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**Conceptual Design:**

**Conceptual Strategies in the Applied Arts**

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**Conceptual Design:**  
**Conceptual Strategies in the Applied Arts**

by

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Report

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A mis hijos

Andrés e Isabela

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**Conceptual Design:  
Conceptual Strategies In the Applied Arts**

by

María L. Ramírez de Romo de Vivar, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

SUPERVISOR: Gary B. Wilcox

Graphic Design by definition, is conceptual, its birth and production process depends on the conceptualization of problems and solutions. This report will explore what role does conceptual art, and conceptual strategies, play in the applied arts or visual communications. Just as in conceptual art, in graphic design "...the aesthetics of the design is less important than the "product" it signifies; its meaning is more important than its appearance." Strong examples of conceptual strategies will be described through the work of graphic designers Paul Rand, Allan Fleming, and Robert Brownjohn, who experiment with "defamiliarizing the ordinary" and advertising campaigns that have used a conceptual approach.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background Concepts: Conceptual Art and Design in the Twentieth Century	5
Paul Rand: Modernist Influences	8
Allan Fleming: Conceptualism and Mail Art	11
About N.E. Thing Co., Ltd.	12
Robert Brownjohn and Luis Camnitzer: “Watching Words Move” and “Horizon”	21
Design Now and the Future	26
Conclusion	32
Vita	33

## Introduction

Graphic Design by definition, is conceptual, its birth and production process depends on the conceptualization of problems and solutions. This report will explore what role does conceptual art, and conceptual strategies, play in the applied arts or visual communications. Just as in conceptual art, in graphic design "...the aesthetics of the design is less important than the "product" it signifies; its meaning is more important than its appearance."<sup>1</sup> Strong examples of conceptual strategies will be described through the work of graphic designers Paul Rand, Allan Fleming, and Robert Brownjohn, who experiment with "defamiliarizing the ordinary"<sup>2</sup> and advertising campaigns that have used a conceptual approach.

During the mid-twentieth century advertising campaigns started reacting to the social and political changes around the world and proposing new strategies. A recognizable advertising campaign that has been considered among the best campaigns of the twentieth century is Volkswagen's Beetle *Think Small* (Figure 1). In 1959, Helmut Krone created the *Think Small* advertising campaign for the Volkswagen Beetle with copy written by Julian Koenig at Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) agency. In 1999, Advertising Age ranked this campaign as the best advertising campaign of the twentieth century in a survey published as the "Top

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<sup>1</sup> Rand, Paul. *Logos, Flags, and Escutcheons*. AIGA Journal of Graphic Design, vol. 9, no.3, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> "Paul-Rand.com :: Biography." Paul-Rand.com :: American Modernist :: 1914-1996. Web. 06 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.paul-rand.com/index.php/site/biography/>>.

100 Advertising Campaigns”<sup>3</sup>. This particular campaign made a shift in the 1960s advertising art direction; its approach was innovative and conceptual by nature. The *Think Small* campaign moved the focus towards the idea and the core of the Volkswagen brand instead of the product alone. Design-wise, the art and copy was simple and modernist, which allowed to make the audience focus on the idea and the essence of the brand, rather than the product itself. The campaign was a success and DDB followed with an advertisement titled *Lemon* (1960, Figure 2), with a similar conceptual strategy.

In many cases, the similarity between the work of the graphic designers aforementioned and conceptual artists of the time is incredibly close. It opens the question of what were the factors that influenced such growing similarities. Was a paternal-style influence among “high” and “low” art to blame, or was a parallel growth between experimental design and conceptual art the reason. What it is to note is that both fields, design and art during the mid-twentieth century, were treated in a similar manner, with openness and experimentation. The mid-twentieth century experimental and questioning times were equally reflected in these areas.

The advertising world had a tremendous boom during this time and many campaigns started to reflect on experimental and radical ways from the traditional messages produced until that time. Some current conceptual advertising examples will be examined in this report, as well as conceptual art and design

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<sup>3</sup> <http://adage.com/article/special-report-the-advertising-century/ad-age-advertising-century-top-100-campaigns/140918/>



pieces that influenced the applied arts.



© 1959 VOLKSWAGEN OF AMERICA, INC.

## Think small.

Our little car isn't so much of a novelty any more.

A couple of dozen college kids don't try to squeeze inside it.

The guy at the gas station doesn't ask where the gas goes.

Nobody even stares at our shape.

In fact, some people who drive our little

flivver don't even think 32 miles to the gallon is going any great guns.

Or using five pints of oil instead of five quarts.

Or never needing anti-freeze.

Or racking up 40,000 miles on a set of tires.

That's because once you get used to

some of our economies, you don't even think about them any more.

