

DESIGNVERSO

SAUL

BASS

ANATOMY OF A

DESIGNER

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**Designverso: una collana dedicata  
ai designer della comunicazione  
immaginata come allegato  
alla rivista Multiverso,  
Università degli Studi di Udine**

**POLITECNICO**  
MILANO 1863



**Scuola del Design della Comunicazione**

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Sezione C2

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Copertina animata



Spesso, guardando un film, la nostra attenzione cade principalmente sui grandi volti, sulla trama o sugli effetti speciali. Non ci si rende conto del contributo fondamentale apportato sotto i nostri occhi da chi riesce a coglierne l'essenza e ad integrarla perfettamente nel film attraverso la traduzione in immagini.

Saul Bass è l'iniziatore di un nuovo modo di raccontare storie: inventa segni e li mette in movimento introducendo lo spettatore nella realtà del lungometraggio.

Ci ha conquistato con la sua semplicità grafica che cela uno studio attento dell'anatomia del film: da questo nasce "Anatomy of a designer", dalla volontà di compiere lo stesso processo nell'analisi della sua persona. Alla base della nostra progettazione vi è stato il suo approccio, trasversale nell'ambito del progetto, ai problemi: scandagliare il problema per definirne la soluzione.

L'unione di creatività e razionalità in un linguaggio che si fonda sull'utilizzo del colore con pochi contrasti netti e sulla sintesi attraverso forme geometriche dai tratti primitivi sono gli aspetti su cui, a nostra volta, abbiamo basato il nostro lavoro.

Giorgia Giulia Campi, Davide Formenti, Riccardo Fucelli e Francesco Mugnaini

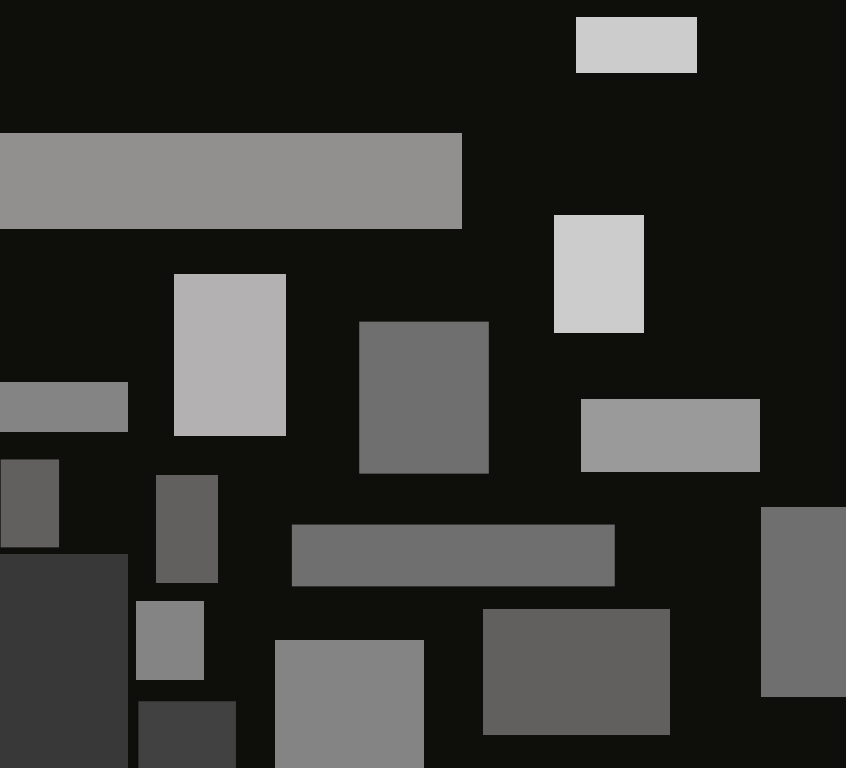
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LA PRESENTAZIONE  
A VOLTE  
E' PIU' IMPORTANTE  
DELLO SVILUPPO STESSO  
DEL PROGETTO

”



BIOGRAPHY



# Biografia

Saul Bass nacque a New York nel maggio del 1920 da una famiglia ebraica. I genitori, di origini russe, si trasferirono negli Stati Uniti nel 1907, portando con loro un forte bagaglio culturale che riuscirono a trasmettere ai propri figli. La madre di Saul, casalinga, era una grande raccontatrice di storie, capacità che Saul ereditò e metterà in pratica nella sua lunga carriera. Saul mostrò una passione per l'arte e il disegno fin dall'infanzia e i genitori incoraggiarono il suo talento.

**«Il mio primo ricordo legato all'arte risale a quando mio padre mi regalò una scatola di Crayola. C'erano quarantanove colori diversi nella scatola. Io li ho usati e ho disegnato fino a ridurli all'osso, dopodiché lui mi regalò un'altra scatola, e continuai a disegnare.**

**La sensibilità e l'amore per il lavoro manuale Saul l'apprese proprio da suo padre, un pellicciaio che lui amava definire un'artista».**

Le parole di Bass trasmettono un'intensa ammirazione nei confronti del padre:

**«Ciò che faceva in modo davvero straordinario era disegnare fiori e uccelli. Realizzava decorazioni con i ritagli di carta. Prendeva la carta, la piegava otto, dieci, dodici volte e poi faceva delle piccole cose con le forbici. Poi c'era quel grande momento in cui ci spiegava tutto, ed erano solo fiori, uccelli e alberi, era un intero mondo!».**

Uno dei maggiori impulsi per la già fervida immaginazione di Saul fu dato da un viaggio a Chicago fatto con la madre nell'estate del 1934, anno in cui la città ospitò l'Esposizione Universale per celebrare il suo primo secolo di vita. Saul visitò la fiera e ne rimase colpito:

**«C'era molto per deliziare un ragazzino di quattordici anni alla fiera, dai fantastici giochi di luce, alla pista da sci, tutte le frittelle che vuoi per un centesimo al padiglione della Quaker Oats. Saul al tempo non realizzò che, trentacinque anni dopo, avrebbe ridisegnato il logo della Quaker».**

Se il viaggio a Chicago fu una delle esperienze visive più ricche della sua infanzia, sarà alle scuole superiori che Bass inizierà davvero a distinguersi per le sue capacità artistiche.

**Dall'alto:**  
Stazione del treno diretto all'Expo di Chicago.  
Vista di Chicago negli "anni ruggenti".



**Dall'alto:**  
Vista della James Monroe High School nel Bronx.  
Vista della Art Students League di New York.

Alla James Monroe High School Saul era il redattore artistico della *The Monroe Doctrine*, la rivista della scuola che trattava argomenti di letteratura e di arte, e si occupava della impaginazione grafica dell'annuario scolastico. Alcuni di questi lavori vennero notati da uno scopritore di talenti della Art Students League di Manhattan che offrì a Saul una borsa di studio per l'importante scuola d'arte.

**«...Non potevo credere che si potesse vivere di arte. Io ho deciso che era quello che mi sarebbe piaciuto fare».**

Nel 1936 Saul Bass inizia i suoi studi alla Art Students League di Manhattan: frequenta il corso serale in Layout and Design for Industry tenuto da Howard Trafton, un artista specializzato in illustrazione, lettering e tipografia, il cui lavoro era stato molto influenzato dal Modernismo europeo. Per Trafton, infatti, era fondamentale spiegare ai suoi allievi le qualità dell'arte come la forma, il colore, la prospettiva e la composizione, elementi alla base di ogni forma artistica. Inoltre, Trafton insisteva sul ruolo fondamentale che ha la tecnica del disegno nella preparazione del graphic designer.

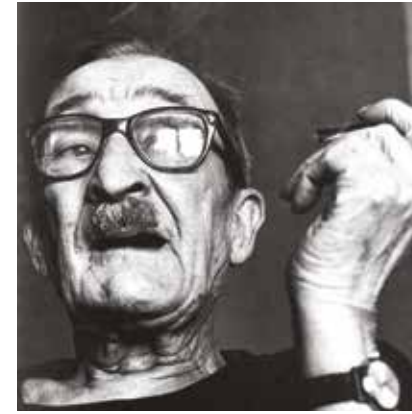
**«Ho imparato a conoscere Cézanne, Picasso e la cultura africana, così come i maestri del Rinascimento e mi sono cimentato con la prospettiva, la forma e lo spazio negativo. Egli (Trafton) mi rivelò i modelli ritmici che portano l'occhio da una zona di un disegno all'altro, l'arco di una mano, la curva di una nuvola. In breve, la classe di Trafton era esattamente quello che mi serviva in quel momento».**

Una volta finite le lezioni serali con Trafton, Bass realizzò il suo portfolio da portare in tutte le agenzie pubblicitarie di New York alla ricerca di un lavoro. Venne assunto da un piccolo studio pubblicitario che realizzava annunci commerciali per la United Artists. A quei tempi, il graphic design, spesso definito come "arte commerciale", stava emergendo come un'area specializzata del design. Non aveva però ancora un nome e un'importanza definita, come invece l'avevano l'industrial design e l'interior design. Questo faceva sì però che la formazione nell'ambito del graphic design fosse molto libera e fluida e non necessariamente legata alla formazione universitaria, fortunatamente per Saul, che decise di non entrare al college.

