Paul Rand

Life, Work, Philosophy, and Influence on Modern Design

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Abstract

Paul Rand is one the most influential graphic designers of the 21st Century. This thesis will cover his biography and show how the events of his life shaped him into the famed and prestigious designer we know him to be today. The thesis will then cover the many projects Rand designed and show the influences on his style and how his design philosophy is evident in his work. Finally, the thesis will look at how Rand's style and philosophy has impacted graphic design in the modern era. This study will show why Paul Rand is considered to be one of the greatest graphic designers in history, and why his principles translate into good design, so the reader can learn how to improve their own work.

Paul Rand: Life, Work, Philosophy, and Influence on Modern Design

On November 26, 1996, Paul Rand died of cancer in Norwalk, Connecticut. He left behind a large body of work created over the course of his lifetime, which included book covers, magazine spreads, posters, corporate identities, as well as articles and books he wrote himself. Graphic design was quite a different field from when Rand first started, back when it was primarily known as "commercial art" (Rand, *Designer's Art*, 1988, pp. xi-xviii). Rand had a profound influence on this change, taking commercial artists from being formulaic corporate pawns to having the power to make pivotal creative direction decisions.

Today graphic design is a respected and valued occupation due in large part to Rand's influence. The principles Rand laid out in his literature and followed in his work are copied by many modern graphic designers when they create their own designs. Rand's contribution to the profession is profound and indisputable. This thesis will explore how Rand's background and philosophy shaped his work, and how his work and philosophy shaped the modern state of graphic design.

History

Paul Rand was born Peretz Rosenbaum on August 15, 1914 in Brooklyn, New York. His father, Itzhak Yehuda, was an immigrant from Galicia, Poland. His mother, Leah, was from Brooklyn. Both of them were orthodox Jews who worked together running a grocery store. Itzhak's clientele included members of what the press had dubbed "Murder, Incorporated" (Heller, Paul Rand, 2000, pp. 10-31). Rand also had a grandfather, who was eventually beaten brutally to death by a robber while he was taking a Jewish ritual bath in a Mikvah (pp. 10-31). Rand had two siblings, a twin named Fishel

(Philip) and an older sister named Ruth. Whenever they were not working the store, Rand

and his brother went to a Brooklyn state school in the mornings and to a Yeshiva to study

the Jewish Talmud in the afternoons. They both would occasionally skip school to

explore the neighborhood. Outside the grocery store were hung advertising displays

promoting Palmolive soap, with artwork of attractive women on them. Even at age three

Rand would copy these figures. This, however, ran against the orthodox view which

stated drawing figures was prohibited (pp. 10-31). Drawing became a hobby that

established Rand's independence. As he grew older, he became inspired by comic strips,

such as George Herriman's "Krazy Kat" and Frederick Burr Opper's "Happy Hooligan,"

as well as Nell Brinkley's comic women she drew for *The New York World* (pp. 10-31).

Rand would hide in the dark back room of the grocery store where he would create his

drawings. In spite of his orthodox upbringing, Rand could not shake his attraction to art.

This internal passion would stay with him the rest of his life.

When he was fifteen, he found a bound volume of *Commercial Art*, a British

graphics trade magazine, in a Macy's bookstore. He learned his first lessons about art

history from this magazine. He also discovered a copy of *Gebrauchsgrafik* (which means

"Commercial Art" in German)*,* a leading German advertising arts journal. The publisher

would regularly showcase leading designers from around the world. Rand's first copy of

the magazine introduced him to László Moholy-Nagy, a Hungarian painter and

photographer who was a professor in the Bauhaus school, Richard Lindner, a German-

American painter, and Valentin Zietara, a highly skilled German-Polish graphic designer

(pp. 10-31). Pablo Picasso, painter Paul Klee, and sculptor Alexander Calder were others

who became great sources of inspiration for Rand (Caudell, 2014). Rand would collect

bilingual editions of the journal and began to create his own design library. He was

mesmerized by the beauty of the design he discovered in these issues. During this time

Rand recognized that there is an intimate connection between art and design.

Rand was repeatedly scolded for indulging his secular interests. His father told

him, "We will lose you because you live in a secular world. Your language is Yiddish,

and your faith is Hebrew. Reading this will spoil you; it will destroy you as a Jew"

(Heller, Paul Rand, 2000, pp. 10-31). Both Rand and his brother took steps which led

them down paths that separated them from their parent's orthodoxy. Rand became an

artist, and Philip became a musician. Philip played in dance bands until he was killed in

his mid-twenties in a car crash on his way to a job in the Catskill Mountains. According

to a friend and former of colleague of Rand, Morris Wyszogrod, Rand ended up coming

to the conclusion faith and pursuits deemed secular are not mutually exclusive (pp. 10-

31).