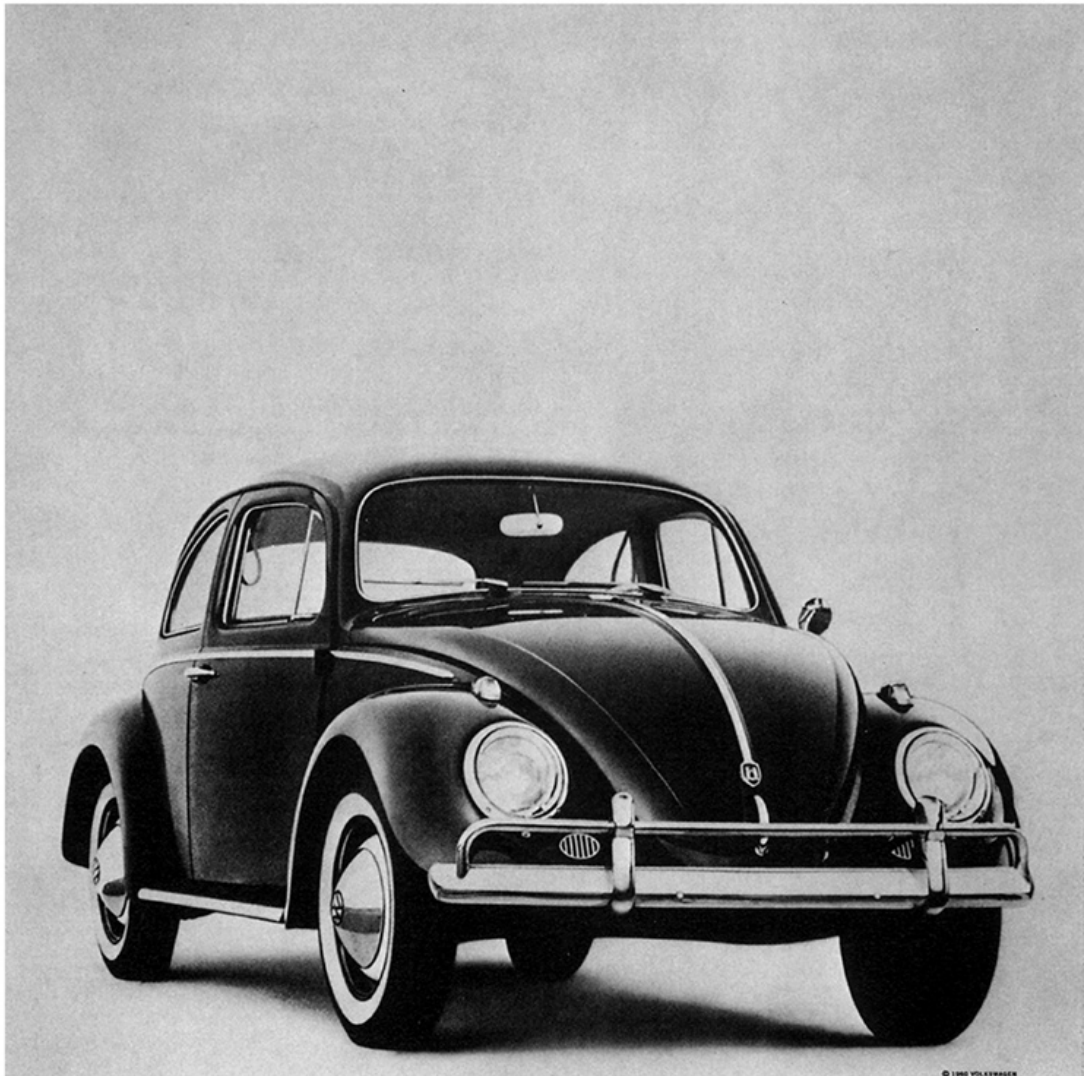
Except when you squeeze into a small parking spot. Or renew your small insurance. Or pay a small repair bill.

Or trade in your old VW for a new one.

Think it over.



Figure 1. *Think Small* campaign for Volkswagen Beetle by Julian Koenig, 1959.



## Lemon.

This Volkswagen missed the boat.

The chrome strip on the glove compartment is blemished and must be replaced. Chances are you wouldn't have noticed it; Inspector Kurt Kroner did.

There are 3,389 men at our Wolfsburg factory with only one job: to inspect Volkswagens at each stage of production. (3000 Volkswagens are produced daily; there are more inspectors

than cars.)

Every shock absorber is tested (spot checking won't do), every windshield is scanned. VWs have been rejected for surface scratches barely visible to the eye.

Final inspection is really something! VW inspectors run each car off the line onto the Funktionsprüfstand (car test stand), tote up 189 check points, gun ahead to the automatic

broke stand, and say "no" to one VW out of fifty.

This preoccupation with detail means the VW lasts longer and requires less maintenance, by and large, than other cars. (It also means a used VW depreciates less than any other car.)



We pluck the lemons; you get the plums.

Figure 2. *Lemon* advertisement, 1960. Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB).

## Background Concepts: Conceptual Art and Design in the Twentieth Century

Conceptual art is often described as one of the most influential movements of the twentieth century. Concentrating on the idea or concept rather than the formal definition of art, conceptual art uses the idea itself as the medium leaving behind traditional skills, like painting and sculpture. Conceptual art laid its groundwork in the early twentieth century with one of the earliest and most prominent representatives, *avant-garde* French-American artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). He experimented with fine arts and other fields of study such as philosophy, physics, mathematics, and social science, and pushed new boundaries with conceptual works—*readymades*<sup>4</sup>. One of his most recognizable works is *Fountain* (1917, Figure 3), a porcelain urinal, positioned ninety degrees from its original use, and signed with the pseudonym “R. Mutt”.

The work was scandalous at the time, and was submitted for the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, but rejected by the committee. In conceptual art, the idea is the most important aspect of the art, therefore the idea becomes the true meaning of the work.

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<sup>4</sup> Cros, Caroline. *Marcel Duchamp*, 2013. Reaktion Books. Pg. 201: “Duchamp started thinking about the ‘ready-mades’ in 1913, when he jotted a note to himself about making ‘works of art that are not art’. ... This new approach, which challenged contemporary assumptions about the very nature and value of art, provided, provided an ordinary thing with ‘another destination’.”

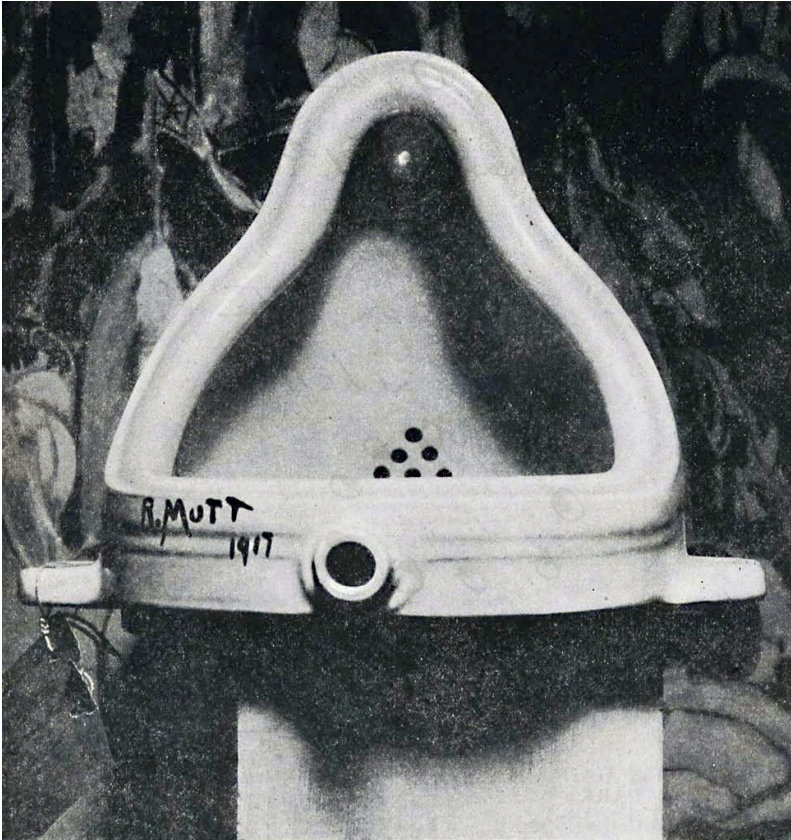


Figure 3. “*Fountain*” by Marcel Duchamp, 1917

Graphic design precedes conceptual art, but it is important to note that graphic design is considered in a separate category entirely. Graphic design is considered an applied art or minor art rather than a formal fine art. By definition, graphic design is a type of applied art that follows a creative process combining art and technology to communicate ideas. Graphic design uses typography and images to convey ideas and problem-solve concepts, and its main representation is commercial areas in need of visual. Art director and graphic designer, Paul Rand, defines design as the synthesis of form and content.