**«Saul descriveva se stesso come uno studioso metropolitano, che leggeva voracemente durante i viaggi in metropolitana di un'ora per il centro di Manhattan e si immergeva in una vasta gamma di immagini, dai libri di fumetti e film alle copertine delle riviste. James Montgomery Flagg, J.C. Leyendecker e Norman Rockwell erano fra gli illustratori americani che ammirava. Egli, inoltre, ricordava di aver visto meravigliosi manifesti di Lucian Bernhard, il famoso designer tedesco, in metropolitana. Il Bronx, un focolaio di radicalismo negli anni Trenta, fu la sua università».**

Nel 1938 Saul Bass fece il suo primo ingresso nel mondo del cinema. Venne, infatti, assunto alla Warner Bros, dove aveva il compito di occuparsi del layout dei manifesti pubblicitari dei film: disposizione delle immagini, lettering e aspetto grafico. Nel 1941 Saul Bass passò alla Twentieth Century Fox, in un periodo estremamente vitale per l'industria cinematografica. Inizialmente Bass fu contento di lavorare nel settore della pubblicità per il cinema, ma ben presto si accorse di come questo fosse estremamente orientato verso un approccio da lui poco apprezzato, quello che definiva l'approccio del See, see, see. L'intento di questo metodo di creazione era quello di realizzare manifesti pieni di immagini e impulsi visivi che colpissero il fruitore in mille modi possibili. Bass non condivideva questa idea di pubblicità, ritenendo più efficace quel tipo di approccio riduzionista, basato sull'«idea più semplice» che vedrà la sua fortuna a partire dai lavori degli anni Cinquanta. Negli anni Quaranta, tuttavia, nonostante Bass cercasse di far valere le sue idee, i tempi non erano ancora maturi per cambiare le convenzioni del settore. Estremamente deluso da questo tipo di approccio, nel 1944 Saul lasciò lo studio, convinto di non volersi più occupare di campagne pubblicitarie per i film. Iniziò, quindi, a lavorare per la Blaine Thompson Company, una promettente agenzia newyorkese. Fu proprio durante gli anni di lavoro alla Blaine Thompson Company che Bass conobbe Gyorgy Kepes, artista ungherese, esponente del Modernismo europeo, che avrà un enorme influenza su di lui. A partire dal 1930 inizia la sua collaborazione con Laszlo Moholy Nagy, l'importante pittore e fotografo esponente del Bauhaus. Entrambe le personalità e i loro studi saranno di importanza vitale per la carriera artistica di Saul Bass, e per la definizione del suo stile. Le lezioni di Kepes contribuirono a trasformare il modo in cui Bass intendeva il design, aiutandolo a diventare non solo un semplice designer di talento, ma un importante esponente della grafica di stampo modernista.

**Dall'alto:**  
Laszlo Moholy Nagy.  
Gyorgy Kepes.



**Dall'alto:**  
Alex Brodovitch.  
Paul Rand.

La vicinanza a Kepes gli permise, inoltre, non solo di ampliare le proprie conoscenze in campo artistico e teorico, ma anche di entrare a far parte della New York Art Directors Club e di stringere così amicizie importanti con i maggiori grafici che lavoravano a New York, da Alex Brodovitch a Paul Rand. Dopo aver seguito le lezioni con Kepes ed essersi fatto un nome importante nel mondo del design newyorkese, Saul Bass ritornò a lavorare per il cinema. Pur rimanendo sotto contratto della Blaine Thompson Company, iniziò, infatti, una collaborazione con la Warner Bros che lo portò a stringere una forte amicizia con il suo collega Paul Radin. Radin, poco tempo dopo, venne assunto dalla Buchanan and Company per dirigere i nuovi uffici di Los Angeles. Sotto raccomandazione di Radin, nel 1946 a Saul Bass fu offerto un posto come art director a Hollywood. Nonostante New York in quegli anni rappresentasse ancora il centro dell'industria pubblicitaria per il cinema, qualcosa nell'aria stava cambiando: la nascita di diverse case di produzione indipendenti stava creando molta concorrenza tra i giovani designers newyorkesi. Inoltre, Los Angeles e Hollywood, in questi anni, stavano diventando un luogo di incontro per numerosi artisti e uomini di talento. Bass decise che era giunto il momento di cambiare aria e accettò l'offerta di Paul Radin.

Nel 1946, quando Saul Bass arrivò a Los Angeles, la città era «una Mecca per i giovani artisti e designer». All'inizio degli anni Quaranta numerosi designer, artisti e architetti si riunirono attorno alla rivista «Art & Architecture», che ebbe una particolare influenza su Saul Bass e la sua generazione. Caratterizzata una grafica modernista, la rivista si occupava di promuovere tutto ciò che si presentava in maniera progressista nei diversi campi: arte, architettura, design, fotografia, cinema, musica, danza e persino politica. Saul ammirava molto il lavoro di questa rivista e l'attenzione che mostrava per diverse personalità da lui conosciute e apprezzate, dal suo maestro Kepes, a Moholy Nagy, da Hoffman a Mies van der Rohe.

Nel 1948 venne riconosciuto anche il talento di Saul Bass, che iniziò a collaborare con la rivista, creando la copertina del mese di Novembre.

In questo contesto sociale ed economico che Saul Bass riuscì a far emergere le sue idee innovative nel settore della pubblicità per film:

**«La modernità dei contenuti di certi film aiutò l'accettazione di forme moderne di pubblicità, e non è una coincidenza che i più importanti lavori di Saul alla fine degli anni Quaranta e i primi anni Cinquanta furono o per produttori e direttori indipendenti o per film con argomenti di attualità – e spesso per entrambi».**

Uno dei primi lavori di Bass a Los Angeles fu la campagna pubblicitaria per *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) di Charlie Chaplin ma purtroppo i suoi disegni furono perduti. Si dedicò allora alla creazione di manifesti di diversi film prodotti da Stanley Kramer. Dopo il successo di *Champion*, a Saul venne affidata la campagna pubblicitaria di *Now Way Out* (*Uomo bianco, tu vivrai!*, Joseph Mankiewicz, 1950), un film della Twentieth Century Fox che affrontava un tema difficile, quello del razzismo. Bisognava creare, quindi, un manifesto capace di attirare il pubblico senza suscitare ulteriori polemiche. Bass ideò una campagna che può essere considerata come il primo esempio di estetica modernista all'interno della pubblicità per film. Per la prima volta il titolo del film è utilizzato come un vero elemento grafico e si inserisce perfettamente nella composizione grafica dell'intera locandina. Il tutto crea delle aspettative nel pubblico, senza anticipare nulla del film. Anche nella sua successiva campagna – quella per *Decision Before Dawn* (*I dannati*, A. Litvak, 1951) – Bass starà molto attento agli aspetti modernisti acquisiti durante le lezioni di Kepes. Nel 1950 Saul Bass si trasferì alla Foote, Cone & Belding, agenzia pubblicitaria che realizzava le campagne per i film della RKO. Qui si scontrò più volte con il ricco proprietario della casa di produzione, Howard Hughes, la cui idea di cinema e di promozione limitava la creatività di Bass. A causa di questi limiti imposti dall'alto, Saul decise di abbandonare l'agenzia e si mise in proprio, lavorando come freelance e aprendo il suo ufficio personale nel 1956. Gli anni Cinquanta possono essere considerati il decennio d'oro per la carriera di Bass: fu in questi anni che si affermò il suo stile più caratteristico che, pur con le differenze dovute ai diversi temi affrontati, rimarrà riconoscibile fino ai suoi ultimi lavori negli anni Novanta.

È in questi stessi anni, inoltre, che Saul Bass iniziò il suo lavoro nei titoli di testa. Otto Preminger, che già si era distinto per un'attenzione particolare alla



**Sopra:**  
Saul Bass con Otto Preminger.

sequenza d'apertura di alcuni suoi film – *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (*Sui marciapiedi*, 1950) per esempio – nel 1954 decise di affidargli la campagna pubblicitaria per il film *Carmen Jones*. Una volta ideato il logo pubblicitario del film (un rosa su una fiamma rossa) Bass e Preminger pensarono di animarlo e utilizzarlo anche per la sequenza dei titoli di testa. Seppur molto semplice, questa sequenza fu un primo passo importante per poter rinnovare un settore cinematografico che per anni era stato sottovalutato.

