PAUL

RAND

Born Peretz Rosenbaum in 1914 and deceased in 1996, Paul Rand is a graphic design legend. Throughout his 60-years long career, he changed America's opinion on visual communication. With his editorial designs, advertisements, and visual identity works, Rand brought avant-garde European ideas to the United-States, mixing visual arts and commercial design.

TYPE TALK

with Mario Rampone

How do you regard "freedom of expression"

— about the person inspired to design a new typeface?

One must accept the good with the bad, the fanciful with the freakish.

Out of a hundred designs, there may be one that's really new. Who knows!

How do you feel about the "new" typefaces that are inundating the marketplace today?

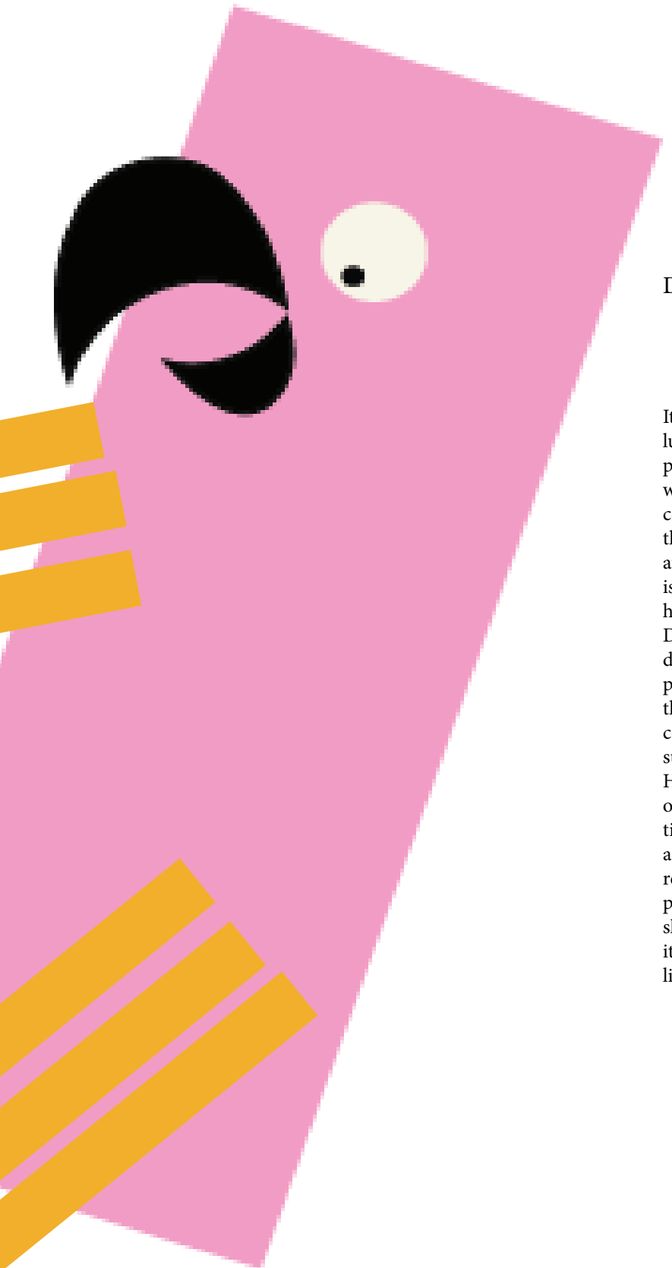
A new typeface is ideal for the neophyte who is intent on one-upmanship, and who equates the latest with the greatest. "There are as many different varieties of letters as there are different kinds of tools," commented Eric Gill, a long time ago. The announcement of anything new is bound to call attention to itself. When one considers the wonderful old faces that have passed through the sieve of time, one wonders, why new faces! Unless they're really new, there seems to be no reason to add to an already overloaded stockpile.

Do you believe that the proliferation of computers in design schools is a good thing?

Although newness has its place,
good design is not merely a question of novelty.

The typographer is more important than the type he uses.

You can’t blame the type if the typography is poor.
It’s like putting the burden on the music when the musician is at fault.



Do you believe that the proliferation of computers in design schools is a good thing?

It depends on how the computer is built into the curriculum. To the extent that the machine replaces the hand and prevents the student from practicing the manual skills, it is wrong. To the extent that computer theory replaces and is confused with design theory, it is equally wrong. Of course, there's a time and place for everything. Once a student feels at home with design—and this takes a very long time—he is free to choose his tools. A student once said, "I came here to learn how to design, not how to use a computer." Design schools take heed. After all, for every competent designer, there are at least a thousand competent computer operators—and we haven't even begun to deal with the products of computer-generated design, nor with the competence of those who teach design. The computer is surely one of the most astonishing machines of our time. However, the language of the computer is not the language of art/design. It is the language of machine—of production. It enters the world of creativity only as an adjunct, as a tool—a time-saving device, as a mean of investigating, retrieving, and executing tedious jobs—but not as the principal player. In education this art/production relationship is inescapable. The moment the balance is disturbed, it becomes a hindrance to invention and a barrier to the link between hand and tool. Of course, the computer is capable of producing visual effects not possible by other means. In the hands of a thoughtful designer, this may be useful. It may even help in the creative process—the realm of ideas—by suggesting visual possibilities undreamed of with other techniques, or by helping to solve problems specifically designed for the computer's capabilities. But these very means may also be the source of exploitation, merely for the sake of effects but not of essence. The expression "garbage in, garbage out" is more than a quip. Unless the computer is used properly, it will only encourage the kind of trendiness so profuse today—worse, in a way, than that stemming from more conventional means. The abundance of visual possibilities the computer makes available is its virtue: at the same time, it may be a source of confusion and baffling complexity. When to use it is certainly more important than how to use it. In the school environment it should be only a part of the curriculum but not the curriculum. I sometimes wonder if the fuss about computers in design schools isn't simply a decoy to show that the school is au courant. Or does it indicate some other problem! The tangibles of computer technology are obviously easier to cope with than the intangibles of design.

Do you believe design by computer will be as enduring as more conventional systems?

Enduringness has little to do with technique. As a production tool for a seasoned designer the computer is ideal As a tool for the beginning student it is a distraction. It produces more than the student needs, or is capable of absorbing.I don't use a computer myself. My supplier is better equipped to atisfy all my typographic needs, as he was in the Linotype days. I have never set type. I just look and "feel" if it's right or wrong.

I don't think one has to set type in order to be aware of its intricacies. It's a bit like expecting a doctor to experience the same illness as his patient, in order to validate his prescriptions.

Do you feel this technology can satisfy the requirements for good typography?

Computer-generated typesetting lacks the built-in discipline so essential to proper spacing. The limitations of metal typesetting provided the restrains for finer word spacing. On the other hand, the unlimited, variable spacing possibilities of the computer are the source of endless problems,
unless the designer is a pro.

Do you feel this technology can satisfy the requirements for good typography?

Alphabets for computer programs are unitized the same as metal type was. The programs provide kern tables to cut the sidewalls off in order to bring the characters closer together. Today, unitizing provided with each font is not accurate enough for critical spacing. To correct this problem, custom kern tables are necessary. PostScript devices have exacerbated the problem. Do you believe that good typography is possible with this technology?

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Yes, of course. The principal problem is spacing. It depends on people who are sensitive to the kind of typography that was possible when metal setting was available.

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DON'T TRY

TO

ORIGINAL

JUST TRY

TO

GOOD