In the 1920s and 1930s the New Typography movement presented graphic design to the European artistic scene, rebelling against traditional design strategies and styles. The designs consisted of blocks of text and images in asymmetrical arrangements. This new type of design was well received by designers, artists and printers of the time, and quickly applied to publications and graphic design in general. Such design relied heavily on typography and is still a great influence in today's design styles.

## Paul Rand: Modernist Influences

Paul Rand (Born Peretz Rosembaum, 1914-1996) was a well-known American graphic designer, best known for his corporate logo designs. Traditionally educated in the United States, including training with George Grosz at the Art Students' League, he is considered one of the originators of the Swiss Style of graphic design. Rand is responsible for designing many posters and corporate identities, including the logos for IBM, UPS and ABC. In his publication *Design Form and Chaos*<sup>5</sup>, Rand explains what is a logo and what is its function. The same way conceptual artist in the 1960's questioned the role of institutions and who and what defines art, Rand dematerializes the object (logo) and poses it as a conceptual thought. Here is Rand's description:

[...] A logo, after all, is an instrument of pride and should be shown at its best. If in the business of communications, "image is king," the essence of this image, the logo, is the jewel in its crown.

*Here is what a logo is and does:*

A logo is a flag, a signature, an escutcheon, a street sign.

A logo does not sell (directly), it *identifies*.

A logo is rarely a description of a business.

A logo derives its *meaning* from the quality of the thing it symbolizes, not the other way around.

A logo is *less* important than the product it signifies; what it represents is more important than what it looks like.

The subject matter of a logo can be almost anything.

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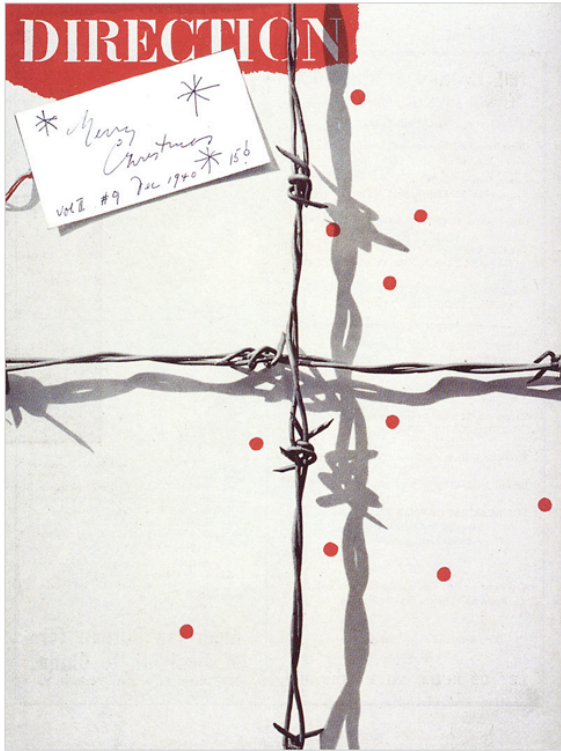
<sup>5</sup> Rand, Paul. "Logos...Flags...Street Signs." *Design, Form, and Chaos*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993. 56. Print.

In *Thoughts on Design*, one of his early publications, Rand examines the designer's problem when not considering the design a product of an idea.<sup>6</sup> There is a mistaken conception that graphic design is the result of triumphant arrangements of elements. But the reality is that good design is an effect not a cause. Through Rand's work it is clear that he had strong modernist influences. Some include, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), and Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, 1887-1965), among others. Lazlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) was amongst his closest mentors, and his work reflected an influence of Constructivism.

Rand designed cover art for *Direction* magazine from 1938-1945, but it was the 1940 cover that is considered a crucial design in his career. Rand had total artistic freedom from editor-in-chief, Margaret Harris. The December 1940 cover (Figure 4), uses barbed wire presenting the magazine as both a war-torn gift and a crucifix; in his book, *Thoughts on Design* Rand notes: "...is significant that the crucifix, aside from its religious implications, is a demonstration of pure plastic form as well . . . a perfect union of the aggressive vertical (male) and the passive horizontal (female)." Attempts through radical and conceptual strategies can be considered Rand's bridging of his profession with the "higher" arts such as his modernist influences.

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<sup>6</sup> Rand, Paul. *Thoughts on Design*,. New York: Wittenborn and, 1947. Print.



**Figure 4. Paul Rand's Direction magazine cover, December 1940.**

He later continued with other designs through his career geared towards the commercial field, and advertising, not without following his own philosophies of conceptual design. In 1960 he published the article *Advertisement: Ad Vivum or Ad Hominem?*<sup>7</sup> examining the role of advertising in reference to the creator, the designer. He questions the role aesthetics have in advertising, and how to give priority to think in terms of need and function in able to succeed as a designer. He compares the designer to the fine arts artist, and in a way levels the often “lower” profession up their level, creating a reputation for upcoming graphic designers of the time.

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<sup>7</sup> Originally published in 1960 in a special issue of *Daedalus: The Visual Arts Today*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes (Winter 1960)



## Allan Fleming: Conceptualism and Mail Art

Allan Robb Fleming (1929-1977) was a Canadian graphic designer best known for having created the Canadian National Railway logo in 1959. The New York industrial design firm James Valkus commissioned the Canadian National Railway logo (Figure 5) in 1959 and it is still used to this day. He assumed different corporate positions in typographic, advertising, and editorial companies through his career. After working as art director for *Maclean's* magazine, and radically redesigning the magazine, he was hired as executive art director at MacLaren Advertising Company Ltd. Some of his clients included General Electric and General Motors. One of the designs that will be examined in comparison with work of conceptual artists of the time is the “N.E. Thing Co., Ltd.” logo named, *Please Complete and Return*.



Figure 5. Canadian National Railway logo by Allan Fleming, 1959.

