

Paul Rand

Design  
Form  
and  
Chaos

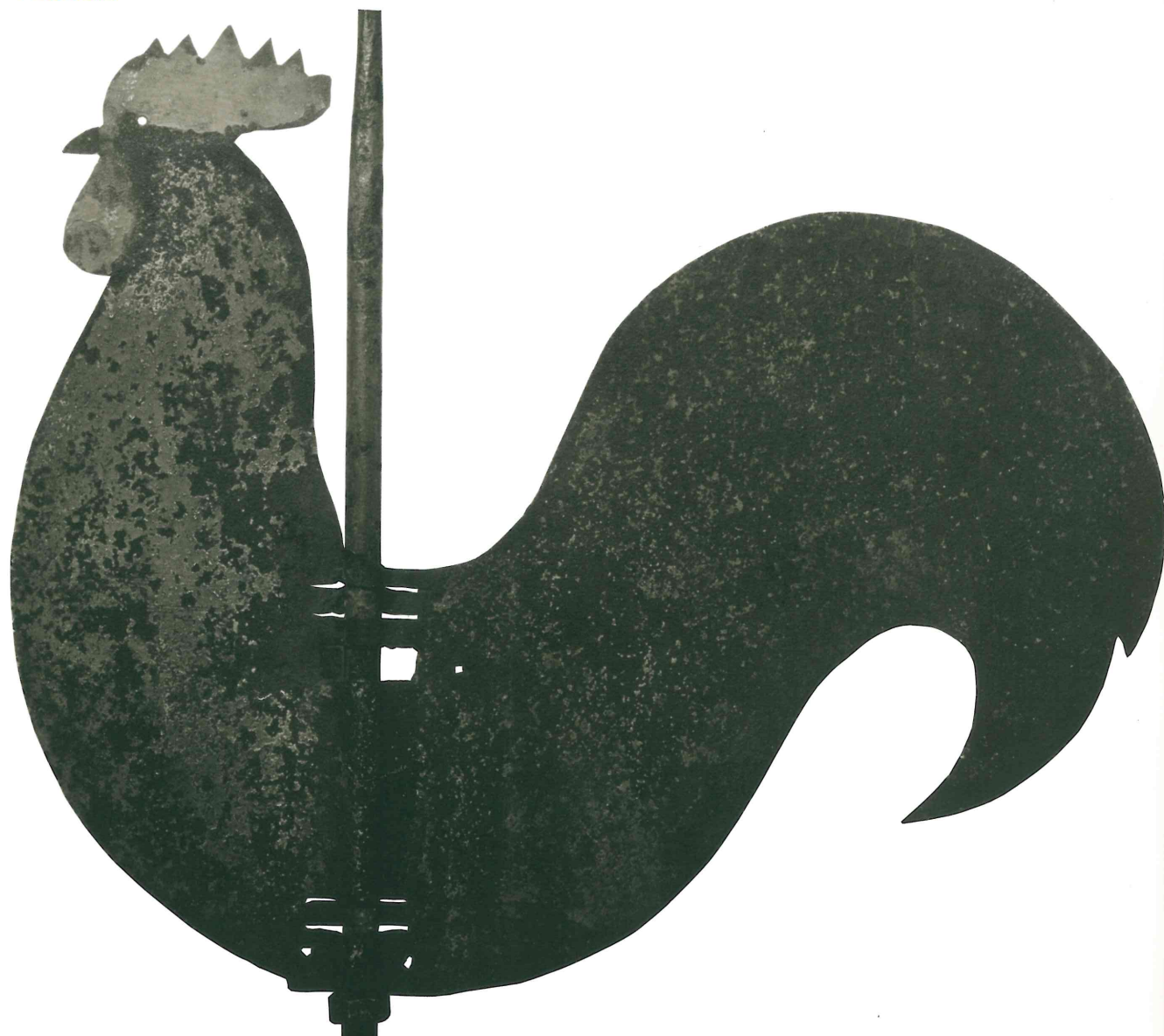


Yale University Press  
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1993

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**PAUL RAND MARRIED CREATIVE CONCEPT TO CLARITY OF FORM.** The purpose of design was, he asserted, "to simplify, to clarify, to modify, to dignify, to dramatize, to persuade, and perhaps even to amuse."<sup>1</sup> Guided by European modernist principles, this son of Jewish Viennese immigrants pushed and pounded American graphic design for fifty years. In the 1940s, he led the concept-driven New Advertising movement in New York. Collaborative teams of art directors and copywriters still emulate the work he did with writer Bill Bernbach at the Weintraub Agency. Beginning in the 1950s he unified then-booming corporations with clean powerful marks, thus kicking off the maelstrom of corporate branding. His timeless logos for IBM, Westinghouse and ABC remain, testifying to the ability of their maker. In the latter half of his career Rand worked alone, preferring to communicate directly with the company president—no dilly-dallying with clients' committees and middlemen. Ultimately, he forged a relationship between graphic design and corporate America that carried designers to profitable professional heights, but left them dependent, perhaps troublingly, upon clients' societal visions and needs.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Rand, "Form and Content," in *Design, Form, and Chaos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3.



