

The Simplicity of Paul Rand and the Application of
Roland Barthes Principles



PAUL RAND



AMERICAN

EXPRESS

GRAPHIC DESIGNER



**RAYMOND
PAUL**

PAUL RAND



A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Born in August of 1914, highly respected graphic designer Paul Rand was a pioneer of the American Modernist style. Combining personal philosophy and a visual vocabulary, Rand developed some of the most well-known logos of

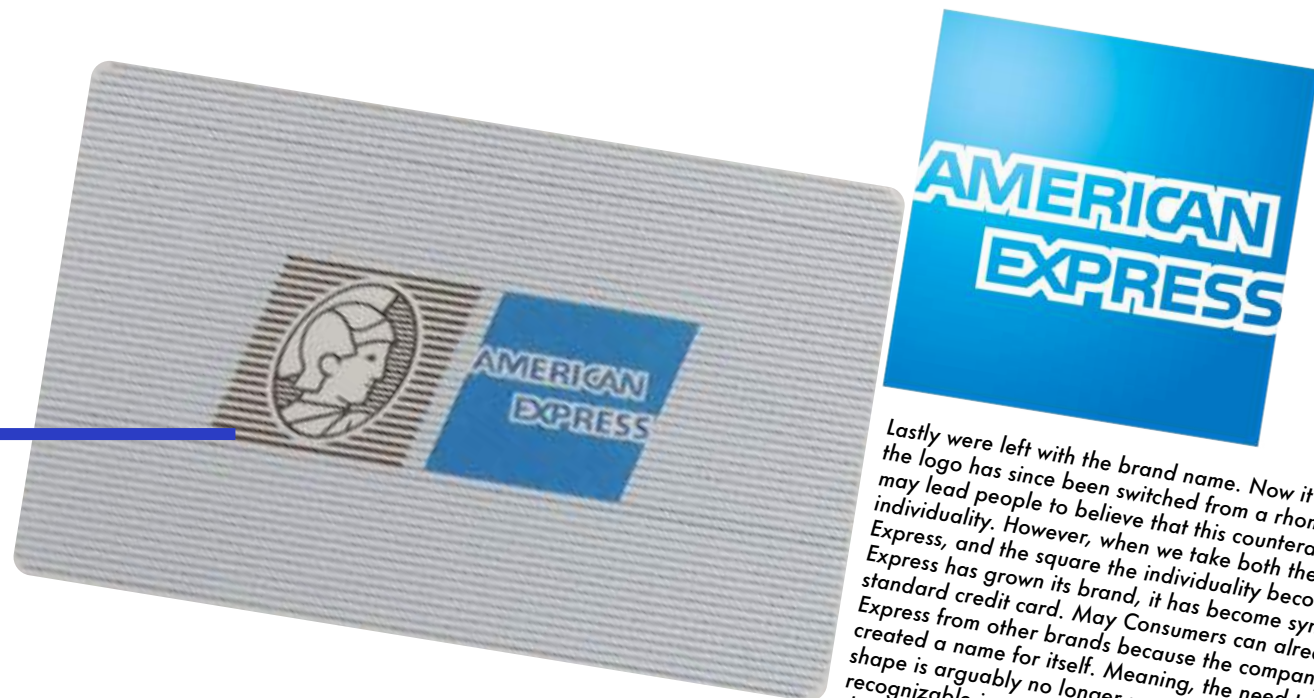
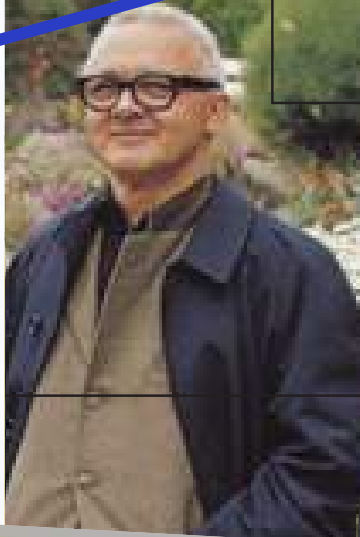
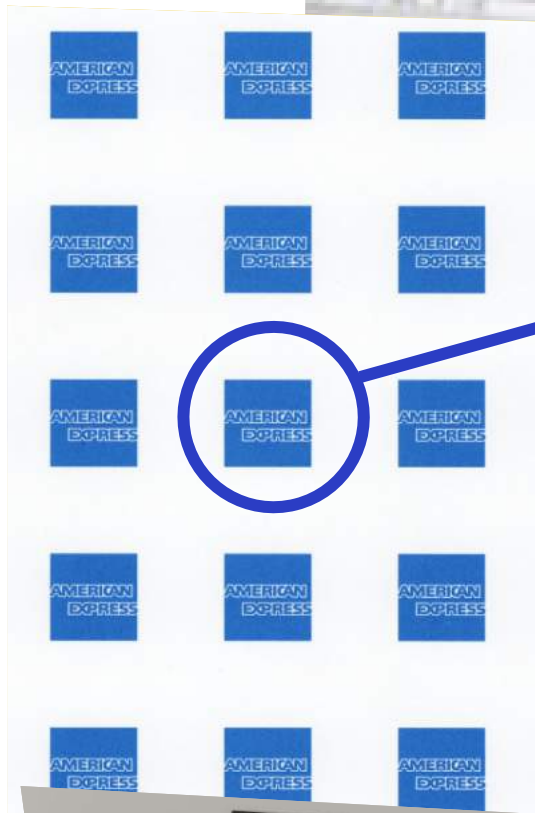
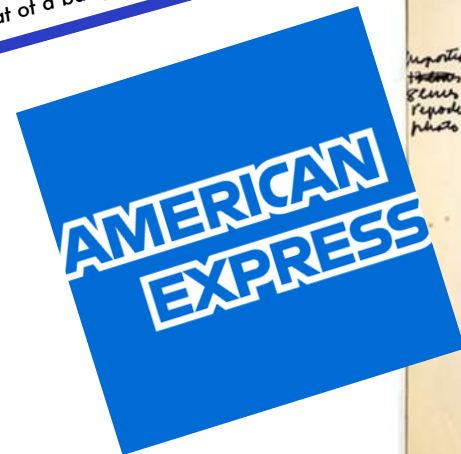
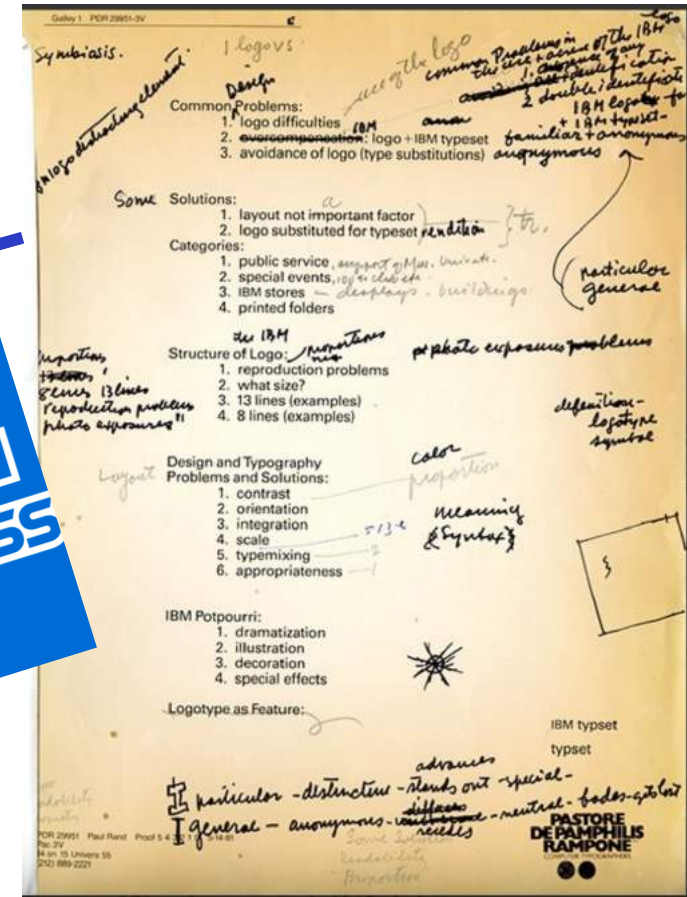
today such as IBM, NEXT, and our primary focus for today, American Express.