## About N.E. Thing Co., Ltd.

In 1966 conceptual artist Iain and Ingrid Baxter founded the “N.E. Thing Co., Ltd.” (Figure 6) —it was an official business entity, but created only for the purposes of conceptual art. With this faux or conceptual enterprise “N.E. Thing Co., Ltd.” (also known as NETCO) Baxter “developed an aesthetics that questioned the accepted structures involved in the creation and production of works of art, the system of art and its marketing mechanisms, as well as the very organization of thought.”<sup>8</sup>

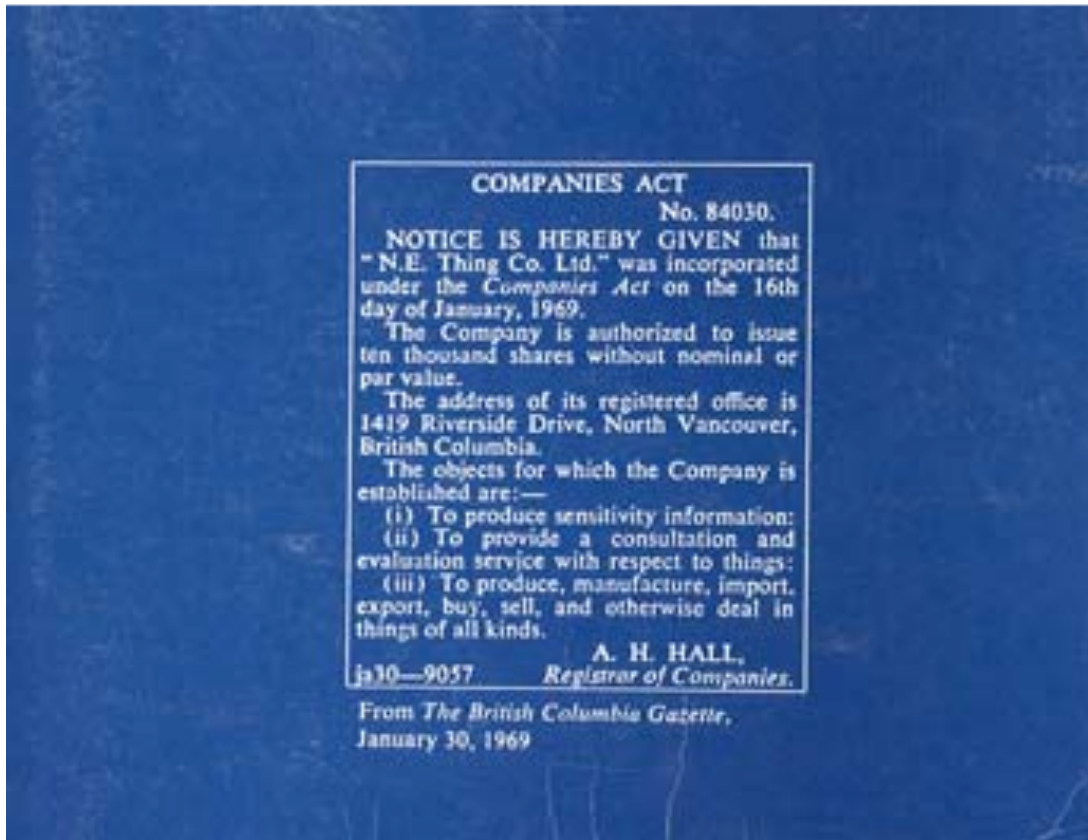


Figure 6. Companies Act 84030 (cover), 1969. N.E. Thing Co., Ltd.

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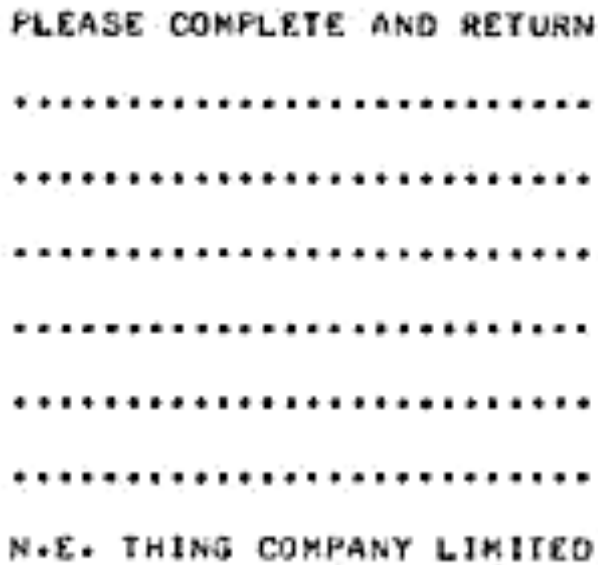
<sup>8</sup> “VOX – Iain Baxter.” VOX Centre De L’image Contemporaine. Web. 01 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.voxphoto.com/fd/baxter/en/intro.html>>.

According to the objectives of NETCO, with an ironic hint through its acronym, read as follows in the patent document they created:

- i. To produce sensitivity information;
- ii. To provide a consultation and evaluation service with respects to things;
- iii. To produce, manufacture, import, export, sell, and otherwise deal in things of all kinds.

NETCO was a fully organized corporation, with “departments” that would handle every artistic request. The names of these faux departments addressed the authenticity issue of the institutions, or in this case the legitimization of entities many times explored by conceptual artists. Examples of those departments were: research, accounting, ACT (Aesthetically Claimed Things) and ART (Aesthetically Rejected Things), photography, printing, COP (copying or plagiarism), film, consulting projects and service. NETCO also used new technologies of the time, such as the telex machine, that will be relevant to the conceptual logo discussed.

To follow with the “legitimization” of the company, NETCO hired Allan Fleming, to design the company’s logo. Fleming’s approach was to be true to the company’s mission, so he proposed an ambiguous logo. The logo, *Please Complete and Return* (Figure 7), consisted on such request, followed with dotted lines below, and “N. E. THING COMPANY LIMITED” printed at the bottom. There is no indication of what is solicited; the result is a call for participation versus the direct communication of a product. As designer Paul Rand proposes, the logo *identifies*. The logo was often also simply named “thing.”



**Figure 7. *Please Complete and Return* logo by Allan Fleming for the N.E. Thing Co., Ltd, 1959.**

NETCO's ironic attitude was clear in every communication or activity taken place, and example are their letters, where the ambiguity was the centerfold and included the logo, claimed as the "only telexable logo in the world" (Figure 8).