Nel 1955, per il suo film successivo, Otto Preminger diede a Saul il via libera per progettare un tipo di pubblicità innovativa. I manifesti, le locandine di vario formato, e tutto il materiale pubblicitario doveva avere un aspetto unitario e facilmente riconoscibile dal pubblico. Il risultato fu l'impressionante campagna creata per *The Man with the Golden Arm* (*L'uomo dal braccio d'oro*, 1955), da cui nasceranno anche i titoli di testa del film. La collaborazione tra Bass e Preminger si rivelerà essere molto fruttuosa e duratura. Nel suo studio al 1778 della Highland Avenue di Hollywood, Bass, nonostante avesse un assistente, lavorava per lo più in solitaria, seguendo personalmente ogni aspetto dei suoi progetti. Le cose cambiarono nel 1956 quando conobbe Elaine Makatura, sua futura moglie e, soprattutto, sua più importante collaboratrice. Nata a New York in una famiglia di origini ungheresi, Elaine sviluppò fin dall'infanzia una passione per le arti, in particolare la musica e il disegno. Dopo aver intrapreso una carriera nel mondo del canto a fianco delle sorelle, alla fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale il gruppo – le Belmont Sisters – si sciolse e Elaine si trovò costretta a decidere del suo futuro. Iniziò, quindi, a lavorare come disegnatrice di modelli e stilista per una casa di moda a New York. Nel 1954 decise di trasferirsi a Los Angeles per intraprendere una carriera nel design. Venne assunta alla Capitol Records dove lavorò per circa due anni, fin quando non si accorse che aveva bisogno di un lavoro più stimolante, e qualcuno le consigliò di rivolgersi a Saul Bass, che a quel tempo stava cercando un assistente. Un anno prima Saul aveva realizzato i titoli di testa del film di Billy Wilder *The Seven Year Itch* (*Quando la moglie è in vacanza*, 1955) e Elaine ne fu piacevolmente colpita.

Una volta assunta nello studio di Bass, Elaine sviluppò interessi e abilità grafiche notevoli, tanto da iniziare fin da subito a collaborare alla realizzazione di alcuni progetti. Nel 1960 si sposarono e questo fu anche l'anno che segnò definitivamente la nascita del loro sodalizio professionale: Saul decise di affidarle la realizzazione dei titoli di testa di *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960).



A questo seguiranno moltissimi altri lavori: non solo titoli di testa ma anche campagne pubblicitarie, corporate images, packaging e diversi cortometraggi. Si può affermare che Saul era il volto pubblico della coppia, mentre Elaine rimase per molti anni in disparte, ignorata da critici e storici dell'arte. In realtà la sua capacità nel disegno, il suo sguardo grafico e la sensibilità musicale sono stati elementi fondamentali per rendere la collaborazione con Saul Bass "veramente completa", come lui stesso ha sempre sostenuto.

Poco tempo dopo l'arrivo di Elaine, Saul, con l'aiuto dell'uomo d'affari Morrish Marsh, diede vita alla Saul Bass & Associates. Dopo collaborazioni saltuarie con diversi grafici, fotografi e architetti, nel 1960 assunse a tempo pieno Art Goodman, designer che lo aiutava nella definizione del concept dei vari progetti. Insieme al fotografo George Arakaki e alla manager Nancy von Lauderbach, Goodman rimarrà al servizio di Saul Bass per ben trent'anni. L'agenzia in questi anni ebbe una forte espansione e nel 1975 Bass trovò un nuovo socio, Herb Yager: un responsabile di marketing che aveva molta esperienza lavorativa nel campo della pubblicità.

L'agenzia cambiò il suo nome in Bass/Yager & Associates, ma Saul rimase il cardine di ogni progetto: nonostante avesse molta fiducia in Yager e nei suoi collaboratori, Bass preferiva assumersi tutta la responsabilità del design. Tra la fine degli anni Cinquanta e i primi anni Sessanta, come abbiamo già accennato, Saul Bass collaborò con un altro regista molto importante a Hollywood, interessato all'arte e con una grande passione per il design: Billy Wilder. Il primo film di Wilder a cui lavora Bass è il già citato *The Seven Year Itch* (*Quando la moglie è in vacanza*, 1955). Sempre per Billy Wilder realizzò la campagna pubblicitaria per *Love in the Afternoon* (*Arianna*, 1957), *Some Like it Hot* (*A qualcuno piace caldo*, 1959) e *One, Two, Three* (*Uno, due, tre!*, 1961). Al di fuori delle collaborazioni importanti con Preminger e Wilder, in questi anni Bass lavora anche con altri registi. Di particolare importanza è il lavoro realizzato nel 1956 per *Around the World in Eighty Days* (*Il giro del mondo in 80 giorni*) di Michael Anderson, tratto dal romanzo omonimo di Jules Verne. Bass realizzò per questo film una sorta di epilogo che assume le vesti di titoli di coda, un vero e proprio cortometraggio animato che mette in scena il viaggio del protagonista Phileas Fogg.

Il 1958 fu l'anno che segnò l'inizio di un'altra collaborazione importante per Bass: venne, infatti, ingaggiato da Alfred Hitchcock per la realizzazione della campagna pubblicitaria e dei titoli di testa di *Vertigo* (*La donna che visse due volte*, 1958). Il loro sodalizio durò



**Dall'alto:**  
Saul Bass con Elaine Makatura.  
Saul Bass con Alfred Hitchcock.

**In basso:**  
Saul Bass durante le riprese di Phase IV.



per ben tre film – oltre a *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest* (*Intrigo Internazionale*, 1959) e *Psycho* (*Psyco*, 1960) – e segnò una tappa fondamentale per la carriera di Saul Bass. Per la prima volta, con *Psycho*, Bass non si occupò solo dei titoli di testa ma venne assunto con il ruolo più ampio di visual consultant e gli venne affidata la creazione degli storyboards di diverse scene del film (tra cui la tanto discussa "scena della doccia"). Nello stesso anno, il 1960, Bass venne coinvolto da Kirk Douglas per la realizzazione di *Spartacus*, la cui regia venne affidata a Stanley Kubrick. Per questo film Bass realizzò i titoli di testa (i primi con la moglie Elaine) e si occupò di alcune sequenze importanti, come quella dedicata alla scuola dei gladiatori e quella fondamentale della battaglia finale. Iniziò, in questi anni, a dar vita a titoli di testa inusuali per il suo stile, girati in live action: famosissimi quelli di *Walk on the Wild Side* (*Anime sporche*, 1962, Edward Dmytryk), in cui Bass riprende le movenze e lo sguardo intenso di un gatto nero. Nel 1966, inoltre, realizzò la famosa sequenza della corsa in *Grand Prix* (John Frankenheimer).

La metà degli anni Sessanta segnò una svolta dal punto di vista lavorativo. Saul Bass, d'accordo con la moglie Elaine, mise da parte l'interesse per i titoli di testa e decise di dedicarsi a progetti interi, realizzando vari cortometraggi e un lungometraggio. In un'intervista precedente con la Kirkham, Saul ammise:

**«Mi ero stancato di inizi e parti centrali e volevo fare un qualcosa che avesse un inizio, una parte centrale e una fine».**

Tra i primi lavori di Saul e Elaine ricordiamo i due cortometraggi promozionali realizzati nel 1964 per la United Airlines (*From Here to There*) e per la Eastman Kodak (*The Searching Eye*), entrambi presentati all'Esposizione mondiale di New York di quell'anno. Questo tipo di sponsored films permettevano ai Bass di rimanere all'interno del campo della corporate image e inoltre, assicuravano loro una libertà creativa impossibile da trovare nel mondo di Hollywood. I cortometraggi di Saul e Elaine Bass all'epoca riscosero un notevole successo, vincendo diversi premi. Una menzione particolare va, a tal proposito, al film *Why Man Creates* (1968), che nel 1969 vinse il premio Oscar come miglior cortometraggio documentario. Realizzato per la Kaiser Aluminum, il film è una vera dichiarazione di intenti: nei suoi ventinove minuti è riassunta l'idea di creatività di Saul Bass.

Nel 1974 Bass realizzò l'unico lungometraggio della sua carriera, *Phase IV (Fase IV: distruzione terra)* ma, nonostante gli apprezzamenti della critica, il film non ebbe un grande successo e Bass decise allora di abbandonare momentaneamente il cinema per dedicarsi maggiormente alla pubblicità per le aziende.

