Review: 'Honest with materials'
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<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Galvanising the top team</td></tr>
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Wrong perceptions	Correct perceptions
The problem we face is temporary	There is a crisis and the issues are major and fundamental
It is someone else's fault we are in trouble	It does not matter why we are in the mess; we the top team must lead the way forward
The problems lie in specific areas of the organisation; they are not widespread	Firm-wide change is needed across functions, territories and hierarchy

The themes of this book are profoundly important to anyone who believes Britain should and can have a rejuvenated industrial future. We do not have to accept decline as inevitable. Most firms that choose to create their own success can do precisely that. This book shows how.

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'Honest with materials'

DESIGN, FORM, AND CHAOS
by Paul Rand
Yale University Press, 218 pages, £35, $45

Paul Rand, produced some of the most significant and memorable images of and for American industry when it was in its unassailable hey-day. He has worked with some of the most powerful American corporations: IBM, Westinghouse, American Broadcasting. He has a world wide reputation. In 1973 he was elected an Honorary Royal Designer for Industry.

Rand, with Eliot Noyes, Charles Eames, George Nelson and a handful of others, represents a traditional strand of American design that comes directly from the Puritan Yankee 'honest with materials' tradition. It is as far removed from Harley Earl's fins for General Motors, Disneyland and

Tinseltown as it is possible to be. Both traditions are equally American; both are unmistakeable. Now Rand is getting older and more acerbic. This book, a collection of essays, represents some of his views on what works and what doesn't in graphic design.

Rand is nothing if not trenchant. Take the Rand view on the purpose of a logo. 'The principal role of a logo is to identify, and simplicity is its means . . . A logo, primarily, says who, not what, and that is its function. *Its effectiveness depends on* distinctiveness, visibility, adaptability, memorability, universatility and timelessness . . . This does not imply that appropriateness is undesirable. It merely indicates that a one-to-one relationship between a symbol and what is symbolized is very often impossible to achieve'. And so on. You don't have to agree. As a matter of fact I don't, not entirely anyway, but you certainly know where he stands.

Rand is not much different on the subject of market research or 'polling' as he rather quaintly calls it. He says, and for what it is worth, here I do agree with him, 'In the area of corporate identity, for example, the need for research, other than to satisfy one's curiosity, is questionable . . . Might the IBM logo have looked like this if it had been subject to market polling?'

Predictably, Rand doesn't seem to believe in large design groups. He appears to think that designers work best when they work alone. 'Design is a personal activity and springs from the creative impulse of an individual. Group design or design by committee . . . deprives the designer of the distinct pleasure of personal accomplishment.' All this may lead you to believe that Rand is an exemplar of the ivory tower school of design; but he isn't. Rand is very good on the relationship between client and designer. 'The relationship that exists between the designer and managers 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.'

What else does the book consist of, in addition to a series of elegantly phrased and sophisticated observations of the kind which I have quoted? Well there are some examples of Rand's own work, for IBM, Next Computers, The Limited and other less famous organisations. These presentations, as he calls them (although they aren't like any other presentations that you've ever seen), have been created both to show how he got to the end result, and how the design work can be applied in its final form. Like so much of Rand's work, the designs he shows are simple, brilliant, witty and although clearly from the same school, highly original.

In the rest of the book, Rand's 'elder statesman' position is perhaps a bit too evident. He rails against modern design and designers. 'The deluge of design that colours our lives, our print and our video sirens is in harmony with the "spirit of our times" . . . The qualities that evoke this bevy of depressing images are a collage of chaos and confusion, swaying between high tech and low art, and wrapped in a cloud of arrogance: squiggles, pixels, doodles, dingbats, ziggurats, and aimlessly sprinkled lilliputian squares. . .'. He goes on like this for quite a long time. Well of course, a great dealt of what poses for design today is, as Rand says, trendy rubbish, but then surely it always was. Things haven't got worse over the years. Most design work has always been at best mediocre and unoriginal. Great design has always been rare. The unique problem of today is that there is just much more of it about.

All in all, although the book is beautifully presented, as estate agents are inclined to say, it doesn't have much shape. It is too evidently a collection of articles and thoughts which have appeared at different times in different places. It is, despite these weaknesses, clear, unpretentious, self-confident, entertaining and free from any kind of jargon. Rand's creative work is as always fresh, seductive, timeless and brilliant.

WALLY OLINS
Wally Olins is the author of 'Corporate Identity', Chairman of Wolff Olins and a member of the RSA Council

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

New books by Fellows

ARTHUR, DAVID, *Market Forces. Theme Pamphlet No. 52*, Industry Churches Forum, 86 Leadenhall Street, London EC3A 3DH, 10 pages, £1. One of a series on the relationships between Christian faith and working life.

BALLARD, ESME, *Tamworth Castle*, Tamworth Borough Council, Staffordshire, 12 pages £1.20. An illustrated guidebook to the castle by the curator.

CURL, JAMES STEVENS, *A Celebration of Death*, Batsford, £25 paperback. An introduction to buildings, monuments and settings of funerary architecture in the western European tradition.

HOARE, WILLIAM, *The Musical Director in the Amateur Theatre*, J. Garnet Miller Ltd, Malvern, Worcestershire, 112 pages, £7.50 paperback (*see* lecture by Sir Richard Luce, May *Journal*, p378 ff).

IWAO, SUMIKO, *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality*, Free Press (Macmillan), New York, 304 pages, $24.95 hardback.

SPENDER, MICHAEL, *The Art of Pamela Kay*, David & Charles, 128 pages, £25.