Fleming utilized conceptual strategies, inspired by conceptual art of the time, to design logotypes and printed materials. NETCO's approach of a faux entity, can be compared with the faux entities of Juan Trepadori of the New York Graphic Workshop<sup>9</sup>, but Fleming's logo is worth comparing it to José Guillermo Castillo's

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<sup>9</sup> New York Graphic Workshop (1964-1970) was founded by three young Latin American artists in New York — Luis Camnitzer, José Guillermo Castillo, and Liliana Porter—the group's mission was to redefine the practice of printmaking, focusing on its mechanical and repetitive nature as opposed to its traditional techniques and aesthetics. Moreover, the group employed radical printmaking practices — printing, for example, on the side of a ream of paper — exploring the idea of what actually constitutes a print. The NYGW examined the ideas and conceptual meaning behind printmaking, and sought to utilize the medium in both alternative and accessible ways.

Mail Exhibition #2 (1967, Figure 9), which consisted in requesting the viewer to fold a sheet of paper along the dotted lines, though the request was for a specific result, rather than an open input from the reader in Fleming's logo.

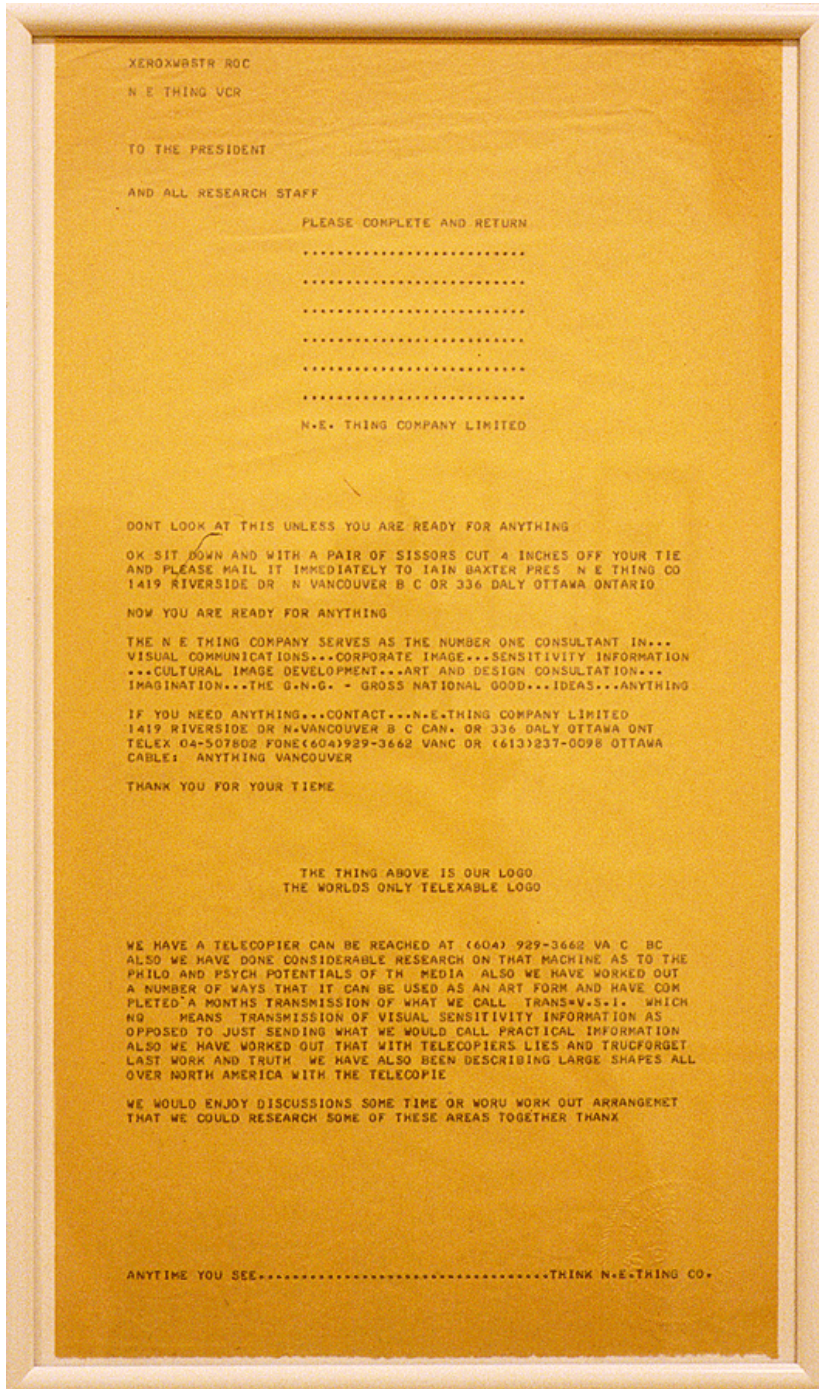


Figure 8. Telex letter with NETCO's logo



**Figure 9. *Mail Exhibition #2*, Offset print. José Guillermo Castillo, New York Graphic Workshop, 1967.**

Another case worth mentioning is the NYGW's *First Class Mail Exhibition #14* (1970, Figure 10), where the input of the viewer is similar to the request in *Please Complete and Return* (1959). Once the NYGW entered the mainstream New York gallery scene, *First Class Mail Exhibition #14* was intended as an attack to the institution, within the institution. As described in the NYGW catalog from the

Blanton Museum of Art (2009):

The piece was shown at MoMA in 1969, *First Class Mail Exhibition #14* had a poster that read, "The New York Graphic Workshop Announces its First Class Mail Exhibition #14." A table with a box of envelopes, an empty box, and a pen underneath the poster. The audience was invited to self-address envelopes with the promise that a work of art would be sent to them in the mail. MoMA paid the postage, the idea being that the expense of mailing an artwork to all of the visitors would place a tremendous financial burden on the museum. Visitors received a flier that read, "The New York Graphic Workshop Announced its First Class Mail Exhibition #14."



Figure 10. Documentation of *First Class Mail Exhibition #14*, Flyer and photograph, 1970.

Another artist that used mail art, similar to NETCO's telefax is Felipe Ehrenberg's in "Obra Telegráfica." (1973, Figure 11 and 12) Ehrenberg plays too with the irony of what is authentic, what is legitimate, in his case the piece was rejected by the 1973 Puerto Rico Bienal.