L'interesse per il title design tornò a farsi vivo nei coniugi Bass alla fine degli anni Ottanta, quando ripresero a lavorare ai titoli di testa di alcuni film: ricordiamo *Tonko/Don Huang/The Silk Road* (Junya Sato, 1988), *The War of the Roses (La guerra dei Roses)*, Danny DeVito, 1989) e *Mr. Saturday Night (Mr. Sabato sera)*, Billy Crystal, 1992).

Con gli anni Novanta, inoltre, si diede inizio alla collaborazione che segna la nascita della seconda fase del title design bassiano, quella con Martin Scorsese. Da questo importante e fruttuoso sodalizio artistico nacquero i titoli di testa di ben quattro film. Il primo fu *Goodfellas (Quei bravi ragazzi)*, 1990), seguito da *Cape Fear (Cape Fear - Il promontorio della paura)*, 1991) e da *The Age of Innocence (L'età dell'innocenza)*, 1993). L'ultimo film di Scorsese a cui Saul Bass lavorò, sempre in collaborazione con Elaine fu *Casino (Casinò)*, 1995), creando dei titoli di testa indimenticabili, importante epilogo della sua ricca carriera. Saul Bass morì, infatti, l'anno dopo l'uscita di *Casino*, nel 1996.

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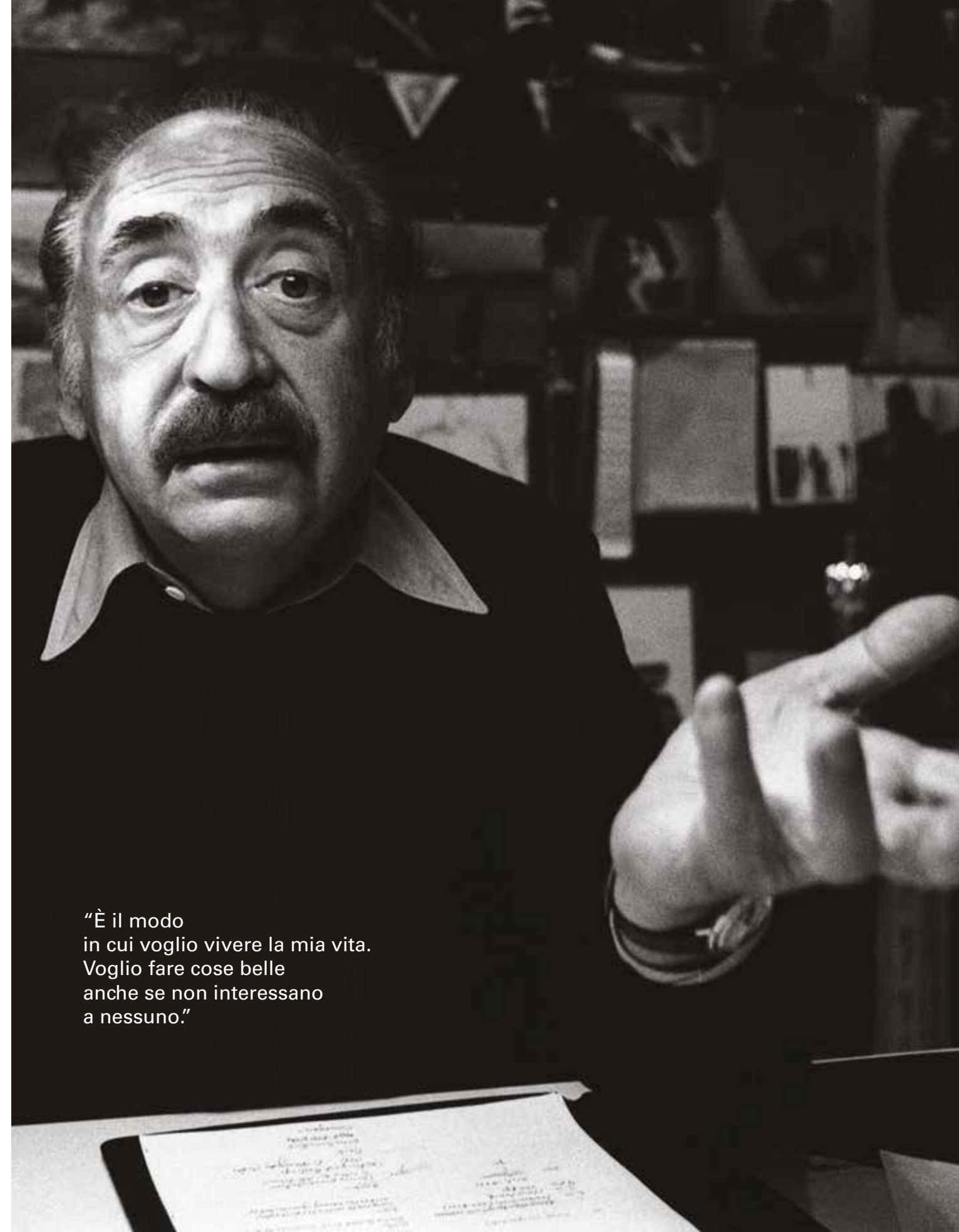
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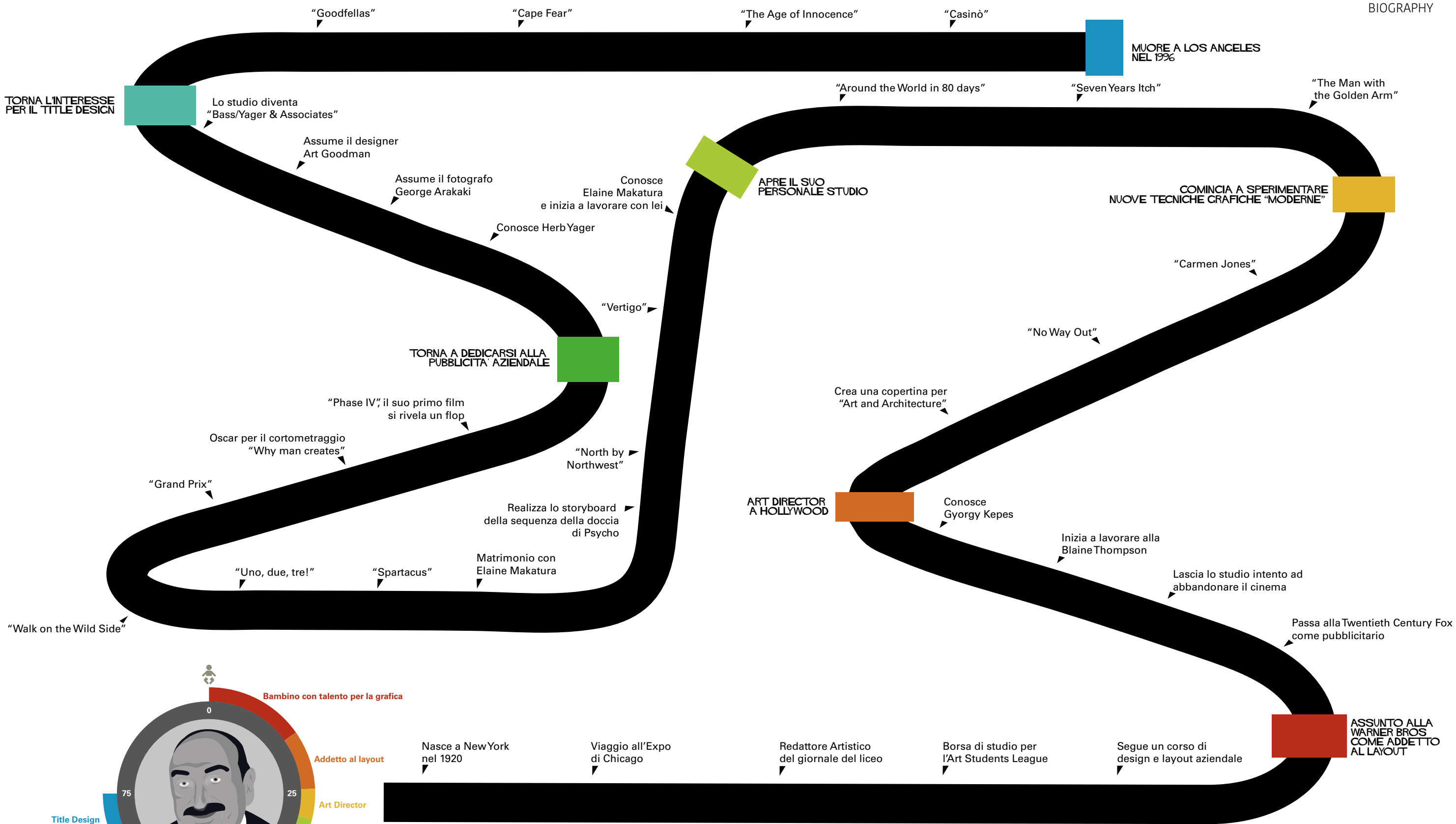
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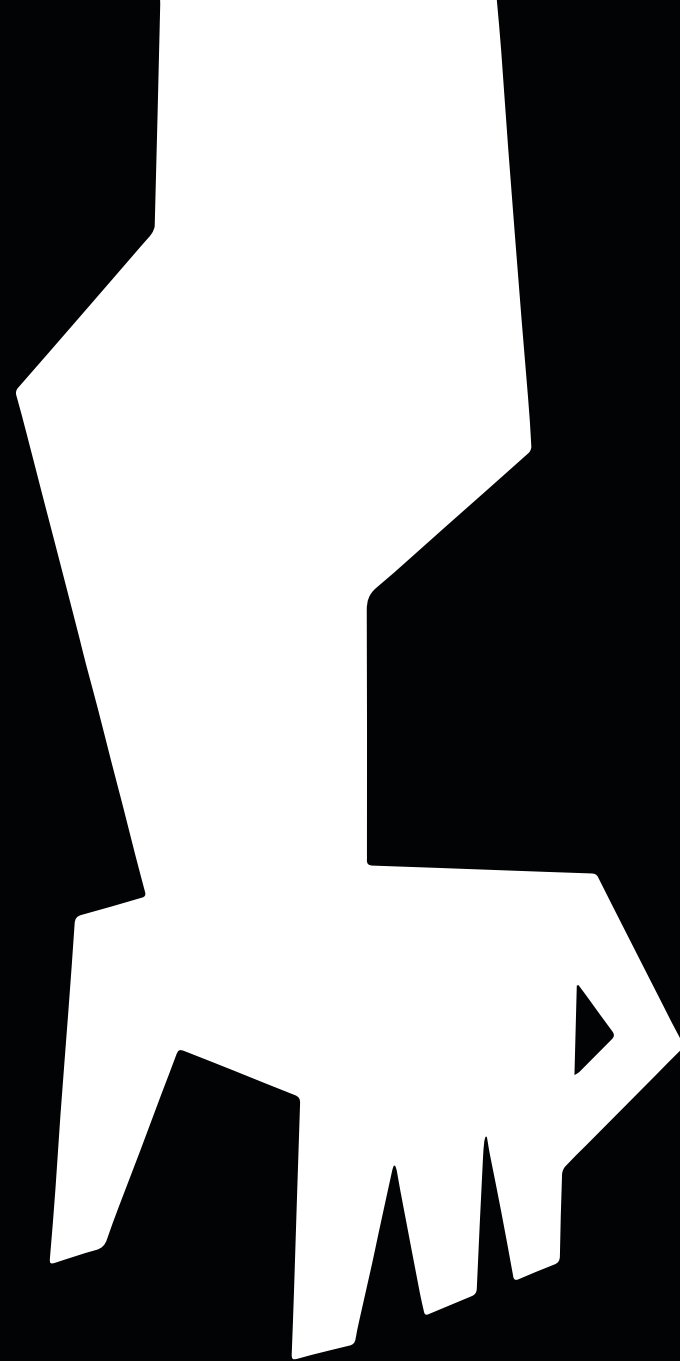
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“È il modo  
in cui voglio vivere la mia vita.  
Voglio fare cose belle  
anche se non interessano  
a nessuno.”