Rand attended Public School 109 in Brooklyn, New York. While there, he tried to

avoid classes he found less interesting, such as English, math, social studies, and P.E., by

taking on other extra-curricular activities (Heller, Paul Rand, 2000, pp. 10-31). For

instance, he created school event signs and painted a large mural of a stone bridge to

hang behind the faculty sign-in desk. He became the chief class artist of his school and

would copy the styles of J.C Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell with his paintings. At

his age, Rand thought artists were supposed to work without reference images, so while

Leyendecker and Rockwell used pictures of models when they created their works, Rand

never did. In high school, Rand held on to his intense interest in creating art. Despite his

father's continual warning not to make art a career pursuit, Itzhak agreed to cover the $25

entry fee to enroll in night art classes at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. This was on the

provision he also attend Harren High School in Manhattan during the day. He had to take

the Canarsie subway back and forth each day to take his classes at the Pratt Institute. By

1932, he had earned two diplomas, one from his four years at Harren High School and

one from his three years at Pratt. Rand would later dismiss his time at Pratt, saying, "I

literally learned nothing at Pratt; or whatever little I learned, I learned by doing myself"

(pp. 10-31). His professors there were stuck in tradition and spouted trite phrases. His

teachers encouraged students to emulate the "great artists" such Rembrandt and

Michelangelo. Graphic design was almost never mentioned. Even though a revolution in

design was taking place in Europe, his professors never discussed the avant-garde.

      After Pratt, Rand attended the Parsons School of Design and the Art Students

League where he was taught by Georg Grosz, a German caricature artist ("Paul Rand,"

1997). Before long, Rand gave up on painting as a career path, deciding that the career

was not practical enough. He decided to focus on the commercial aspect of art, including

learning to illustrate typefaces. Rand educated himself in the New York Public Library on

Fifth Avenue.

      In 1938, *PM Magazine* made Rand the focus of the autumn issue, showcasing

much of his work ("Paul Rand," 1938, pp. 3-4). Even at that time, the article glossed over

Rand's formal education, dedicating more space to describing how Rand developed the

mindset of an artist through his personal study of how historical figures such as Picasso,

Mondrian, and Lissitzky approached art. Yet at the same time, he was described as,

"unhampered by traditions" ("Paul Rand," p. 4). At 24, Rand had already collected an

impressive art library in his pursuit of learning. The article also showed that even at this

early stage, Rand approached commercial art as a problem to be solved, not as an

opportunity to pretty it up with ornamentation, which he called "artisan tricks" ("Paul

Rand," p. 4). Rand believed so-called fine art and painting had helped advertising and

applied art considerably, yet he was also wary of applying it to a given problem when it

was unnecessary ("Paul Rand," pp. 3-4). The author likened Rand's philosophy to that of

Le Corbusier, a Swiss-French architect, painter, and designer who helped pioneer modern

architecture. In the article Rand was recorded as saying that it is wrong to borrow a

design used in a work of art and bring it into a new context without understanding the

elements that caused the original piece to succeed. There should be a logical reason for

every element of a designer's work. Because Rand approached his work as a project to be

solved, he had a Jack-of-all trades mindset. The article quoted Rand as having said,

> I feel that an artist well grounded in fundamentals should not be limited to any
>
> one sphere of design. I am definitely opposed to the so-called specialist, and to
>
> pigeon-holing a man. I believe that a good poster artist can, if given the
>
> opportunity, do fine newspaper ads. And, the chances are that the actor who,
>
> because he once did a good job as a gangster has since done nothing but
>
> gangsters, could probably do schoolteachers and country doctors, too, if he got the
>
> chance…provided he is thoroughly grounded in the craft of acting. ("Paul Rand,"
>
> pp. 3-4)

Rand himself created art within a broad range design mediums during this time,

including magazine covers, packaging, logos, posters, and layouts.

Rand produced many books over his lifetime which he both wrote and designed

himself. At age 33, Rand created *Thoughts on Design*, a book where he articulates his

philosophy of graphic design (Rand, *Thoughts*, 1947, pp. v, vii-viii). In the book, he

states that graphic design is not good design if it is irrelevant. Even if a work complies

with the principles of form and is aesthetically pleasing, if it does not succeed in serving

the purpose of communication, the work is useless. Rather, form and function are to

cooperate with each other as a beautiful integration. Rand speaks of design in terms of

problem solving and using the three types of material the designer has to work with.