To understand the meaning of design is to sense the common thread that weaves its way through the arts of painting, architecture, and industrial and graphic design. It is also to understand the part form and content play in the intricate process of design, and to realize as well that design is also commentary, opinion, a point of view, and social responsibility.

To design is much more than simply to assemble, to order, or even to edit; it is to add value and meaning, to illuminate, to simplify, to clarify, to modify, to dignify, to dramatize, to persuade, and perhaps even to amuse. [To design is to transform prose into poetry. Design broadens perception, magnifies experience, and enhances vision. Design is the product of feeling and awareness, of ideas that originate in the mind of the designer and culminate, one hopes, in the mind of the spectator.] Design, as we shall see, is also an instrument of disorder and confusion. [Design for deception is often more persuasive than design for good; seduction is one of its many masks.]

Design is both a verb and a noun. It is the beginning as well as the end, the process and product of imagination. Like a huge onion with multiple layers, the more it is peeled, the more it reveals. Content is the raw material of design. Form, in turn, is the reorganization and manipulation of content. To form is to fix visual relationships in a given space, hence *form* and *plastic* are also synonyms for design. Design is the fusion of form and content, the realization and unique expression of an idea.<sup>1</sup> Design entails a part-whole relationship expressed in terms of facture, space, contrast, balance, proportion, pattern, repetition, scale, size, shape, color, value, texture, and weight. These are the means; unity, harmony, grace, and rhythm are desirable ends. (This list of means and ends has been cited so often that it has almost lost all meaning. However, these very considerations are what ultimately distinguish art from non-art, good design from bad design. Furthermore, perfection in design depends on the integration of all ingredients. Since such ingredients are inexhaustible, perfection is really unattainable.) Implicit in all this are inventiveness, intuition, judgment, and experience. There is no formula for good design; each problem is unique, as is each solution. Furthermore, the world of design is not utopian; solutions are often willful, arbitrary, or the product of endless compromise.

1. Some aestheticians reject the expression *form and content* in favor of *form and substance*, *idea*, or *preconception*.

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"Roosters," said Picasso in 1944, "have always been seen, but seldom seen so well as in American weathervanes." Clearly, the designer of this sheet metal weathervane (circa 1800) was acutely sensitive to form. His business, however, was not design, nor did he have to explain or justify what he did. But for the designer who may have to explain, understanding the problems of form takes the place of a lot of babble and ambiguity.

Good Design Is Goodwill

by Paul Rand  
1987

1. Giorgio Vasari,  
*Lives of the Most Eminent  
Painters, Sculptors and  
Architects* (1568), 3:1868

Michelangelo, responding to the demands of Pope Julius II about the completion of the Sistine Ceiling, replied, "It will be finished when I shall have satisfied myself in the matter of art." "But it is our pleasure," retorted the pope, "that you should satisfy us in our desire to have it done quickly."<sup>1</sup> And it was not until he was threatened with being thrown from the scaffolding that Michelangelo agreed to be more expeditious. On the whole, however, the relationship between Michelangelo and the pope was reciprocal. Mutual respect, apologies, and ducats were the means of mediation.

Today the relationship between designer (painter, writer, composer) and management shares certain similarities with that of our distinguished protagonists. What has always kept the designer and client at odds is the same thing that has kept them in accord. For the former, design is a means for invention and experiment, for the latter, a means of achieving economic, political, or social ends. But not all business people are aware that, in the words of a marketing professor at Northwestern University, "Design is a potent strategy tool that companies can use to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. Yet most companies neglect design as a strategy tool. What they don't realize is that design can enhance products, environments, communications, and corporate identity."<sup>2</sup>

The expression *good design* came into usage circa 1940, when the Museum of Modern Art sponsored the exhibit "Useful Objects of American Design under Ten Dollars." The intention, of course, was to identify not just "good" design but the best, that which only the most skillful designer (trained or untrained) could produce. Over the years designers of both products and graphics have created an impressive collection of distinguished designs. Yet ironically, this body of good work makes one painfully aware of the abundance of poor design and the paucity of good designers. Talent is a rare commodity in the arts, as it is in other professions. But there is more to the story than this.