COMISION ORGANIZADORA  
Bienal de San Juan de Grabado  
Apado 4184  
Inst. de Cult. Portorriquena  
San Juan Puerto Rico 00905

Respuesta a la Bienal de Gráfica  
de Puerto Rico/ segunda vez que  
envio "obra telegráfica" (Hay una  
en la colección del MAC-USP que  
donó Walter Zanini al museo). La  
obra fue rechazada  
contundentemente por los  
organizadores! O\*\*+

Señores,

Reitero mis gracias por su amable invitacion y my aceptacion de la misma.

Sirva esta para certificar el envio de mis obras por medio telegrafico (British Post Office Telegram, Exeter 29 Nov. 73) y constatar la existencia de la edicion completa:

ejemplares numerados 1/10 enviados a la Bienal.  
ejemplares numerados de 2/10 a 10/10 enviados al domicilio arriba citado.

Como prevengo reservas sobre la aceptabilidad de mi obra dada a su naturaleza, me apresuro a constatar lo siguiente, al tiempo que incluyo datos biograficos apropiados ~~para~~ segun su convocatoria:

- 1- El TELEGRAMA es hecho a mano usando maquinas.  
(La litografia --piedra preparada por el autor como yo preparo un telegrama-- es en muchos casos impresa por litografistas. En mi caso, telegrafistas).
- 2- Mi firma, tal y como aparece al calze de mi obra telegrafica, es original y ha sido desde hace varios años, siempre impresa.
- 3- Mi obra es multiejemplar pues la edicion consta de 10 ejemplares. Su existencia la certifican los numeros seriales de la oficina de telegramos de la ciudad de Exeter, Devon, con los siguientes numeros: WB 434 542 -73  
WB 434 543- 74  
WB 434 544- 75  
sucesivamente hasta WB 434 541 -99

haciendo un total en mis manos de 27 copias.

Incluyo sus formas DESCRIPCION DE LAS OBRAS ENVIADAS completadas pues la naturaleza de mi obra impido su acompanamiento fisico.

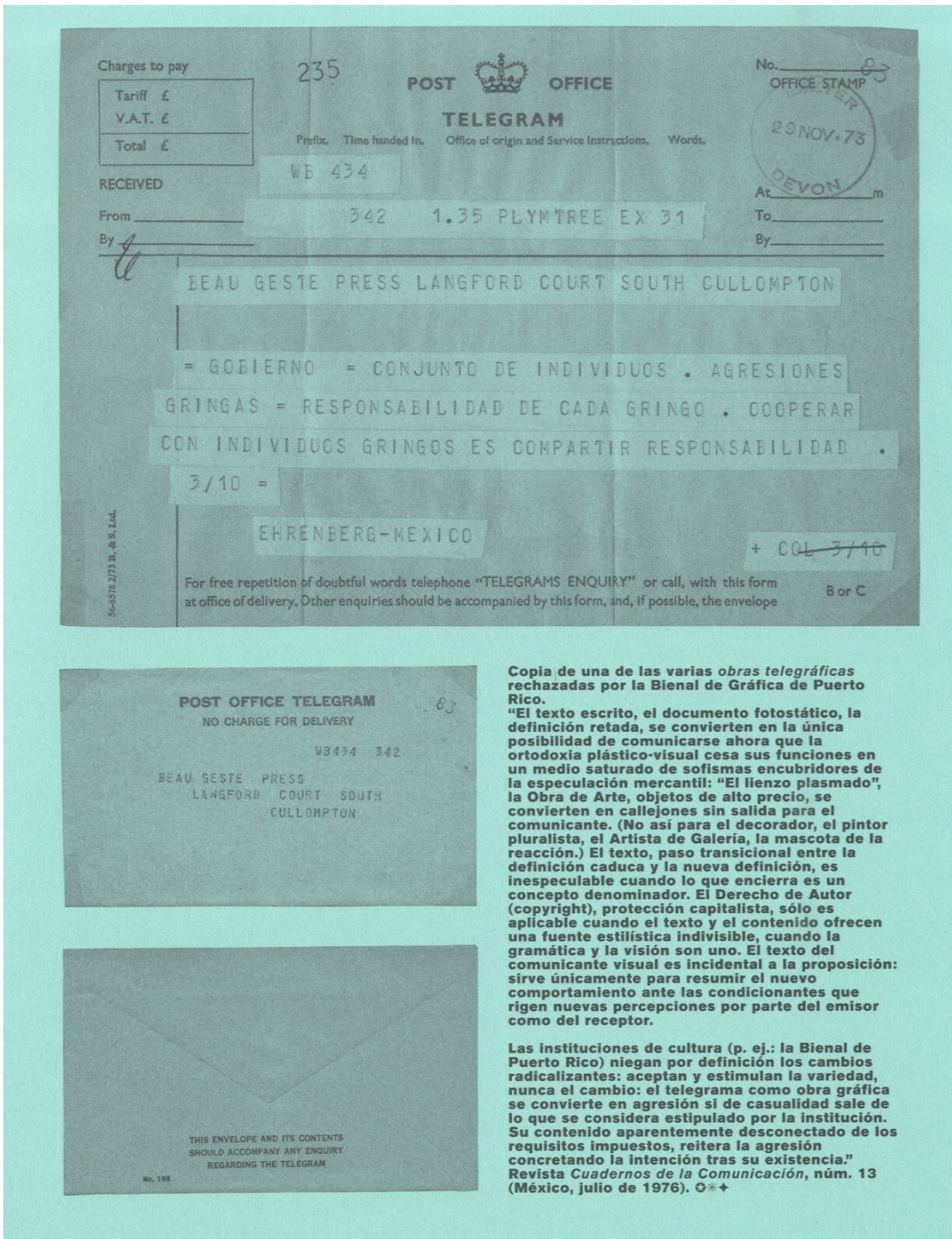
Incluyo tambien, la forma DATOS BIOGRAFICOS tambien completada.

Quedo de Uds. atentamente

Felipe Ehrenberg/Mexico

Figure 11. Letter explaining "Obra Telegráfica" by Felipe Ehrenberg, 1973





**Copia de una de las varias obras telegráficas rechazadas por la Bienal de Gráfica de Puerto Rico.**

"El texto escrito, el documento fotostático, la definición retada, se convierten en la única posibilidad de comunicarse ahora que la ortodoxia plástico-visual cesa sus funciones en un medio saturado de sofismas encubridores de la especulación mercantil: "El lienzo plasmado", la Obra de Arte, objetos de alto precio, se convierten en callejones sin salida para el comunicante. (No así para el decorador, el pintor pluralista, el Artista de Galería, la mascota de la reacción.) El texto, paso transicional entre la definición caduca y la nueva definición, es inespeculable cuando lo que encierra es un concepto denominador. El Derecho de Autor (copyright), protección capitalista, sólo es aplicable cuando el texto y el contenido ofrecen una fuente estilística indivisible, cuando la gramática y la visión son uno. El texto del comunicante visual es incidental a la proposición: sirve únicamente para resumir el nuevo comportamiento ante las condicionantes que rigen nuevas percepciones por parte del emisor como del receptor.