These three type of material are

> 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.
>
> (Rand, *Thoughts*, 1947, p. 4)

When the designer breaks down the complex material into its simpler parts, he or

she can better and more clearly state the problem they are trying to solve.

In the mid- to late-30s, Rand took advantage of his influence in the workplace to

bring the avant-garde art movements from Europe into publishing and business

communications. He combined modern typography with paintings of the day to create

advertisements and book jackets for a number of different clients. He incorporated icons

and symbols in his early advertisements, creating designs that used negative space and

color to draw the eye. This treatment of iconic imagery in advertising was ground

breaking and helped advance modernism in America. During this time, Rand did many

iconic covers for *Direction* magazine, a cultural arts publication (Remington, 2003, pp.

108-109). Rand eventually quit his job at the Weintraub Advertising Agency in 1955 and

began his freelance career (Eskilson, 2007, p. 325). Rand taught at Yale from 1956 to

1985, the year he retired. Rand's focus as a teacher was on Modernism, elevating the

principle of utility over the principle of decoration. Rand was convinced that artistic

tricks divert the viewer's attention from the effect an artist endeavors to produce. He said

even excellent elements such as bullets, arrows, brackets, and ornate initials are at best

superficial ornamentation unless they are employed logically "(Paul Rand," 1997).

Work

In 1955 Thomas Watson Jr. of IBM hired Rand to study IBM's printed material

and make detailed recommendations for how they could be improved. Rand turned in a

report noting the utter lack of consistency in IBM's branding. His report stated,

> The examination has of necessity been cursory but it is believed that a number of
>
> significant features can be noted. Of all these perhaps the most critical is the
>
> absence of a family resemblance. There are, to be sure, a number of well-designed
>
> advertisements and house organs, but they are isolated pieces…. Typographic
>
> style is inconsistent even within individual campaigns; the IBM trademark is not
>
> sufficiently distinctive to be exploited with maximum effectiveness; and with a
>
> few exceptions, pictorial execution and layout incline to the commonplace. The
>
> fact that IBM's printed pieces bear little family resemblance to one another makes
>
> it difficult satisfactorily to establish a "company personality." (Harwood, 2011,
>
> pp. 39-40)

Rand suggested the first step in fixing IBM's design issue was to redesign their

logo. While he did not think IBM had a bad logo, he saw ways in which it could be

significantly improved. He redesigned the Beton Extra Bold typeface IBM was currently

using and made it more distinctive and easy to duplicate. By the following year, Rand

became a consultant director for IBM and coordinated all graphic output for the

company. He worked in conjunction with Eliot Noyes, the overall director of IBM's

design program. At the time, IBM's design chain was fragmented and haphazard, without

any unifying style guide or semblance of consistency (Harwood, 2011, p. 40). In April of

1965, Rand completed the first edition of *The IBM Design Guide,* intended as a series of

rules and principles for the IBM designers to follow. Up until the 1990s Rand was

responsible for designing most IBM stationary, as well as packaging for computer

products (p. 51). Rand continued to experiment with his logo redesign, before finally

settling on the eight-bar design that is now in service today. He introduced his final IBM

logo in 1970. It was used alternatively with Rand's original logo until the old logo was

completely phased out in 1972 (p. 54).

In 1959 Rand designed the branding for Westinghouse, a multinational producer

of appliances. The logo was so striking and abstract, the executives at Westinghouse

almost prevented the design from being put into production (Eskilson, 2007, p. 326). In

1968 he redesigned the packaging for Westinghouse's product line of lamps. During this

time Rand primarily made improvements by eliminating much of the excessive and

unnecessary graphics which had been adopted (p. 326). In 1961 Rand redesigned the UPS

logo so it had a much stronger visual presence. This logo was used for over 40 years.

Roughly 30 years later, Rand asked if he could fix small imperfections in the logo he had

come to notice over time, as a free service (Rand, *Miggs*, 1991). His offer was denied.