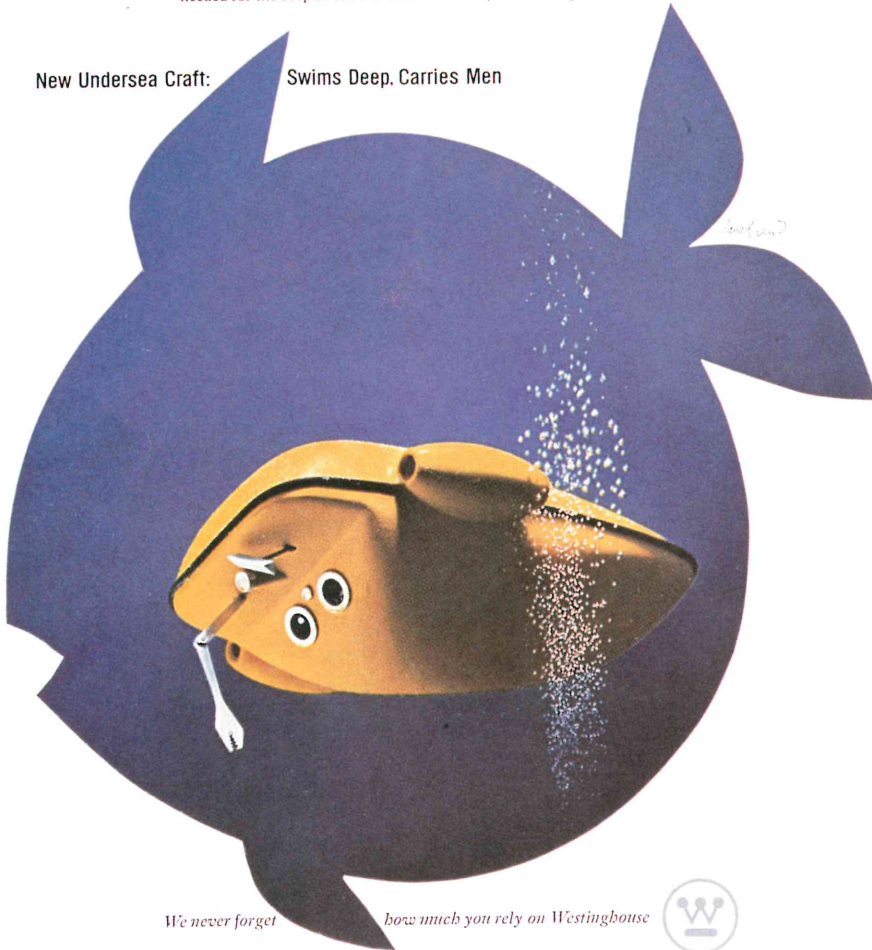
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*Right: This 19th century French pitcher, a clear example of good design by a good designer, was produced long before the expression good design was bandied about. The ornament was used by the early Greeks and was a conspicuous motif of the Secessionists and artists and architects of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903). "There is nothing new under the sun."*



**Westinghouse** is building a remarkable craft, a free-roaming explorer of the underseas. Unlike the famous bathysphere, which dangled at the end of cables, *Deepstar* has no strings attached. She will rise, dive, turn and back at will, self-propelled and independent. Her 3-man crew will be able to set instruments, sample the bottom at depths of two miles, salvage, photograph, and most of all, *explore* the vast oceanic world that has hidden itself so long from man. Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau, the undersea pioneer who created the basic concept, is collaborating with Westinghouse on the vehicle. *Deepstar* will be equipped with the controls, instruments, mechanical "hands" and everything else needed for the deep swim. *You can be sure... if it's Westinghouse*

New Undersea Craft: Swims Deep, Carries Men



We never forget

how much you rely on Westinghouse



Advertisement, Westinghouse, 1965.

Technology and nature join forces. Lines of type suggest water.

Even if it does not require extensive schooling, design is one of the most perplexing pursuits in which to excel. Besides the need for a God-given talent, the designer must contend with encyclopedic amounts of information, a seemingly endless stream of opinions, and the day-to-day problem of finding “new” ideas (popularly called creativity).

Yet as a profession it is relatively easy to enter. Unlike those of architecture and engineering, it requires no accreditation (not that accreditation is always meaningful in the arts). It entails no authorization from official institutions, as do the legal and medical professions. (This is equally true of other arenas in the business world, for example, marketing and market research.) There is no set body of knowledge that must be mastered by the practitioners. What the designer and his client have in common is a license to practice without a license.

Many designers, schooled or self-taught, are interested primarily in things that look good and work well; they see their mission realized only when aesthetics and practical needs coalesce. What a designer does is not limited to any particular idea or form. Graphic design embraces every kind of problem of visual communication, from birth announcements to billboards. It embodies visual ideas, from the typography of a Shakespearean sonnet to the design and typography of a box of Kellogg's Corn Flakes. What might entitle these items to the *good design* accolade is their practicability and their beauty, both of which are embodied in the idea of quality. The Bahlsen design (circa 1930) meets both goals admirably. “H. Bahlsen, the biscuit maker of Hanover, was a manufacturer who combined art and his work in the most thorough fashion.”<sup>3</sup> He was one of those rare businessmen who believed that “art is the best means of propaganda.”