"WORK?  
IT'S JUST A SERIOUS PLAY"



**BETWEEN**



## Il Cinema

La carriera di Saul Bass è un vero e proprio esempio di versatilità artistica. Durante i suoi intensi anni di lavoro egli si occupò dei diversi aspetti del graphic design, dalla pubblicità alla corporate identity, dal packaging alla televisione, dedicando ampio spazio al cinema: dalle campagne pubblicitarie per i film ai titoli di testa, fino alla creazione di cortometraggi e di un lungometraggio.

Dopo aver seguito le lezioni con Kepes ed essersi fatto un nome importante nel mondo del design newyorkese, Saul Bass ritornò a lavorare per il cinema. iniziò, infatti, una collaborazione con la Warner Bros che lo portò a stringere una forte amicizia con il suo collega Paul Radin.

Radin, poco tempo dopo, venne assunto dalla Buchanan and Company per dirigere i nuovi uffici di Los Angeles. In quegli anni la Buchanan and Company era una delle più importanti agenzie pubblicitarie degli Stati Uniti, e in campo cinematografico collaborava soprattutto con la Paramount Pictures. Sotto raccomandazione di Radin, nel 1946 a Saul Bass fu offerto un posto come art director a Hollywood. Numerosi designer, artisti e architetti si riunirono attorno alla rivista "Art & Architecture", che ebbe una particolare influenza su Saul Bass e la sua generazione. Caratterizzata da una grafica modernista, la rivista si occupava di promuovere tutto ciò che si presentava in maniera progressista nei diversi campi: arte, architettura, design, fotografia, cinema, musica, danza e persino politica.

Saul ammirava molto il lavoro di questa rivista e l'attenzione che mostrava per diverse personalità da lui conosciute e apprezzate, dal suo maestro Kepes, a Moholy Nagy, da Hoffman a Mies van der Rohe. Nel 1948 venne riconosciuto anche il talento di Saul Bass, che iniziò a collabo-



Saul Bass, copertina realizzata per la rivista "Arts and Architecture", Novembre 1948

rare con la rivista, creando la copertina del mese di Novembre. La promozione artistica e culturale a Los Angeles iniziava, in questi anni, a portare un'aria nuova anche nell'industria cinematografica. Uno dei primi lavori di Bass a Los Angeles fu la campagna pubblicitaria per *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) di Charlie Chaplin ma purtroppo i suoi disegni furono perduti. Si dedicò allora alla creazione di manifesti di diversi film prodotti da Stanley Kramer. Attorno alla figura di Kramer si era creato un team di registi e professionisti che si occupavano di realizzare film dai temi sociali. In particolare si ricordano *The Men* (Il corpo ti appartiene, Fred Zinnemann, 1950), *Death of Salesman* (Morte di un commesso viaggiatore, László Benedek, 1951) e soprattutto *Champion* (Il grande campione, Mark Robson, 1949). Nella locandina di *Champion*, in particolare, si possono notare alcune delle caratteristiche che ritroveremo nei lavori futuri di Bass: la scelta di pochi elementi simbolici, contrasti cromatici molto forti, il bianco e il nero illuminato da dettagli rossi e un lettering non regolare. Dopo il successo di *Champion*, a Saul venne affidata la campagna pubblicitaria di *Now Way Out* (Uomo bianco, tu vivrai!, Joseph Mankiewicz, 1950), un film della Twentieth Century Fox che affrontava un tema difficile, quello del razzismo. Bisognava creare, quindi, un manifesto capace di attirare il pubblico senza suscitare ulteriori polemiche. Bass ideò una campagna che può essere considerata come il primo esempio di estetica modernista all'interno della pubblicità per film. La locandina si caratterizza per una serie di grosse linee nere orizzontali, intervallate da immagini dei protagonisti immortalati in alcune scene diegetiche. Le linee, inoltre, presentano delle frecce al loro interno che, insieme al simbolo delle manette aperte legate alla spalliera del letto (in basso a destra nella locandina), simboleggiano l'idea di fuga. Il titolo del film è utilizzato come un vero elemento grafico e si inserisce perfettamente nella composizione grafica dell'intera locandina. Il tutto crea delle aspettative nel pubblico, senza anticipare nulla del film ma è chiaro che la storia sarà caratterizzata da un crescendo di tensione. Anche nella sua successiva campagna - quella per *Decision Before Dawn* (I dannati, A. Litvak, 1951)- Bass starà molto attento agli aspetti modernisti acquisiti durante le lezioni di Kepes. Si nota, inoltre, per questa locandina, una decisa influenza dal Bauhaus. Gli anni Cinquanta possono essere considerati il decennio d'oro per la carriera di Bass: fu in questi anni che si affermò il suo stile più caratteristico che, pur con le differenze dovute ai diversi temi affrontati, rimarrà riconoscibile fino ai suoi ultimi