When Rand worked with clients, he often created pitch booklets to explain how

his design solution took care of the problem his client needed to solve. The booklets

included images and explanations which helped to explain his process. NeXT Computers,

The Limited, and American Express were a few of these such booklets. The NeXT

booklet started with exploring different typefaces to set the logo in, and the different

connotations of each. The booklet then explored how to solve the problem of

defamiliarizing the word "next." Because "Next" is such a common and ordinary word, it

needed to look different in order to stand out. At this juncture Rand demonstrated that the

letters "NEXT," when set in all capitals, can sometimes be confused with EXIT. He tried

different combinations of capitalization, and finally settled on NeXT. This made "e" the

focal point by contrasting its circular shape with the straight lines of the capital letters.

Rand indicated different positive words the letter "e" could stand for, such as

"exceptional" and "excitement," but ultimately those happened to be a happy accident

which came about by solving the problem. Rand then discussed the necessity of a device

which could reinforce the memorability of the name of the company. For this purpose, he

utilized a black cube which was distinct, memorable, and conceptually unrestrictive. He

stacked the letters of "NeXT" on one another to preserve readability at small sizes. He

chose the red, yellow, pink, and green color palette for the letters to appeal to a young

target demographic and to "sparkle," contrasting against the black box in which they

were set. He also turned the box to a 28 degree angle for tiling purposes (Rand, *Design*,

1993, pp. 69-88).

In 1994 Rand was hired to redesign the American Express logo. Although his

design was never actually adopted, his booklet for the redesign gives additional insight

into his philosophy and process. Rand began by pointing out that the current logo does

not live up to the quality of the company name. The length of the name made it difficult

to work with or reproduce, the off-centered word placement was odd, and the blue square

the letters were set in lacked spirit. Instead of a square, Rand replaced the old logo with a

rhombus, which was livelier and stood out better. The similarity of the rhombus to the

square would keep continuity with the 36 year old logo. He attempted to use a narrower

typeface which was less formal and fit better in the rhombus. However, the length of the

name was still an issue, so Rand abbreviated it to "AmEx." Just as "USA" is an acronym

everyone understands, so too is the meaning of "AmEx" unmistakable. The abbreviation

also served the purpose of being both functional and economical, since it fit with the

company's theme of efficiency. Rand then transitioned to the centurion, which had higher

recognition value than the square logo. Rand created a simplified centurion which he also

placed in a rhombus. When placed side by side, the two symbols formed a symbiotic

relationship, reinforcing and explaining each other. He also showed how this combination

could be used in conjunction with descriptors which could be utilized for various services

the company offered.

      These booklets served the purpose of both explaining and validating Rand's work

to his clients. Rand faced the challenge of convincing them that his solution was the best

one for their problem. The booklets gave his clients a window into his mind, walking

them step by step through how he approached the problem all the way to his final

solution which solved all the issues he laid out in the beginning. Since Rand did not give

his clients multiple options to choose from, this tool was indispensable in convincing

them that they made the right call.

Philosophy

Over the course of his lifetime, Rand wrote many articles and several books related to the subject of design. Some of them have quite a narrow and specific scope (*The Trademark as an Illustrative Device* for instance) while others are more broad, related to the general principles of design. When these are studied and compared, several recurring themes emerge which explain much of Rand's work and shed light on the mindset which produced them.

Rand saw design as a problem solving activity where he would frame his client's needs as a problem and seek out the best way to solve it. Understanding visual context and the relationship of elements is crucial to designing a work. In *Black in the Visual Arts,* Rand attacks the evidently prevalent notion of the time which scapegoated black as a grim dismissal of all other colors and associated it with sin, crime, and death. This perspective discouraged artists from using the color. Rand condemned this blanket denunciation which completely ignored any consideration of form or the relative nature of color. An artist could just as easily use white and black the other way round, just as Herman Melville employed the white whale as a symbol of monstrous evil. Black can be frightening, but it can also have a powerfully expressive impetus (Rand, "Black," 1949). Rand understood that different problems require different approaches and was unafraid to take advantage of whatever tools best solved the problem, whether that tool be the color black, the rhombus shape, or a geometric Swiss typeface.

Rand believed definitions were important in the design field. He once had a conversation with Mokkesh Patel, the Chair of Visual Communication at Arizona State University on this subject. He asked him about the definition of design. Patel answered

that design is a process of translating the problems of communication to the intended

audience. Rand responded that Patel's answer is not a correct definition of design, but is

merely a description of what a designer has to do. Patel then attempted to define design

as a plan, before Rand cut him off, explaining that saying design can be a plan of

anything is absolutely unserviceable to a student of design. This definition does not

generate any future possibilities for them, nor does it lead anywhere. The definition may

technically be a correct answer, but it does not help the student in any way. A good

definition will lead automatically to generated possibilities (Kroeger, 2008, p. 29).