3. H. K. Frenzel, editor,  
*Gebrauchsgraphik*  
(Berlin, January 1932), 2

Martel Schwichtenberg







UCLA Summer Sessions 1993

University of California, Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, California 90024  
March 1993

Session A: June 28–August 6  
Session B: July 19–August 27  
Session C: August 9–September 17

*Cover design, UCLA, 1993. One alphabet is worth a thousand pictures.*

Design is a personal activity and springs from the creative impulse of an individual. Group design or design by committee, although occasionally useful, deprives the designer of the distinct pleasure of personal accomplishment and self-realization. It may even hinder his or her thought processes, because work is not practiced under natural, tension-free conditions. Ideas have neither time to develop nor even the opportunity to occur. The tensions encountered in original work are different from those caused by discomfort or nervousness.

The relationship that exists between the designer and management is dichotomous. On the one hand, the designer is fiercely independent; on the other, he or she is dependent on management for support against bureaucracy and the caprice of the marketplace. I believe that design quality is proportionately related to the distance that exists between the designer and the management at the top. The closer this relationship, the more likely chances are for a meaningful design. For example, the relationship between the designer and the chief executive of Bahlsen was, undoubtedly, very close. "With a very few exceptions, all the Bahlsen wrappers are the work of a woman artist, Martel Schwichtenberg. In a masterly manner she contrived to keep the designs up to their original high standards."<sup>4</sup>

4. *Ibid.*, 11

Design is less a business than a calling. Many a designer's workday, in or out of the corporate environment, is ungoverned by a time sheet. Ideas, which are the designer's *raison d'être*, are not produced by whim nor on the spur of the moment. Ideas are the lifeblood of any form of meaningful communication. But good ideas are obstinate and have a way of materializing only when and where they choose — in the shower or subway, in the morning or middle of the night. As if this weren't enough, an infinite number of people, with or without political motives, must scrutinize and pass on the designer's ideas. Most of these people, in management or otherwise, have no design background. They are not professionals who have the credentials to approve or disapprove the work of the professional designer, yet of course they do. There are rare exceptions — lay people who have an instinctive sense for design. Interestingly, these same people leave design to the experts.

If asked to pinpoint the reasons for the proliferation of poor design, I would probably have to conclude, all things being equal, that the difficulties lie with: (1) management's unawareness of or indifference to good design, (2) market researchers' vested interests, (3) designers' lack of authority or competence.

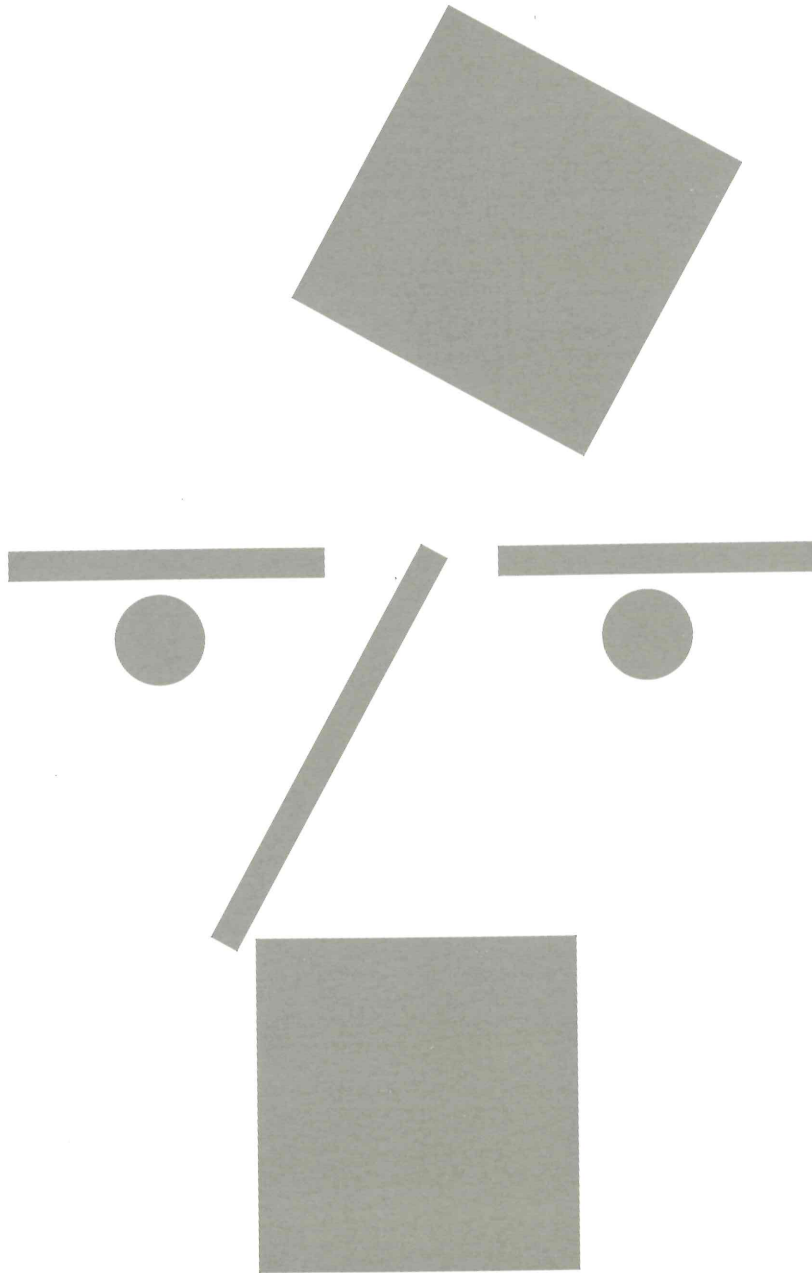
Real competence in the field of visual communication is something that only dedication, experience, and performance can validate. The roots of good design lie in aesthetics: painting, drawing, and architecture, while those of business and market research are in demographics and statistics; aesthetics and business are traditionally incompatible disciplines. The value judgments of the designer and the business executive are often at odds. Advertising executives and managers have their sights set on different goals: on costs and profits. "They are trained," says Kotler, quoting a personnel executive, "in business schools to be numbers-oriented, to minimize risks, and to use analytical detached plans — not insights gained from hands-on experience. They are devoted to short-term returns and cost reduction, rather than developing long-term technological competitiveness. They prefer servicing existing markets rather than taking risks and developing new ones."