lavori negli anni Novanta. È in questi stessi anni, inoltre, che Saul Bass iniziò il suo lavoro nei titoli di testa. Otto Preminger, che già si era distinto per un'attenzione particolare alla sequenza d'apertura di alcuni suoi film – *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Sui marciapiedi, 1950) per esempio – nel 1954 decise di affidargli la campagna pubblicitaria per il film *Carmen Jones*. Una volta ideato il logo pubblicitario del film (un rosa su una fiamma rossa) Bass e Preminger pensarono di animarlo e utilizzarlo anche per la sequenza dei titoli di testa. Seppur molto semplice, questa sequenza fu un primo passo importante per poter rinnovare un settore cinematografico che per anni era stato sottovalutato. Nel 1955, per il suo film successivo, Otto Preminger diede a Saul il via libera per progettare un tipo di pubblicità innovativa. I manifesti, le locandine di vario formato, e tutto il materiale pubblicitario doveva avere un aspetto unitario e facilmente riconoscibile dal pubblico. Il risultato fu l'impressionante campagna creata per *The Man with the Golden Arm* (L'uomo dal braccio d'oro, 1955), da cui nasceranno anche i titoli di testa del film. Il 1960 fu l'anno che segnò definitivamente la nascita del sodalizio professionale tra il designer e sua moglie, Elaine Makatura: Saul decise di affidarle la realizzazione dei titoli di testa di *Spartacus* (Id., Stanley Kubrick, 1960). A questo seguiranno moltissimi altri lavori: non solo titoli di testa ma anche campagne pubblicitarie, corporate images, packaging e diversi cortometraggi. Come vedremo, sarà particolarmente importante il suo contributo nei titoli di testa realizzati per i film di Martin Scorsese negli anni Novanta. Come fa notare Pat Kirkham nel libro *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, parlando del loro sodalizio professionale, è molto difficile distinguere gli apporti di ciascuno nei loro progetti in quanto collaboravano sempre insieme, uniti da una forte intesa intellettuale e creativa. Si può affermare che Saul era il volto pubblico della coppia, mentre Elaine rimase per molti anni in disparte, ignorata da critici e storici dell'arte. In realtà la sua capacità nel disegno, il suo sguardo grafico e la sensibilità musicale sono stati elementi fondamentali per rendere la collaborazione con Saul Bass "veramente completa", come lui stesso ha sempre sostenuto.

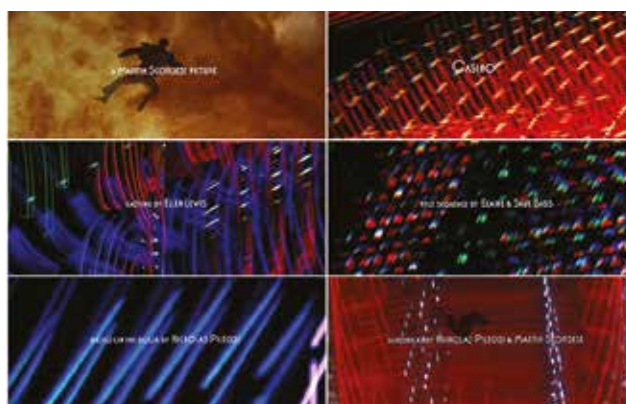
Casino (Casinò, Martin Scorsese, 1995) Titoli di testa, Elaine Bass



Elaine Bass, poster per la campagna promozionale di Spartacus (S. Kubrik 1960)

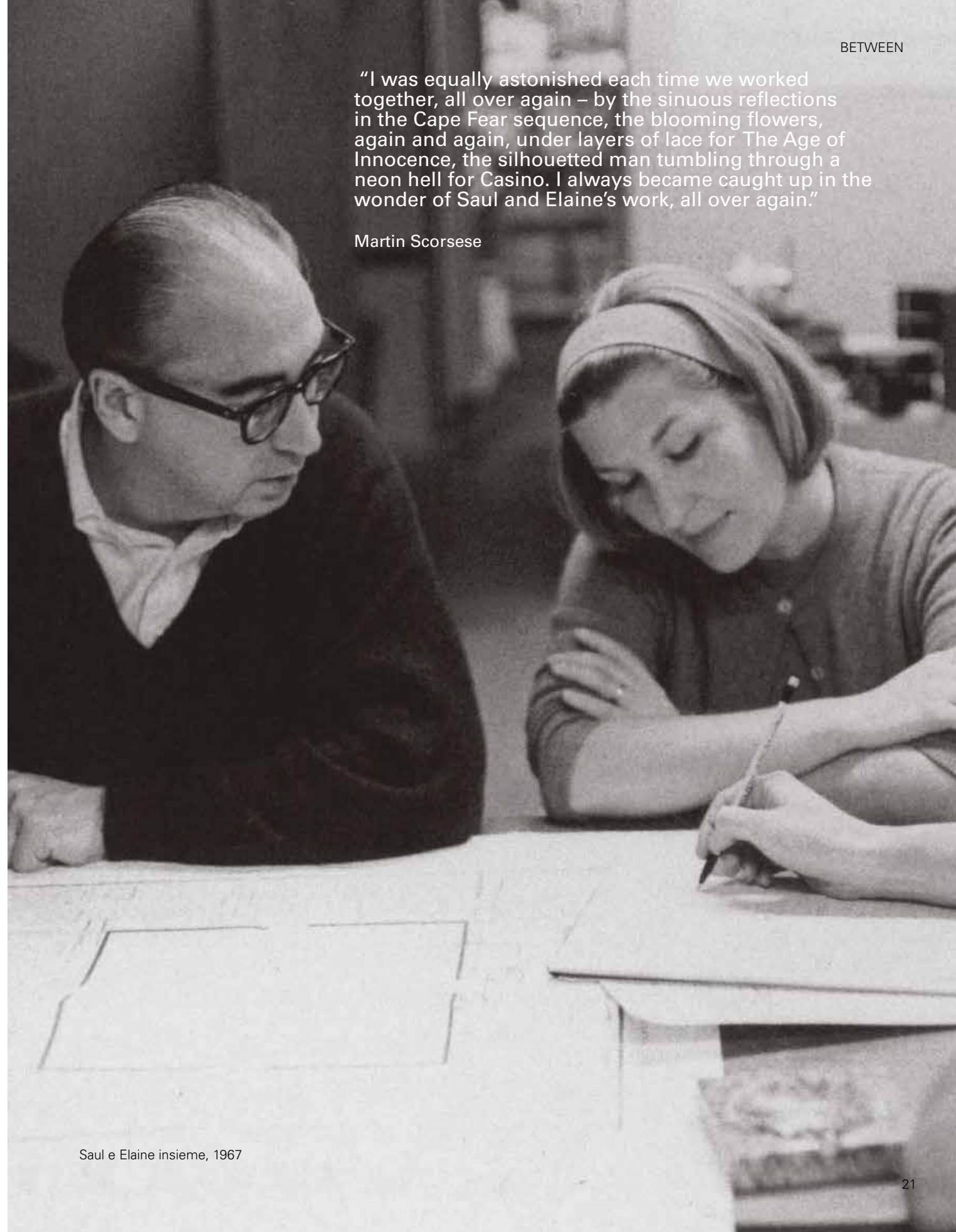


Goodfellas (Quei bravi ragazzi, Martin Scorsese, 1990), Titoli di testa, Elaine Bass



"I was equally astonished each time we worked together, all over again – by the sinuous reflections in the Cape Fear sequence, the blooming flowers, again and again, under layers of lace for *The Age of Innocence*, the silhouetted man tumbling through a neon hell for *Casino*. I always became caught up in the wonder of Saul and Elaine's work, all over again."

Martin Scorsese



Saul e Elaine insieme, 1967

Tra la fine degli anni Cinquanta e i primi anni Sessanta, come abbiamo già accennato, Saul Bass collaborò con un altro regista molto importante a Hollywood, interessato all'arte e con una grande passione per il design: Billy Wilder. Il primo film di Wilder a cui lavora Bass è *The Seven Year Itch* (Quando la moglie è in vacanza, 1955), realizzando una sequenza dai titoli dall'aspetto decisamente modernista e legato alla cultura pop. Il particolare font realizzato da Harold Adler si inserisce all'interno di una serie di blocchi dai luminosi colori pop che a ritmo di musica scivolano sullo schermo nero, formando una scacchiera irregolare. Tutte le scritte sono bianche su fondo nero, mentre la menzione del regista è messa in risalto rispetto le altre comparando su un quadrato bianco che salta fuori dagli altri blocchi con una molla. Prendendo spunto dalle sigle dei quiz televisivi (che in quegli anni iniziavano a diffondersi) e dai gesti degli illusionisti, Bass riuscì ad esprimere con questi titoli di testa l'animo giocoso e ottimista della commedia. Al di fuori delle collaborazioni importanti con Preminger e Wilder, in questi anni Bass lavora anche con altri registi. Di particolare importanza è il lavoro realizzato nel 1956 per *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Il giro del mondo in 80 giorni) di Michael Anderson, tratto dal romanzo omonimo di Jules Verne. Bass realizzò per questo film una sorta di epilogo che assume le vesti di titoli di coda, un vero e proprio cortometraggio animato che mette in scena il viaggio del protagonista Phileas Fogg. La sequenza si apre con una dichiarazione di intenti: leggiamo infatti le parole "chi si vede in quale scena e chi ha fatto cosa", mettendo a nudo quella che è la funzione principale dei titoli di testa e di coda, la presentazione dei professionisti. Ciò che segue è un riassunto delle tre ore precedenti, una striscia animata che riflette lo stile grafico della fine degli anni Cinquanta: la pulizia della linea, l'uso del collage e del montaggio per la combinazione di illustrazioni d'epoca vittoriana e i disegni caricaturali, i blocchi di colori vivaci e i contorni nitidi sono tutti elementi che accompagnano il viaggio di uno strano omino con la testa a forma di orologio e della sua bicicletta, icone dei due personaggi principali. In un suo importante articolo sul grafico americano Gerard Blanchard si occupa proprio di analizzare questa sequenza di coda realizzata da Bass. Egli si sofferma in modo particolare sul ruolo che la sequenza dei titoli di coda assume, sottolineando le differenze con la sequenza d'apertura: mentre quest'ultima ha come obiettivo quello di preparare lo spettatore per l'entrata nella finzione, i titoli di coda hanno il compito di riaccompagnarli fuori della diegesi, farlo rientrare nella realtà senza troppi