Las instituciones de cultura (p. ej.: la Bienal de Puerto Rico) niegan por definición los cambios radicalizantes: aceptan y estimulan la variedad, nunca el cambio: el telegrama como obra gráfica se convierte en agresión si de casualidad sale de lo que se considera estipulado por la institución. Su contenido aparentemente desconectado de los requisitos impuestos, reitera la agresión concretando la intención tras su existencia." *Revista Cuadernos de la Comunicación*, núm. 13 (México, julio de 1976). ☉\*+

Figure12. Felipe Ehrenberg's copy of one Obra Telegráfica, 1973

There is a legitimization of art through all these examples, and they can trace all the way back to Duchamp's *readymade* art. In the case of Fleming, his example is truly a valuable piece in conceptual design. When reviewing the NETCO logo, the audience creates and defines the meaning of the product. Just as in conceptual advertising campaigns, the audience becomes an active participant, rather than a simple recipient.

## **Robert Brownjohn and Luis Camnitzer: “Watching Words Move” and “Horizon”**

Robert Brownjohn (1925-1970) was a graphic designer that is considered to have influenced a movement of change for the graphic arts into conceptual art. His most recognized works are movie titles for James Bond films of the 1960's, artwork for the Rolling Stones, but there are also several examples that are worth examining along with work of 1960's conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer (1937), and poet, Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948). Brownjohn was among the most innovative graphic designers in 1950's New York and 1960's London.

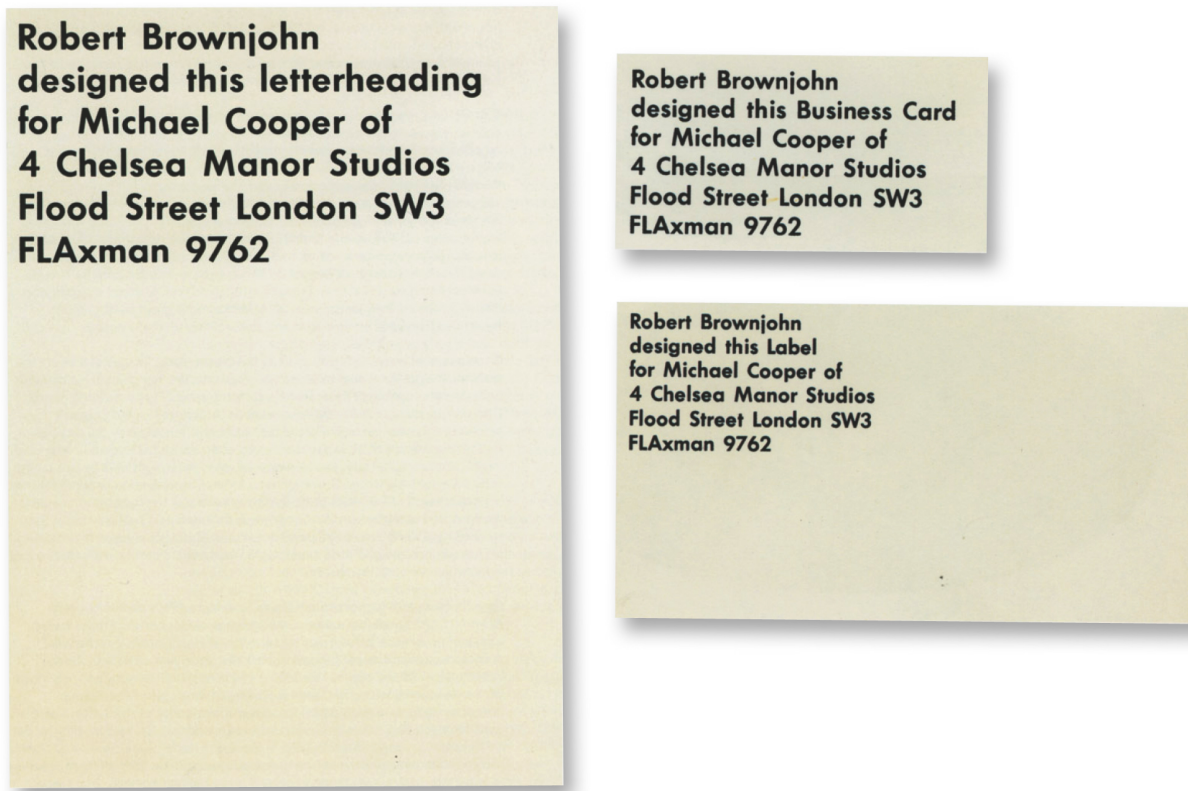
Brownjohn redefined graphic design in the 1960's, his position towards typography and image was playful and intelligent. He designed business stationery that resembled conceptual art, aesthetically and conceptually. He knew how to dematerialize the object; in this particular project the business stationery consisted of a written description of its representation.

In 1967, Brownjohn designed business stationery (Figure 13) for British photographer, Michael Cooper (1941-1973). Michael Cooper was a recognized for his photographs of leading rock bands of the 1960s and 1970s. The result was a conceptual response to a trivial request. It is said that he used half the page on purpose, making the items all about himself.<sup>10</sup> Aside from his personal reasons for doing the assignment, it resulted in a great play on typography, and a

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<sup>10</sup> King, Emily, and Robert Brownjohn. *Robert Brownjohn, Sex and Typography, 1925-1970: Life and Work*. New York: Princeton Architectural, 2005. Print.

dematerialization of the object, in this case the letterhead, and business card.