Many executives who spend time in a modern office at least eight hours a day may very well live in houses in which the latest audio equipment is hidden behind the doors of a Chippendale cabinet. Modern surroundings may be synonymous with work, but not with relaxation. The preference is for the traditional setting. (Most people are conditioned to prefer the fancy to the plain.) Design is seen merely as decoration — a legacy of the past. Quality and status are very often equated with traditional values, with costliness, with luxury. And in the comparatively rare instance that the business executive exhibits a preference for a modern home environment, it is usually the super modern, the lavish, and the extremely expensive. Design values for the pseudo-traditionalist or super-modernist are measured in extremes. For the former it is how old, for the latter how new. Good design is not based on nostalgia or trendiness. Intrinsic quality is the only real measure of good design.

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*Old and amusing artifacts like this Victorian mask serve as both a source of inspiration and a friendly letter-drop. It demonstrates as well that the humorous and the utilitarian are not mutually exclusive, and that only the pompous and the uninformed see humor as a problem.*





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*Caricature depends on compression and grasp of essentials. Hitler or Groucho?  
Two squares arranged in a certain order... the power of geometry.*

In some circles art and design were, and still are, considered effeminate, something “removed from the common affairs of men.” Others saw all artists “performing no useful function they could understand.”<sup>5</sup> At one time, design was even considered a woman’s job. “Let men construct and women decorate,”<sup>6</sup> said Benn Pitman, the man who brought new ideas about the arts from England to the United States in the 1850s. To the businessman whose mind-set is only the bottom line, any reference to art or design is often an embarrassment. It implies waste and frivolity, having nothing to do with the serious business of business. To this person, art belongs, if anywhere, in the home or museum. Art is painting, sculpture, etching; design is wallpaper, carpeting, and upholstery patterns.

5. William Gaunt,  
*The Aesthetic Adventure*  
(New York, 1967), 8

6. Robert B. Stein,  
“The Aesthetic Craze,”  
*Art News*  
(December 1986), 105

“Art,” says Henry James, “in our protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles, to have some vaguely injurious effect on those who make it an important consideration.... It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction.”<sup>7</sup>

7. Henry James,  
“The Art of Fiction,”  
*The House of Fiction*  
(New York, 1941), 27

To many designers, art/design is a cultural mission in which life and work are inseparable. Clean surfaces, simple materials, and economy of means are the designer’s articles of faith. Asceticism, rather than “the good life,” motivates good designers—in keeping with the ideals of the modern painters, architects, and designers of the early part of this century, and with the beliefs, as expressed later by Edgar Kaufman: good design is a “thorough merging of form and function and an awareness of human values, expressed in relation to industrial production for a democratic society.”<sup>8</sup>

8. E. Kaufman,  
*What Is Modern Design?*  
(New York, 1950), 9

Not just good design but the implication of its modernity needs to be stressed. Le Corbusier, the great and influential architect and theorist, commented: “To be modern is not a fashion, it is a state. It is necessary to understand history, and he who understands history, knows how to find continuity between that which was, that which is, and that which will be.”<sup>9</sup>

9. William J. R. Curtis,  
*Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*  
(New York, 1986), 224

The problems a designer is likely to face in business relations depend a great deal on how well informed, genuinely interested, and experienced a client is. Managers responsible for design are usually chosen not for their eye, nor for their impeccable taste, but for their administrative skills. Few understand the intricacies of design or even the role, beyond the obvious, that design and designers play.