However, in a talk at MIT, Rand also said, "Design can be art. Design can be aesthetics.

Design is so simple, that's why it's so complicated" (as cited in Maeda, 2001). Rand

recognized that both design and art can have multiple definitions which are difficult to

pin down.

Understanding the definition of design and related concepts was something Rand

believed should be hammered into the minds of his students. Rand defined design as "a

relationship between form and content" (as cited in Kroeger, 2008, pp. 29-30). Without

understanding this, design is perceived as mere decoration, which is how the layman

understands design. Once this is understood, the designer has something to work with.

The designer has to think through relationships such as color, shape, detail, size, and

style. The moment the designer places an element on a canvas, a relationship has been

created. Ordinarily, these relationships are poor; it is the designer's goal to make the

relationships excellent. This was a fundamental concept to Rand. At his talk at MIT,

Rand's handout states, "Time can, and does, erase meaning of once familiar artifacts, but

time can never erase form" (as cited in Blumenthal, 1996). The relationship between

form and content is an asymmetric one, where form is the superior factor.

Rand believed art was an integral part of everyday life. He said museums have

taken art and separated it from being experienced in normal everyday life. The answer is

in the problem. The problem is that art is isolated from where it should be. Art should be

in the bedroom and in the kitchen, not just in the museums (Kroeger, 2008, p. 21). Art

can be functional as well as aesthetically pleasing. Rand disagreed with Théophile

Gautier, who said, "Nothing is truly beautiful except that which can serve for nothing….

Whatever is useful is ugly" (Rand, *Designer's Art*, 1988, p. xiv). In his book, *A

Designer's Art*, Rand pointed to the stained glass windows of the Chartres cathedral as a

utilitarian work of art. The exterior invited passersby to enter the building, and rose-

colored windows bathed the interior in spiritual atmosphere. Rand saw Chartres as a

prime example of marrying beauty and functionality (*Designer's Art*, p. 3). A designer to

Rand was no different than an artist. Both manipulate the way form and content interact.

Rand stated humorously in a talk at MIT, "I try to create art, whether I make it or not is

not up to me, it's up to God" (as cited in Maeda, 2001).

Rand differentiated good design from bad design with this principle, "A bad

design is irrelevant. It is superficial, pretentious ... basically like all the stuff you see out

there today" (as cited in Maeda, 2001). "Pretentious," just like the "artisan tricks" he

denounced early on in *PM Magazine*. Aesthetics alone is not true design. Good design is

based on a strong positive relationship between the visual component and the

communicated message. Ornamentation, even beautiful ornamentation, is bad design if it

fails to meet its functional requirements. Frustrated with the lack of understanding about

this principle, Rand wrote a stingingly direct article entitled *Confusion and Chaos: The Seduction of Contemporary Graphic Design*. In the article, he attacks the gaudy and chaotic images which he sees as no less than pollution. He contrasts this bad design with the Dada art movement of the early 1900s. Theirs was a movement to rebel against unnecessary conventions of the day, which led to a needed reform. "Today's Dada" as Rand called it, stems from ignorance and rejects anything considered "old hat." Change for change's sake is destructive, not revolutionary. Designers must learn from the example of those who have gone before, so they can stand upon their shoulders. Without this learning, design students who go into the workforce become merely the blind leading the blind (Rand, "Confusion and Chaos," 1992). Rand said at MIT, "The fundamental skill is talent. Talent is a rare commodity. It's all intuition. And you can't teach intuition" (as cited in Maeda, 2001). Solving the problem successfully requires some measure of intuition. Skill can be taught, but instinct is harder to come by.

Rand believed creating a logo that spells out literally what a company does is not an important priority. The far more important task is to create something that has high recognition value and can be closely associated with the company over time. Rand writes in his NeXT Presentation booklet,

> Ideally, a logo should explain or suggest the business it symbolizes, but this is rarely possible or even necessary. There is nothing about the IBM symbol, for example, that suggests computers, except what the viewer reads in it. Stripes are now associated with computers because the initials of a great computer company happen to be striped. This is equally true of the ABC symbol, which does not suggest TV". (Rand, *Design*, 1993, p. 80)

In an interview with Paul Rand by Miggs Burroughs, part of their discussion revolved around people reading concepts into Rand's design. For instance, the stripes in the IBM logo do not have any connection with computers, speed, or interlaced video sent through electronic transmissions (Rand, *Miggs*, 1991). Using stripes was a practical design choice, not a conceptual one. Miggs asked Rand whether his logo for ABC would have worked just as well for CBS if he moved the "b" and "c" around and added an "s." Rand responded, "Oh, of course. Absolutely. The only intrinsic thing about it is that it's been seen for many years" (*Miggs*). The dots in Rand's Westinghouse logo were seen as representing plugs or circuit boards, yet Rand maintained they were meant to make the simple and common shape of the "w" more memorable (*Miggs*).