traumi. Nel caso di *Around the World in Eighty Days*, inoltre, la sequenza animata finale permette l'uscita non traumatica dalla finzione in modo giocoso e ironizzando sulla storia appena vista: se questa sequenza fosse stata un prologo al film, lo spettatore non avrebbe potuto comprendere tutti i riferimenti.

**Sopra:**

*The Seven Year Itch* (Quando la moglie è in vacanza, 1955), Titoli di testa.

**Sotto:**

*Around the World in Eighty Days* (Il giro del mondo in 80 giorni, 1956), Titoli di coda.



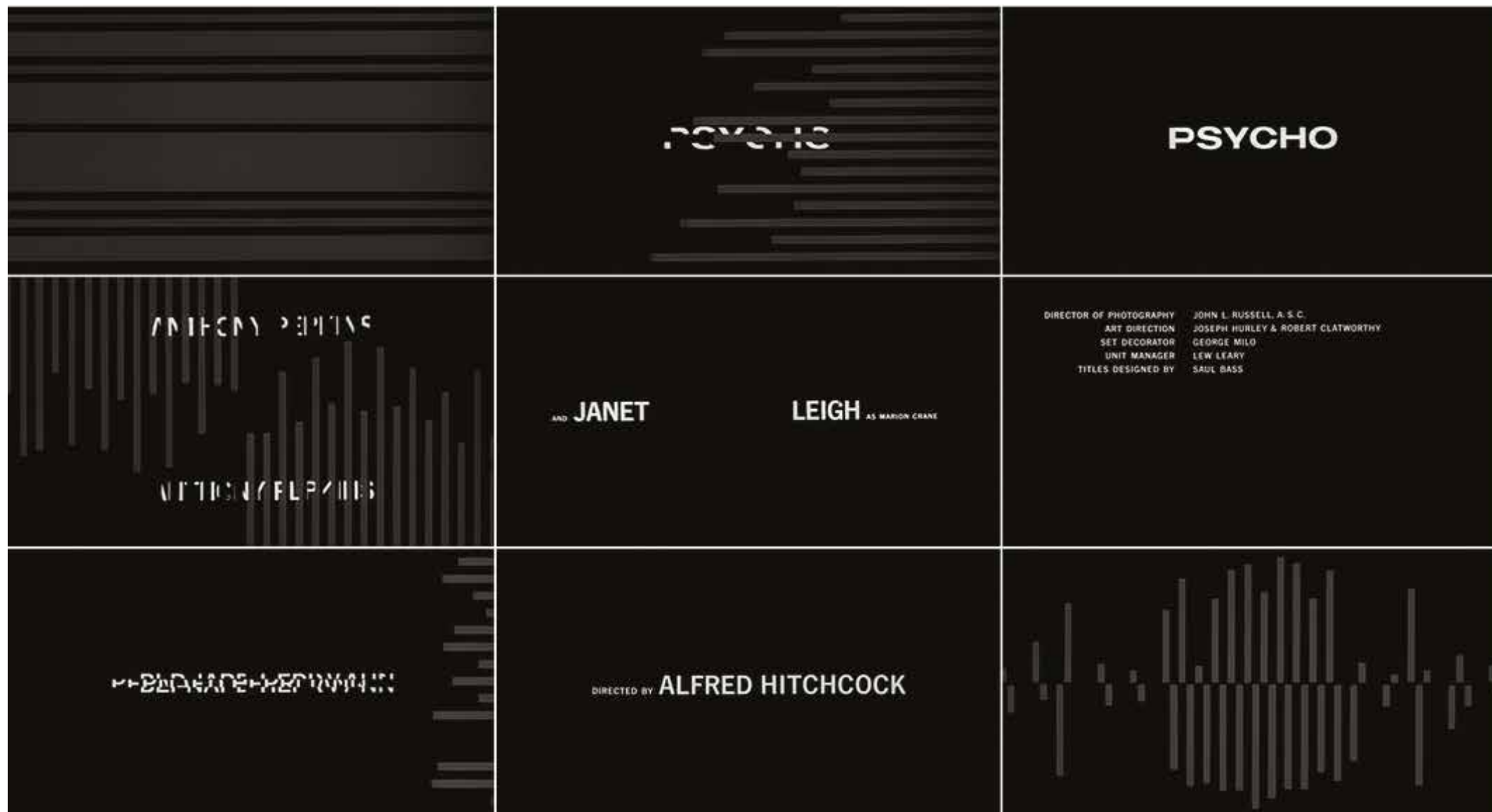
## Psycho: analisi e approfondimento

La scena della doccia è tra le più famose e citate del cinema di tutti i tempi. La sua costruzione formale è incredibilmente attenta e carica di suspense. Il montaggio frenetico, che ci impone un punto di vista complice della macchina da presa, si sposta da dettagli della bocchetta e dello scarico della doccia, del coltello che colpisce, ai particolari del corpo che sappiamo lacerato, del viso della vittima, occhi, labbra, una bocca spalancata per un urlo disperato di terrore. Ed è storia. La protagonista del film è morta dopo la prima mezz'ora.



Psycho (Psyco, 1960), Frame estratto dalla famosa scena della doccia.





**Sopra:**  
Psycho (Psyco, 1960), Titoli di testa.

L'elemento grafico della griglia si presenta nei titoli di testa di (1960), terzo e ultimo film che nasce dalla collaborazione tra Hitchcock e Bass, e che vede quest'ultimo impegnato non solo nella realizzazione della sequenza introduttiva ma anche di alcune sequenze fondamentali all'interno del film. Dopo la scomparsa del logo della casa di produzione sullo sfondo grigio dello schermo scorrono, a intervalli irregolari, barre parallele orizzontali nere che vanno verso la sinistra dello schermo. Nella linea centrale sono presenti dei segni bianchi solo apparentemente casuali, che, uniti ad altri segni che compaiono nello schermo successivamente alla scomparsa delle linee grigie, vanno a formare la scritta Alfred Hitchcock's,

**«Psycho possiede ancora un aspetto che sconvolge: la protagonista muore a metà del film... ed è una cosa che non si può più fare, perché quel maledetto l'ha fatta e – accidenti! – ci ha fregato l'idea per l'eternità!»**

Antonio Serra, Fumettista



**A sinistra:**  
Alfred Hitchcock durante le riprese di Psycho (1960)

bianca su sfondo nero. Dalla destra dello schermo compaiono altre linee orizzontali grigie che sembrano spingere la scritta che scompare dal lato sinistro. Appare la scritta Psycho inizialmente spezzettata alla stessa maniera della scritta precedente per poi comporsi e diventare leggibile. La scritta si muove e si scompone più volte a ritmo della musica di Herrmann fino a dividersi e scomparire dall'alto e dal basso dello schermo, seguita dalle linee grigie verticali che si sono generate dal centro del quadro. Alla stessa maniera, con lettering scomposto e accompagnate da linee grigie, compaiono le scritte che presentano gli attori protagonisti e i professionisti che hanno collaborato con il regista. Le sbarre parallele scorrono sullo schermo sempre a intervalli irregolari senza scontrarsi mai tra loro, seguendo un duplice movimento: da destra a sinistra, o viceversa, e dall'alto verso il basso, o viceversa. I titoli di testa si chiudono con il nome del regista che si scompone di fronte agli occhi dello spettatore e scompare, seguito dalle sbarre che si fondono con le linee delle finestre dei palazzi della prima immagine diegetica del film. Vi è, all'interno di tali titoli di testa, una continua tensione tra un principio di regolarità e uno di irregolarità. L'apparente regolarità è data dall'uso di linee rette che con il loro movimento tendono a formare una griglia, da sempre utilizzata come modello per l'organizzazione dello spazio. In questo caso però, la griglia non si figurativizza, ma rimane sempre accennata, come se non fosse possibile comprendere fino in fondo lo spazio che si delinea poi nella diegesi filmica. Il disordine e l'irregolarità sono rese, in primo luogo, tramite