*Most see the designer as a set of hands — a supplier — not as a strategic part of a business.* Their background is primarily marketing, purchasing, or advertising; only incidentally or accidentally are they connoisseurs of design. It is their uninformed, unfocused preferences or prejudices, their likes or dislikes, that too often determine the look of things. Yet they may not even be discriminating enough to distinguish between good and bad, between trendy and original work, nor can they always recognize talent or specialized skills. They have the unique privilege, but not necessarily the qualifications, to judge design.

Managers responsible for the administration of design may spend endless hours at meetings allegedly about design that take up marketing, production, and administration problems as if they were design problems. Whether the participants understand the nature of the problems, or the implication of design, is questionable. If quality, for example, is the subject for discussion, it is dealt with only as an *abstraction*, with participants *assuming* the others understand what is being discussed, when in fact no one can be sure. Since perception is so intimately a part of taste and design, the experienced designer might possibly point the way to meaningful solutions and smooth the path for an administrator's needs.

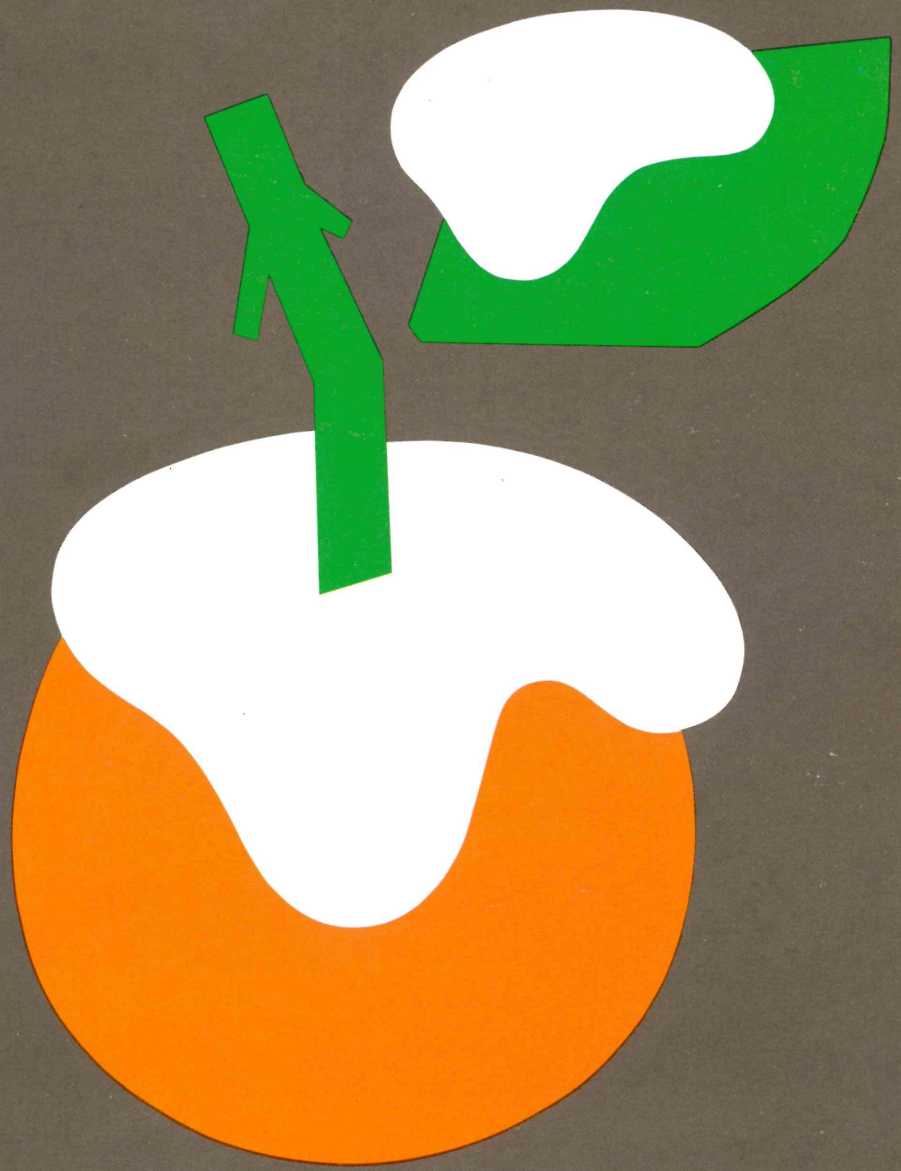
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*Right: Poster, UCLA, 1990: a study in contrasts.*

