

Report on  
Paul Rand's  
**Design Form and Chaos**

After reading this remarkable manuscript I am tempted to ask, at the risk of putting myself out of business, "why do we need any more texts on design?" I guess that's similar to the argument "why do we need any more typefaces when the classics do the job so well?" The answer is obvious, of course: we must allow for diversity of opinion in writing and diversity of style in type. However, with Rand's text I feel I have, so to speak, been to the mountain, and have read the most profound words on this subject. This book is a classic. I realize this is high, but warranted, praise.

To answer your specific questions read the following and extrapolate.

Design Form and Chaos begins where Paul Rand: A Designer's Art left off. If the latter can be viewed as the mature artist's examination of how and why he makes design, then this is the logical next step: a pointed, analytical, sometimes polemical view of graphic design as effects the artist and the culture. A Designer's Art was a smooth sea, Design Form and Chaos churns up the waters by asserting this iconoclast's lifetime commitment to a unique blend of Modernism, rationalism, intuition, and humor. His tone is more resolute here, and it seems as though A Designer's Art was merely a preamble for a decidedly more detailed and critical appraisal of contemporary practice.

The first three chapters are masterpieces of erudition. Indeed, these alone explain the process and passion that foster good design better than anything I've read (or written) on the subject. In an era when socially responsible design has become a fad, the chapter "Good Design is Goodwill" puts the current confusion into clear focus by elegantly simplifying the issue: good design is indeed good citizenship. "Intuition and Ideas" is classic Rand: Here he clarifies the role of the subconscious in this art/craft, placing responsibility on the individual while at the same time unravelling the complexities of the collaborative process.

The Presentation section is living proof that Rand's ethic, as expressed in the previous chapters, works in theory and practice. He takes us through the process as if the reader were the client and the client were a student. In these presentations Rand has given new meaning to "a presentation," a process that is usually fraught with performance anxiety. Rand proves that having an idea is paramount and supporting the idea (whatever it may be) by logic is the cornerstone of successfully making and selling design.

While every chapter is a door swung open on to new truths and discovery, the last two chapters are indeed the most extraordinary. "A Mentor," such a simply titled chapter, is the most interesting exigesis I have ever read about the most important inspirational experience any creative person can have. "From Cassandre to Chaos," which in an early form I published in the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design, is the coda to this book and perhaps Rand's most vociferous argument against fadism and irresponsibility. Everything Rand has observed about graphic design becoming a fashion statement over the past decade is distilled into this acerbic essay. As its publication in the Journal proved, his ideas will stir emotions, but such stirring is long overdue in a profession where the showcase has been the most critical form of discourse. To have the preeminent graphic designer