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."[1] 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.

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

GOOD DESIGN IS GOODWILL

PAUL RAND | 1987

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." 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."

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.

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." He was one of those rare businessmen who believed that "art is the best means of propaganda."

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

PAUL RAND Logos: Westinghouse, 1960; IBM, 1962; UPS, 1961.

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."

Design is less a business than a calling. Many a designer's workday, in or out of the corporate environment, is ungoverned by a timesheet. Ideas, which are the designer's raison d'être, are not produced by whim or 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 [Philip] 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.

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." At one time, design was even considered a woman's job. "Let men construct and women decorate," 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.

"'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."

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 Kaufmann: 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."

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." […]

Design no less than business poses ethical problems. A badly designed product that works is no less unethical than 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 that recommended the use of thread without the needle or the needle without the thread." 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.

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

A DESIGN THAT IS COMPLEX, FUSSY, OR OBSCURE HARBORS A SELF-DESTRUCTIVE MECHANISM.

PAUL RAND
"Logos…Flags…
Street Signs"
1990

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."

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.

PAUL RAND Eye, Bee, M poster, 1981. Rand originally designed this rebus for an in-house IBM event, The Golden Circle Award. IBM forbid distribution, at first, worried that the design threatened their established graphic standards.