UCLA  
Extension

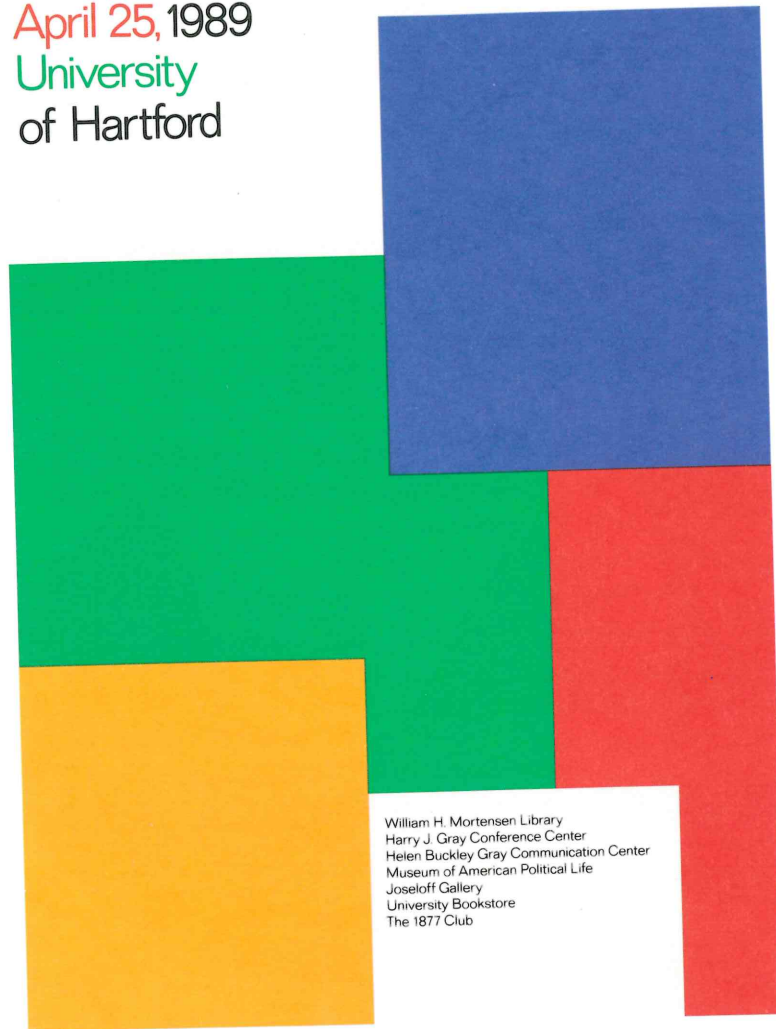
Winter  
Quarter

begins  
January 6  
1990





University Center  
Dedication  
April 25, 1989  
University  
of Hartford



William H. Mortensen Library  
Harry J. Gray Conference Center  
Helen Buckley Gray Communication Center  
Museum of American Political Life  
Joseloff Gallery  
University Bookstore  
The 1877 Club

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*Poster, University of Hartford, 1989. Abstraction turns into celebration.*

*The designer is not always right. The researcher is not always wrong. Profit is not always the motive; market research, whatever its outcome, should never be used as a good excuse for bad design — in the same sense that good design should never be used to promote a bad product.*

Design no less than business poses ethical problems. A badly designed product that works is no less unethical than is a beautiful product that doesn't. The former trivializes the consumer, the latter deceives him. Design that lacks ideas and depends entirely on form for its realization may possess a certain kind of mysterious charm; at the same time it may be uncommunicative. On the other hand, design that depends entirely on content will most likely be so tiresome that it will not compel viewing. "Idea and the form," says James, "are the needle and thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of thread without the needle or the needle without the thread."<sup>17</sup> Good design satisfies both idea and form, the needle and the thread.

A company's reputation is very much affected by how the company appears and how its products work. A beautiful object that doesn't work is a reflection on the company's integrity. In the long run, it may lose not only customers but their goodwill. Good design will function no longer as the harbinger of good business but as the herald of hypocrisy. Beauty is a by-product of needs and functions. The Barcalounger is extremely comfortable, but it is an example of beauty gone astray. A consumer survey that would find such furniture comfortable might find it to be beautiful as well, merely because it is easy to conclude that if something works it must also be beautiful and vice versa. Ugliness is not a product of market research but of bad taste, of misreading opinions for analysis and information for ideas.

