract, two-dimensional, flat, non-representational, non-mimetic are commonly associated, sometimes incorrectly, with the term symbol. It is true that the depiction of most distinctive symbols does fit the image these words help to characterize visually; but it is not true that the symbol has to be simplified (etc.) in order to qualify as a symbol. The fact that some of the best symbols are simplified images merely points to the effectiveness of simplicity but not to the meaning of the word per se. In essence, it is not what it looks like but what it does that defines a symbol. A symbol may be depicted as an "abstract" shape, a geometric figure, a photograph, an illustration, a letter of the alphabet, or a numeral. Thus, a five-pointed star, the picture of a little dog listening to his master's voice, a steel engraving of George Washington, or the Eiffel Tower itself—are all symbols!