It's important to note that Rand believed that the quality of a design was rooted in being distinct enough to be mem-

orable, to be visible enough to stand amongst a crowd, to utilizing timeless design with both simplistic and accurate form, and arguable the most important was that design needs to embody the message of its brand.



American Express today holds those values not only through verbal and printed advertisement but through its branding and logo as well. Currently, American Express has largely in part stuck to the most recognizable identity, as created by Paul Rand. The rhombus, centurion, and Brand Name. When we break apart each of these symbols we get a complete look at what message American Express and Paul Rand sought to convey. The rhombus was set to visualize individuality, with Paul Rand himself noting, "The rhombus stands out in a sea of squares..." Next, we look at the centurion, a commander of a century within an oval, reminiscent of a badge. Consumers who see this centurion are made to believe that they are protected, that they're shopping with integrity with quality, and they're safe, similar to that of a badge of honor.



Lastly were left with the brand name. Now it's notable to mention that the logo has since been switched from a rhombus to a square, which may lead people to believe that this counteracts Paul Rand's vision of individuality. However, when we take both the Brand Name, American Express, and the square the individuality becomes clear. As American Express has grown its brand, it has become synonymous with any standard credit card. May Consumers can already identify American Express from other brands because the company has grown and created a name for itself. Meaning, the need to stick to the rhombus shape is arguably no longer necessary. In fact, this idea of becoming recognizable is still inline with Paul Rand's principles as he "believed that one should not assume the presence of a logo shall give an identity to a company. Instead, he stressed the importance of how much the company's well-being feeds into the significance of its logo." With that, the ability to update, and keep the brand image along with its message, was made possible. It's still important, however, to look back on how Paul Rand sought to identify and create what essentially is the basis of American Express today.