17. Henry James,  
"The Art of Fiction,"  
*The House of Fiction*  
(New York, 1941), 40

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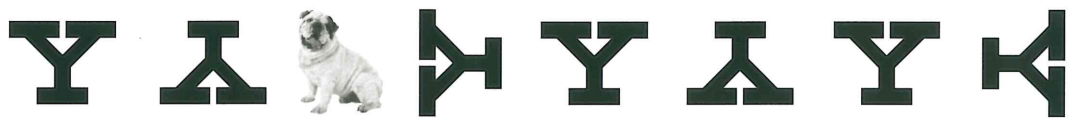
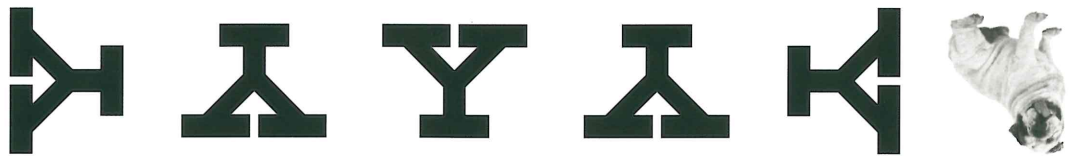
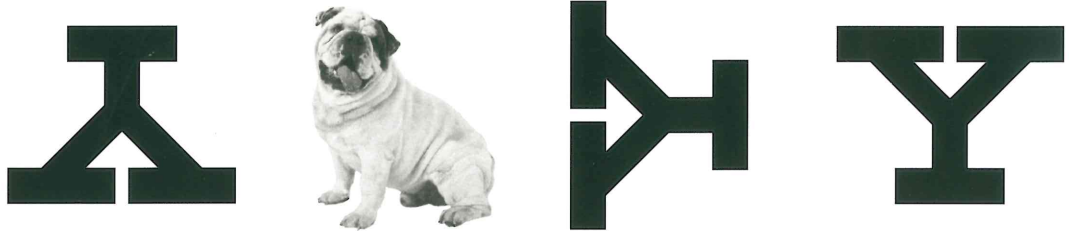
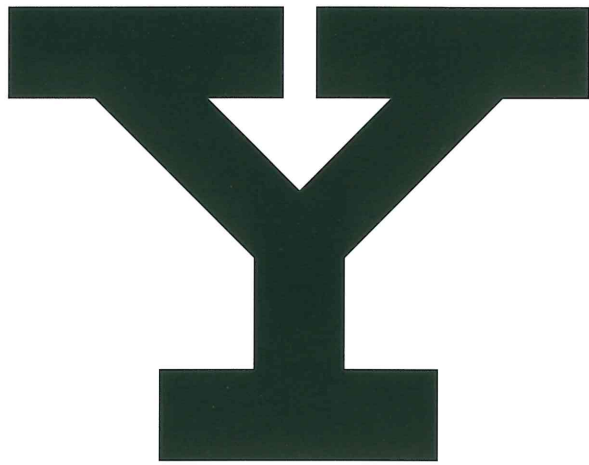
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Poster, PDR, 1985: "What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?"  
(Vincent van Gogh)



18. Joan Campbell,  
 "The Founding of the Werkbund,"  
*The German Werkbund*  
 (New Jersey, 1978), 14

In 1907 the German Werkbund was formed, an organization whose purpose it was to forge the links between designer and manufacturer. It was intended to make the public aware of the folly of snobbery and to underscore the significance of the "old ideals of simplicity, purity and quality." Its aims were also to make producers aware of "a new sense of cultural responsibility, based on the recognition that men are molded by the objects that surround them."<sup>18</sup>

From little buckslips to big buildings, the visual design problems of a large corporation are virtually without end. It is in the very solution of these problems — well-designed advertisements, packaging, products, and buildings — that a corporation is able to help shape its environment, to reach and to influence the taste of vast audiences. The corporation is in a singularly strategic position to heighten public awareness. Unlike routine philanthropic programs, this kind of contribution is a day-to-day activity that turns business strategy into social opportunity and good design into goodwill.

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*Left: Recruiting poster, Yale University, 1988.*

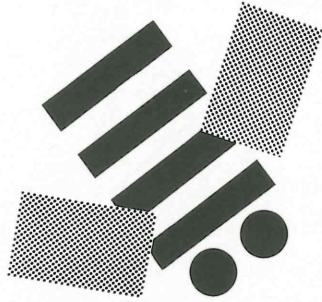


Tokyo  
Communication  
Arts  
Osaka  
Communication  
Arts

*Poster, Tokyo and Osaka Communication Arts, 1991*

The arrangement of colored squares in the poster at left provides ample room for intriguing metaphors. What do these squares mean? The spectator becomes involved in an absorbing riddle; resolving the riddle is a source of satisfaction. The rose, as depicted in the poster on the following page, though more commonplace, sets up a contrasting relationship with the stylized bee, which is engrossing. Choosing among different possibilities is often a bewildering experience. The dilemma of choosing between a metaphoric and a literal depiction is one commonly faced by the designer and settled intuitively if not arbitrarily. If a design is striking enough, it is not always necessary to explain it. Explanations sometimes obscure more than they reveal.





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*Sketch for poster shown on page 50.  
This idea sets up a relationship between the real and the stylized.*



Thoughts on Design Paul Rand



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"<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.