The power of a logo to take on meaning from how the company is perceived can have negative consequences as well as positive ones, depending on the company. The logo Rand designed for the Enron Corporation shortly before his death in 1996 became an example of just such a situation (Eskilson, 2007, p. 333). Like most of Rand's designs, the Enron logo is strikingly simple and successfully solves the design problem he was tasked with. The logo takes the form of square tilted at 45 degrees, with a giant "E" outline springing from the sans-serif word "ENRON." However, when the company shut down at the end of 2001 due to their fraudulent business practices, the logo took on new meaning. The logo became a symbol of corporate evil and was re-christened as the "crooked E" (p. 333). Rand never lived to see the collapse of the company, or even the unveiling of his logo. However, this event drives home the negative side of the concept which much of Rand's other work demonstrated; successful logos easily become sponges

which soak up the perceptions of their audience. Logos derive meaning from the product

they advertise, not the other way round.

Rand had a healthy respect for computers, while stressing caution with how

young designers use them. He once said to students at Arizona State University, "When

the computer was first introduced at Yale University, I considered that a calamity. It is

not because I am against the computer. I am not. I think they are unbelievably astonishing

machines. But that quality in itself—that seductive quality—is also what is bad about it.

Especially for beginners, who have to learn the basics of design" (Kroeger, 2008, p. 45).

Rand understood that the computer is merely a tool in the hands of an artist. The

computer does not teach someone how to become a designer. Rather, it can turn them

into a person who merely operates a computer, instead of one who uses it as an

instrument of design. A designer, particularly a young one, must be careful not to over-

prioritize the computer. When visiting Arizona State University, he told students, "You

need to have a clear head and a clear path when you are learning design, you cannot be

fiddling around with the computer" (p. 54). As for Rand himself, he never learned how to

operate one. While the ASU students were young enough to absorb the new technology,

Rand believed he and his wife were not. At one point they had a set of excellent

equipment, but it never interested him enough to put in the effort to learn the software,

especially when he had individuals on hand who could operate the computers on his

behalf (p. 45).

Rand had a reputation for not giving clients a number of choices when creating a

design solution for them. He once said to graphic designer Miggs Burroughs in an

interview, "[It's] for the same reason that a doctor doesn't give you a million choices,

you know? If you've got a headache, he'll give you an aspirin. He doesn't give you a choice between that and ex-lax…It just doesn't make any sense" (Rand, *Miggs*, 1991). Randy Golden, former Senior Program Manager of IBM Corporate Brand Architecture and Design said, "He didn't give people design options. He gave you what he felt was his recommendation; a single piece of work. And that's very uncommon, especially today. Paul didn't want to hear you didn't like it. He'd say, 'You hired me to do it. I'm telling you this is what you should use'" (Golden, 2015). Golden was the middleman between Rand and the executives of IBM. Because they did not understand Rand's process, they would see his work and nitpick something they did not like. Golden would then have to go back to Rand and convince him to somehow alter his solution. According to Golden,

> I'd have to make up a rationale that said, "The grief we gave you…wasn't good. Let me explain." And I'd make up something that would get him to change. And he would willingly change the design if he felt that. He'd say, "Well, why didn't you know that? Of course we've got to fix it." But if you said, "They don't like blue," his answer would be, "Tough. They bought blue." (Golden, 2015)

> By offering his clients a single solution he forced them recognize that expertise matters in the field of design just as it does in many other fields. Golden was not the only person Rand worked with who understood and respected his process. Steve Jobs, who Rand designed the NeXT logo for, described Rand as

> [O]ne of the most professional people I've ever worked with, in the sense that he fought through all of the formal relationship between a client and a professional such as himself…He had very clear conclusions about what the relationship meant to both parties and how it should be conducted. (Jobs, 1993)