**Figure13. Robert Brownjohn, 1967 Business Stationery for Michael Cooper**

In 1959 Brownjohn teamed up with designers Ivan Chermayeff, and Tom Geismar to form Brownjohn, Chermayeff & Geismar (BCG). BCG did some experimental work, such as *Watching Words Move* (1959, Figure 14), a booklet that consisted of typographical exercises; a play on words. The three designers threw ideas such as: 'addding,' subtrcting,' 'multimultiplying.' This work has visual similarities and conceptual execution, with Luis Camnitzer's work *Horizon* (1968, Figure 15). Camnitzer abandoned figuration on that piece and focused on

language as image. Brownjohn did the same on *Watching Words Move*.



addding  
subtrcting  
multimultiplying  
div id ing  
no thing



Figure14. Cover and interior of *Watching Words Move*, BCG, 1959



**Figure15. Horizon, 1968. Luis Camnitzer**

Regardless of the fundamental difference between *Creacionismo*<sup>11</sup> and conceptual art, one could say that Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948) was a potential influence for conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer and graphic designer Robert Brownjohn. The way Huidobro uses poems to visually build its literal representation is in a way a dematerialization of type and use of words. In

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<sup>11</sup> Creationism was a literary movement initiated by Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro around 1912. Creationism is based on the idea of a poem as a truly new thing, created by the author for the sake of itself — that is, not to praise another thing, not to please the reader, not even to be understood by its own author.

Camino Paralelos (c. 1930, Figure 16) Huidobro plays with transforming the words into shapes, defamiliarizing the context in which we traditionally read poems, and with that adding a conceptual and playful strategy to the poem.

POR LA TARDE PASEAREMOS POR CAMINOS PARALELOS

QUE LA  
MONTAÑA  
EL ÁRBOL  
ERA  
MÁS  
ALTO

MAS LA EL  
MONTAÑA RÍO  
ERA TAN GRANDE QUE  
QUE EXCEDÍA CORRE  
LAS EXTREMIDADES NO  
DE LA TIERRA LLEVA  
PECES

CUIDADO CON NO  
JUGAR SOBRE LA HIERBA  
RECIÉN PINTADA  
UNA CANCIÓN CONDUCE LAS OVEJAS HACIA EL ESTABLO

que te miras. La luna en la

Figure16. Camino Paralelos, Vicente Huidobro (c.1930)

## Design Now and the Future

The examples of early conceptual art and design used in this report are a strong influence in today's design strategies. While Luis Camnitzer and Robert Brownjohn mainly rely on typographical execution, they defamiliarize the ordinary by transforming words into shapes; by making a direct link between the execution and the idea of the message. Allan Fleming contributed to the contemporary art scene while performing his projects as a graphic designer, not an artist. Those are examples that make a strong connection between conceptual art and design. Today, there is a resurgence of modernist style tendencies in design, some campaigns utilize the style itself for aesthetic purposes, but others make a perfect union of design and idea.

IKEA is a Swedish company that designs and sells practical, ready-to-assemble furniture and home décor. It is best known for its practical, simple, and sometimes sustainable items and practices, while not ignoring good design and aesthetics. The recent IKEA RGB Billboard campaign (Figures 17-20) in Germany (January 2014) is a current example of conceptual design strategy similar to the examples mentioned above. This campaign was designed and executed by the *thjink* agency in Hamburg, Germany, with creative directors Georg Baur and Torben Otten. It consisted on one billboard on the road that 'transforms' into three billboards. This clever solution maximizes the physical advertising space while strengthening the company's brand. Printed artwork is displayed as three different headlines, in three different colors (red, green, blue,



RGB) with three different light bulbs. The concept is very basic and follows the RGB and CMYK color models. RGB is considered an additive color model where red, green and blue are added or combined to represent other colors; RGB is for displaying colors and images in electronic systems. CMYK is a subtractive color model used in printing; it represents cyan, magenta, yellow and key (black). Each headline is printed in different colors (cyan, magenta and yellow) and superimposed on one another. The headlines read: (1) Do it like this billboard; (2) Make good use of your space; (3) With small-space solutions from IKEA. There are also three different light bulbs that light up the billboard intermittently (red, green, and blue) and the combinations of those different color models display the different messages. Green light displays the magenta text; blue light displays the yellow headline; and the red light bulb displays the text in cyan.



Figure 17. IKEA's RGB Billboard (2014) with white light, displaying the three superimposed headlines.

Although the billboard works only at night, when the different lights can display the different messages, the solution is a very clever one and has already drawn much attention to the ads and to the creative agency that designed it.

The IKEA Germany billboard is a very clear example of conceptual design where the idea is greater than the product it symbolizes; its meaning is more important than the appearance.



Figure 18. IKEA's RGB Billboard (2014) with green light, displaying the magenta headline.



Figure 19. Ikea's RGB Billboard (2014) with blue light, displaying the yellow headline.



Figure 20. Ikea's RGB Billboard (2014) with red light, displaying the cyan headline.

In 2004, Google launched a billboard advertising campaign to recruit for job positions in computer programming and engineering at Google (Figure 21). The billboard, printed in black font against a plain white background, read: “{first 10-digit prime found in consecutive digits of  $e$ }.com”. The billboard was a mathematical equation to solve and those who would find the answer to this first math problem were asked to solve an even harder mathematical problem that would then, guide them to another web page that asked for their resume. The solution to the problem plus a “.com” would result in the website that would give them the second problem. The advertisement was a very true representation of Google Corporation, an Internet-related services product.



**Figure 21. Google Co. mathematical equation job recruitment billboard (2004)**

This advertisement for recruiting engineers to work in their corporation was a very simple and conceptual solution to the task in hand. The billboard was positioned in a very relevant location, Silicon Valley. The focus was to truly represent the Google brand while hiring the smartest engineers they could find; a very conceptual approach, leaving aside the aesthetics and design execution and highlighting the 'idea'.

Conceptual design strategies in advertising are often associated with non-profit advertising agencies that present services or products for their true meaning; with sincerity, and bluntness at times. But these examples point out the creative conceptual strategy that bring out true meaning of the idea.

## **Conclusion**

The artists and designers included in this report are shown concisely but the material for further study is ample. A connection between conceptual art and graphic design is not too far apart. In some instances, such as Robert Brownjohn and Luis Camnitzer, very similar treatments to typography are implemented and surprisingly the designer precedes the artist by almost 10 years. In the examples illustrated in the report the experimentation and conceptualization is palpable. Content follows aesthetics; the idea triumphs over the execution and aesthetics. In fact, in many cases the 'unfinished' style and execution reflect the idea with more authenticity. Conceptual design is and will continue to be a strong resource in advertising campaigns and graphic design in general.

## Vita

María Leonor Ramírez de Romo de Vivar was born in Mexico City. After completing her work at Pearson High School, Coatzacoalcos, Ver., Mexico, in 1993, she entered Universidad de Monterrey in San Pedro, Garza García, N.L., Mexico. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts, in Graphic Design, from Universidad de Monterrey in May 1998. During the following years, she was employed as a freelancer designer, and then she was employed at The University of Texas at Austin until 2013. In May 2013, she began employment at The University of Texas System.

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