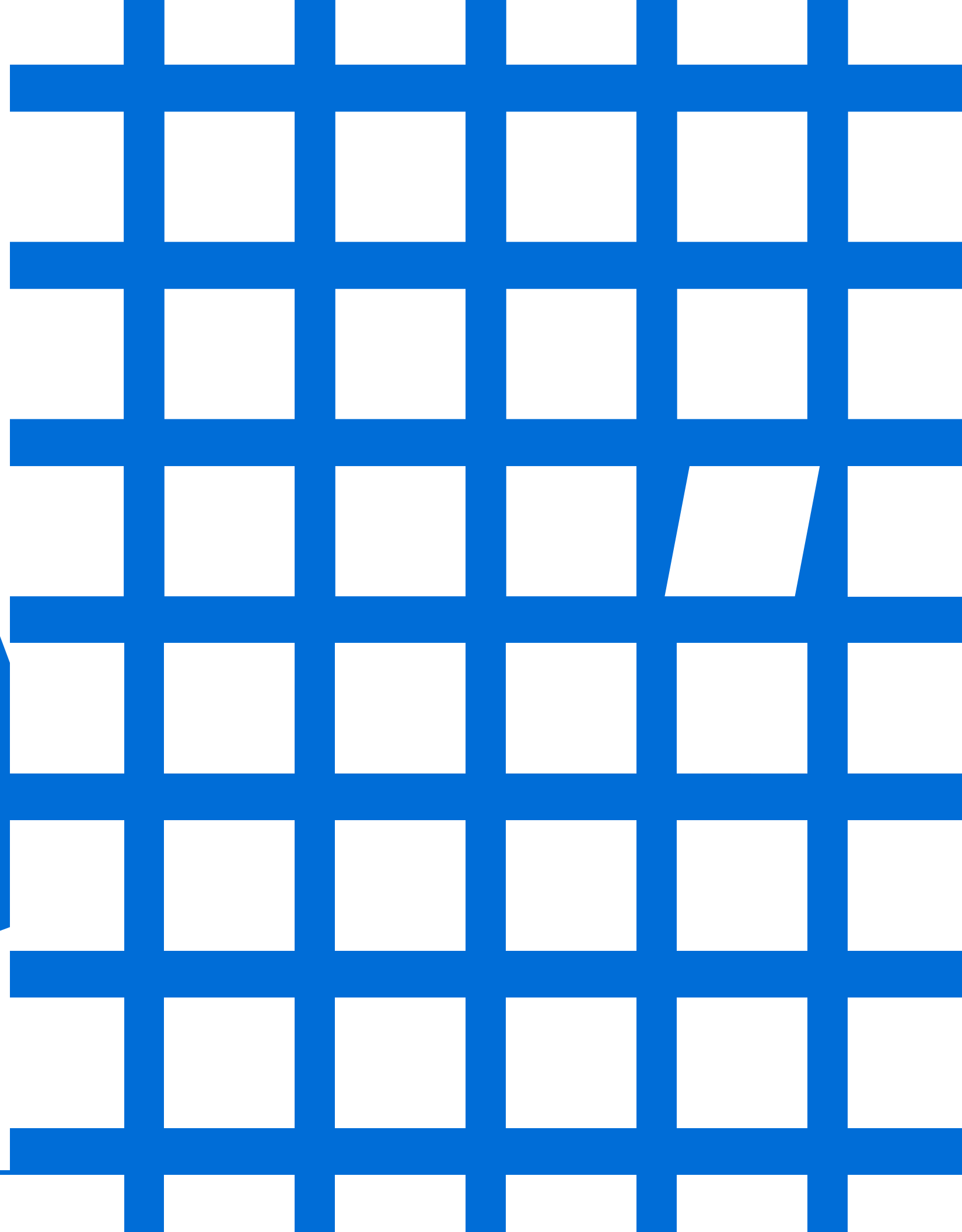
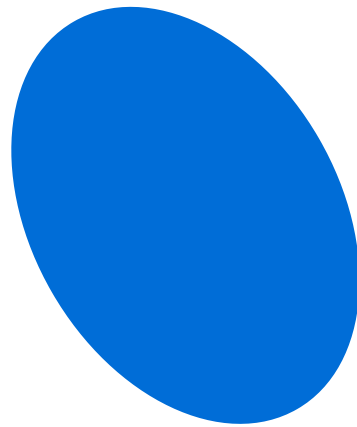
DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

WHAT WAS THE VISION?

When looking back on the original logo, It's important to recognize the intention behind each element of the logo. Upon first glance there is an inherent structure to this logo, however, upon close examination, the composition was established on the idea of non-conformative fluidity. You may ask yourself how can a rigid shape be fluid, well as previously stated, the rhombus was created as a way to be easily noticeable with Paul Rand himself noting, "The rhombus stands out in a sea of squares...". When considering artists such as Josef Muller Brockman who relied on the philosophy of order

and control while expressing the importance of a grid, Paul Rand is essentially doing the opposite. He took a traditional square that rests on the x and y-axis, and intentionally skewed it to diagonal z-axis thereby creating a more dynamic logo. There is fluidity in his intentions. The same can be said for the incorporation of the "badge" shaped like an oval. Here he advances the fluidity from diagonals to stripes, to curves as they all face an overlap. As we move into American express's logo today, The same factors still apply just arranged compositionally differently.