Jobs said Rand was the only designer he consulted with for designing the NeXT

brand. He stated that the clarity Rand brought to the relationship was refreshing. He

gained a respect for Rand when they had their first discussion about the project. Jobs

asked if Rand could come up with several options for him to consider. Rand of course

responded with an emphatic, "No." Jobs recalls Rand answered,

> I will solve your problem for you. And you will pay me. And you don't have to
>
> use the solution. If you want options, go talk to other people. But I'll solve your
>
> problem for you the best way I know how, and you use it or not. That's up to you;
>
> you're the client. But you pay me. (Jobs, 1993)

Rand wrote an article concerned with the subject of presenting multiple solutions

to a client. In the article, he talks about the "inexperienced and anxious executive" who

creates problems which cause doubt and confusion by "innocently" expecting or even

demanding to see multiple solutions to a design problem (Coles, 2007). He highlights the

insecurity of such a character in the following way:

> He needs the reassurance of numbers and the opportunity to exercise his personal
>
> preferences. He is also most likely to be the one to insist on endless revision with
>
> unrealistic deadlines, adding to an already wasteful and time-consuming ritual.
>
> Theoretically, a great number of ideas assures a great number of choices, but such
>
> choices are essentially quantitative. This practice is as bewildering as it is
>
> wasteful. It discourages spontaneity, encourages indifference, and more often than
>
> not produces results which are neither distinguished, interesting, nor effective. In
>
> short, good ideas rarely come in bunches. (Politics of Design, 1981)

Rand maintains that when the designer elects to show the client multiple design

solutions, it is an act of weakness. This behavior is either an expression of uncertainty as

to which solution is really the best, or an expression of fear of the client. Either position

places the client into a role of responsibility which they are inadequate to fill. The

designer may choose to create multiple designs as part of his process for their own

benefit, but that scenario is crucially different from wasting time creating inferior

solutions based solely on the say-so of one who is ignorant as far as this field is

concerned.

Legacy

Rand has left a strong imprint on many of his peers and clients, as well as those

who came after him. Steve Jobs called Rand "the greatest living graphic designer" (as

cited in Behrens, 1999). Saul Bass, the famed graphic designer who made iconic title

sequences, said, "I watched Paul Rand, five years my senior, like a hawk" (Horak, 2014,

p. 34). Bass would later go on to design many famous corporate logos, which included

Bell Telephone, United Airlines, Avery, and AT&T, which mimics the "futuristic" lines

of Rand's IBM logo (Haig, 2014). Tom Geismar founded the graphic design firm now

known as Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv, which has designed a vast number of iconic

logos, including for PBS, the Smithsonian, Chase Bank, Mobil, and Nation Geographic.

He said of his time at Yale, "Among the visiting teachers were Lester Beall, Alexey

Brodovitch, Leo Lionni, Alvin Lustig, and Herbert Matter. They are all rightful heroes to

us, along with, and especially, Paul Rand, whose influence continues to evoke wonder"

(as cited in Clifford, 2013, p. 140). George Lois, who designed over 90 magazine covers

for Esquire magazine, remarks, "At the very pinnacle of my graphic forefathers stands

the name of Paul Rand. Cantankerous, irascible, loving, bristling with talent, brimming

over with taste, and endowed with invincible personal conviction—the original and

badass Rand showed the way" (as cited in Clifford, p. 120). John Maeda, a past professor

at the MIT Media Lab, president of the Rhode Island School of Design, and AIGA

medalist, cites Rand as one of his core influences. He reports,

> As a graduate student at MIT, I stumbled upon a thin, nondescript book called
>
> "Thoughts on Design" by Paul Rand. At the time I was building a reputation for
>
> myself as being a gifted graphical user interface designer. However, as I flipped
>
> through Rand's book I was humbled by the power with which he manipulated
>
> space and at the same time struck by the clarity of his accompanying prose. I was
>
> immediately inspired to pursue the field of graphic design, not necessarily
>
> pertaining to the computer. (Maeda, 2001)

The weight of Rand's influence is indicated by a 1953 *New York Times* ad which

read, "Wanted: Art Director with a modern, creative touch. Need not be a Rand but must

be able to inspire an art department" (VanHemert, 2015). Rand's contemporaries looked

at him with awe, inspired by his work and his talent. Just as Rand studied his artistic

predecessors and the art movements taking place in Europe, so too was Rand studied by

the designers of his day, and the designers who came after him. First with advertising,

then with branding, Rand reshaped business marketing and ushered in the modern design

era.

Without Rand, the graphic design industry as it is known today would likely not

exist. Louis Danziger, a graphic designer to whom AIGA awarded a medal in 1998, was

greatly influenced by Rand's *Thoughts on Design*. He said of Rand, "He almost

singlehandedly convinced business that design was an effective tool" (as cited in Heller,

Thoughts on Rand, 1997, pp. 106-109). As effective a designer as Rand was, he was also

an effective salesman. He had the ability to sit down with the chiefs of the world's largest

organizations and convince them of the value of his work. He could demonstrate how he

could launch them toward meeting their goals. László Moholy-Nagy called him "an

idealist and a realist, using the language of the poet and business man" (as cited in Heller,

Thoughts on Rand, 1997, pp. 106-109). During his lifetime, he convinced corporations

that design was not only a powerful asset, but an essential one. Design can influence a

how a corporation is perceived. A designer can add a great deal of value to his client's

product, and Rand was one of the few people who recognized this at the time. Designers

can improve not only the appearance of the product, but the product itself. They can

improve the memorability of a brand, also adding value to a company. Designers can

improve the quality of life of everyone who their good design impacts.

       In order to be a successful designer in today's world, having the soft skills Rand

possessed is crucial. A designer must not only be talented at his craft, but also be able to

convince clients those talents are valuable and can greatly increase the worth of the

client's product. While today's business climate is far more open to this concept then in

Rand's day, due in no small part to Rand's influence, it still is vital for a designer to have

this array of skills if they are to survive and thrive. Bringing together the personas of the

businessman, the craftsman, and the historian shapes the designer into a powerful force to

be reckoned with. Wade Thompson is the founder and creative director of the global

brand design firm, Son & Sons, as well as an admirer of Rand's work. He intentionally

hired designers who have the ability to walk into a room of executives, voice the ideas, and discuss how their work will impact the company (Caudell, 2014).

Rand not only influenced his peers, but also the shape of graphic design today. When Rand started working at an advertising firm in the 1930s, creativity was a rare commodity. The copywriter supplied the text to the graphic artist, usually a lengthy swath, which would then be plugged into one of the predetermined formats. Then commercial artists would come in and illustrate what the text described, and so another advertisement was popped out into the world. Rand brought in a radically different approach, recognizing that the power of the ad was largely affected by the way images and words were combined. He trimmed down the text and used the whitespace of the page to allow his ads to breathe (VanHemert, 2015). This fresh departure revolutionized the industry. Today ads are rarely cluttered by cumbersome text, but instead are visually stimulating and designed to draw the reader's eye. Rand was the one who brought art into advertising.

While Rand is no longer living, his works are still as powerful as ever. Though his first book, *Thoughts on Design*, was written in 1947, it is just as applicable today as when he wrote it. In it, he outlines the designer as a thinker, an individual who analyzes, interprets, translates, and organizes the problem, drawing on knowledge, instinct, and intuition. The designer uses symbols to fulfill specific functions, depending on the context. This person employs humor, form, repetition, and all other tools at his disposal to create the most effective design he is capable of creating (Rand, *Thoughts*, 1947, pp. 3-5). The principles in the book are still effective for modern designers. The visual examples of his work which he presents to underline his points still draw the eye. Good

design remains good design, regardless of the era. Good design is not dependent on the

artistic trends which constantly ebb and flow. Good design is timeless, and Rand's work

stands as a testament to the fact.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore the history of Paul Rand, some of his work, his

philosophy which shaped his design, and his influence which resonates through the

modern era. His philosophy of purposeful design built on the manipulation of form and

content was the cornerstone of his work, and it inspired the designers of his day as well as

many who came after him. His influence on corporate design has taken the skill of

graphic design from being an underappreciated occupation to a highly esteemed

profession. Rather than bowing to the will of corporate executives, he stood his ground as

an expert in his field and made the world recognize the importance of design. He used his

process to create the best solutions for his clients and increase the value of their products.

When Rand's principles are studied and applied appropriately, design can be

created that stands the test of time without having to bow to the whims of cultural trends,

just as ABC discovered when they sought to change Rand's logo. They changed their

minds when a market survey revealed the symbol had enormous audience recognition. As

Rand himself proclaimed, "When a logo is designed is irrelevant; quality, not vintage nor

vanity, is the determining factor" (Rand, *Logos*, 1991). Bass, Chermayeff, Geismar, and

other admirers of Rand have all designed many simple yet distinctive and meaningful

logos which are still in use and recognized even decades after their creation. Rand has

profoundly shifted the course of history and given the beauty of design not only a place in

the home of millions, but also in their daily lives.

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