FLUIDITY



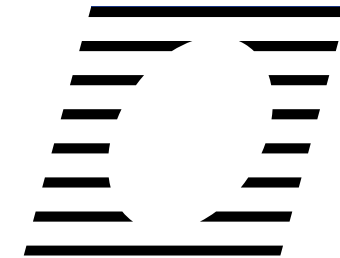
REALLY THE MESSAGE

ROLAND AND



In regard to American Express at its present, I'd like to talk about how the brand integrates both its logo and brand identity with its Catch Phrase. With the creation of the logo, Paul Rand also included the phrase, "Don't Leave home without it". As Logos themselves are "Walking advertisements", We can look at how Rand may have been applying the principles of Roland Barthes. As identified by Roland Barthes, an advertisement can be broken down into a series of clear distinctions, separating each element into their individual state; that is the text and the image are further simplified. When we consider the logo as the "Image" and the "catch-phrase" as the text, Rand is essentially applying what Barthes states as relay and anchorage.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT





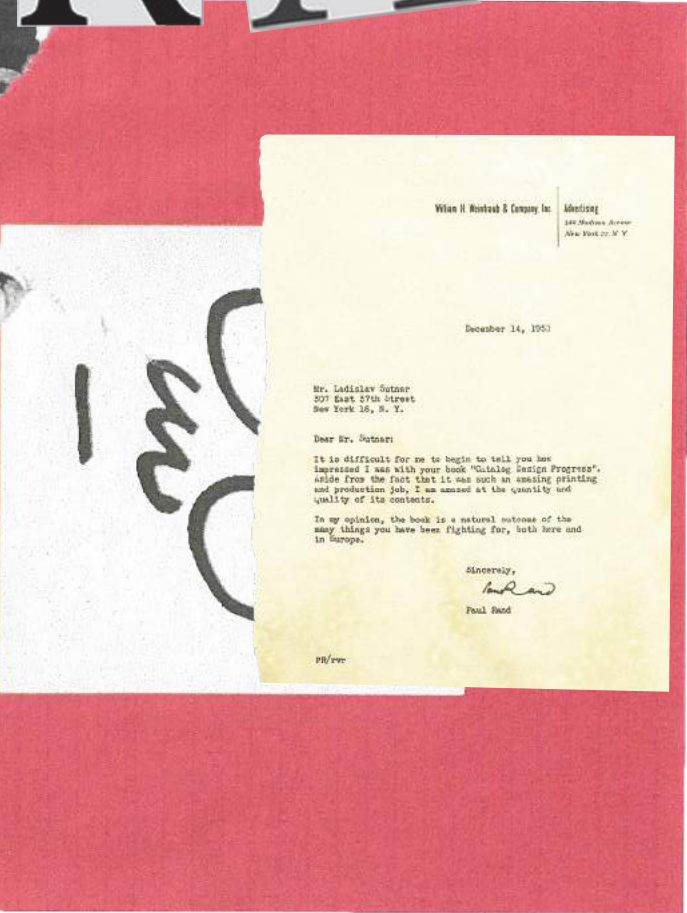
ANCHOR IT DOWN



Barthes describes relay as a means by which the text and image work in tandem, playing off of one another. The image supports the text and the text supports the image. When thinking back on the symbolism and message behind American Express, The text reinstates the idea of safety. You would leave your home with your home without your front door locked, the stove off, and the windows closed. In the same sense, American Express wants you to believe that Their card is just as important by using the phrase "Don't leave home without it". However, That's not to say that Anchorage isn't used as well. Anchorage, as states by Barthes, suggests a more one-sided relationship in which the text guides the viewer in their interpretation of the image. If you were a young consumer looking to get a credit card, The text Would once again Covey its importance. Separately you identify the brand as a trusted credit card company, the text lets you know that American Express is important; as important as any daily prepared factor of your life.



PAUL RAND



Walter H. Westcott & Company Inc. Advertising
145 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N. Y.

December 14, 1963

Mr. Ladislav Sutner
207 East 27th Street
New York 10, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Sutner:

It is difficult for me to begin to tell you how impressed I was with your book "Outing Design Progress", aside from the fact that it was such an amazing printing and production job, I am amazed at the quantity and quality of its contents.

In my opinion, the book is a natural outcome of the way things you have been fighting for, both here and in Europe.

Sincerely,
Paul Rand
Paul Rand

PR/rrc