**«In Psycho del soggetto mi importa poco, dei personaggi anche: quello che mi importa è che il montaggio dei pezzi del film, la fotografia, la colonna sonora e tutto ciò che è puramente tecnico possano far urlare il pubblico. Credo sia una grande soddisfazione per noi utilizzare l'arte cinematografica per creare una emozione di massa. E con Psycho ci siamo riusciti. Non è un messaggio che ha incuriosito il pubblico. Non è una grande interpretazione che lo ha sconvolto. Non è un romanzo che ha molto apprezzato che l'ha avvinto. Quello che ha commosso il pubblico è stato il film puro»**

Alfred Hitchcock a François Truffaut

la casualità con cui le linee compaiono nello schermo. In secondo luogo, l'effetto di caos è dato dalla rapidità dei movimenti, accompagnati dalle musiche di Herrmann, che ricreano la tensione tra terrore e armonia, completando l'imprevedibilità dei movimenti delle sbarre e riflettendo il continuo slittamento tra ordine e inquietudine. Ancora, fondamentale per evidenziare il principio di irregolarità è l'utilizzo di una tecnica particolare per la resa delle scritte informative, il cosiddetto off-set lettering, ossia la scomposizione delle lettere in più parti. Attraverso la divisione in orizzontale la scritta si divide in tre parti e la linea centrale si muove da destra a sinistra velocemente in modo da creare un effetto di distorsione. In senso verticale, invece i caratteri vengono divisi in due parti e scompaiono dalle parti opposte dello schermo, dall'alto e dal basso, producendo un effetto di strappo. A differenza dei lavori precedenti nati dalla collaborazione con Hitchcock, in cui Bass riesce a integrare elementi grafici a immagini analogiche che, in un modo o nell'altro, anticipano alcuni elementi della narrazione, nel caso di *Psycho* la diegesi non è affatto compresa nella sequenza iniziale e i riferimenti al film sono dati solo dagli aspetti grafici e sonori, che rendono la distorsione della psiche del protagonista.

La griglia di *Psycho* lascia fuori lo spettatore per poi accoglierlo gradualmente dentro la finzione. La rete immaginaria di *Psycho* non ha il compito di delineare uno spazio ma quello di rappresentare la psiche confusa e duplice del protagonista e ci accompagna all'interno della finzione, dato che linee con cui terminano i titoli di fondono con le finestre dell'immagine diegetica. Le sbarre di *Psycho* rimandano anche a un altro lavoro di Bass: i titoli di testa di *The Man with the golden arm* (1955, Otto Preminger). Anche in questo film, siamo in presenza di un protagonista che non riesce a liberarsi da un passato che lo imprigiona. Per quanto riguarda i riferimenti artistici, è evidente l'aspetto modernista delle scelte grafiche e il riferimento alla griglia rimanda sempre al De Stijl e, in particolare al Mondrian degli anni Dieci. *Mare* (1914), *Molo e oceano* (1915), *Oceano* (1915) sono tutte opere in cui l'elemento della griglia è ancora accennato, le linee non si incontrano mai e non permettono una costruzione di uno spazio definito. Tuttavia che l'ispirazione maggiore Bass l'abbia trovata proprio all'interno del Bauhaus, conosciuto a fondo grazie agli studi con Kepes. In particolare, si possono trovare analogie tra i titoli di testa di *Psycho* e alcune opere su vetro di Josef Albers. Durante i suoi primi anni al Bauhaus in Germania, Albers realizza diverse vetrate

-Goldrosa (1926), Upward (1926), Pergola (1929)- in cui sbarre verticali e orizzontali si intersecano tra di loro senza mai chiudersi definitivamente in una rete, che rimane solo illusoria. I colori usati da Albers in questi lavori sono pochi e dai contrasti molto forti: sono sempre presenti il bianco e il nero, come nell'opera di Bass, uniti a un altro unico colore che può essere l'arancio, il blu, il rosso. L'influenza del De Stijl, e in particolare da Mondrian è evidente: come Mondrian, Albers riduce la relazionalità degli elementi alla sua forma elementare, attraverso una netta opposizione tra figura e sfondo e con evidenti contrasti tra linee e colori, un'opposizione che nei suoi successivi lavori renderà sempre più complessa. I lavori di Albers, inoltre, saranno di ispirazione per una corrente artistica che si svilupperà alla fine degli anni Cinquanta, la cosiddetta Op art. Si tratta di un movimento formato da artisti, quali Vasarely e Riley tra i più importanti, accomunati dall'intento di ricreare all'interno delle loro opere una sorta di illusione ottica: attraverso linee e griglie si creano effetti di instabilità percettiva. Vediamo, quindi, come abbiano tanto in comune le vetrate di Albers e alcune successive opere dell'Op art con i titoli di testa di *Psycho*. Bass, come Albers, ricrea nella sua opera un ordine interno che è solo apparente, ma che ha come obiettivo quello di creare uno stato d'animo di disfunzione agli occhi dello spettatore, in modo da prepararlo all'instabilità dominante all'interno del film.

Bass descrive le semplici sbarre dei titoli come degli indizi che si uniscono senza mai arrivare a una soluzione:

**«Metti questi indizi insieme e saprai qualcosa. Metti insieme un'altra serie di indizi e saprai qualcos'altro»**

L'instabilità visiva che sta alla base della creazione di Bass è un modo per rappresentare l'instabilità psichica del protagonista Norman Bates. Abbiamo precedentemente accennato al fatto che, in questo film, il lavoro di Bass non si limitò ai titoli di testa ma comprese anche la realizzazione di altri aspetti visivi del film. La Kirkham, nel libro *Saul Bass "A life in film and design"*, spiega come il compito di Bass fosse quello di trovare soluzioni visive per la resa di alcune scene e di alcuni ambienti: l'omicidio nella doccia, l'assassinio del detective, la scoperta del corpo morto della madre del protagonista e la casa in collina. In realtà, riguardo al contributo reale di Saul su questi aspetti si sa ben poco, soprattutto a causa di alcune opinioni divergenti che Hitchcock espone riguardo la reale paternità

*Psycho* (Psycho, 1960), Frame estratto dalla famosa scena della doccia.

della sequenza della doccia durante la famosa intervista con Truffaut. Il regista, infatti, dichiarò di aver girato lui stesso tutte le scene inizialmente affidate a Bass. Kirkham, d'altro canto, documenta la paternità di Bass attraverso lo storyboard disegnato dall'artista, accompagnato dalle sue stesse parole che descrivono tutte le fasi della realizzazione, dalla creazione dello storyboard alle riprese della sequenza. Anche la Kirkham spiega che la sequenza realizzata da Bass fu poi integrata da Hitchcock con due inserti: uno schizzo di sangue e un veloce primo piano del coltello sulla pancia della vittima. Tuttavia, se si tralasciano questi due particolari e si analizza la scena a confronto con lo storyboard disegnato da Bass, si può notare come il contributo di quest'ultimo sia stato indubbiamente notevole. In particolare si ritrovano analogie nell'inquadratura sulla tenda della doccia che si rompe tirata dalla forza della donna che vi si aggrappa mentre cade ormai in fin di vita e nel dettaglio sul buco di scarico dell'acqua che dissolve nell'occhio di Janet Leigh, entrambi presenti anche negli schizzi di Bass. La Kirkham, inoltre, per sostenere la sua tesi sottolinea come questa scena sia molto differente dal resto del film e caratterizzata da un montaggio concitato, inquadrature brevi e netti tagli. Una soluzione formale molto lontana dallo stile di Hitchcock e, infatti, lo stesso Bass racconta di come il regista inizialmente non fosse convinto di questa scelta:

**«Dopo aver disegnato lo storyboard della sequenza della doccia, lo mostrai a Hitch. Lui non ne fu convinto. La sequenza aveva un carattere veramente poco hitchcockiano. Lui non aveva mai usato quel tipo di taglio rapido; lui amava le lunghe inquadrature. Prendete l'inquadratura d'apertura di Psycho dove la macchina da presa si muove su Phoenix, sui palazzi, termina all'interno di un edificio, dentro una finestra e dentro una stanza dove Janet Leigh e John Gavin stanno facendo l'amore. Questo tipo di ripresa è la sua firma. La mia proposta era molto diversa dal suo tipo di approccio»**



Why Man Creates (1968, durata 25 min.)

Testi tratti da:

Marta Satta, Tesi di Laurea Magistrale "Saul Bass: L'arte nei titoli di testa", Università di Pisa, 2014.

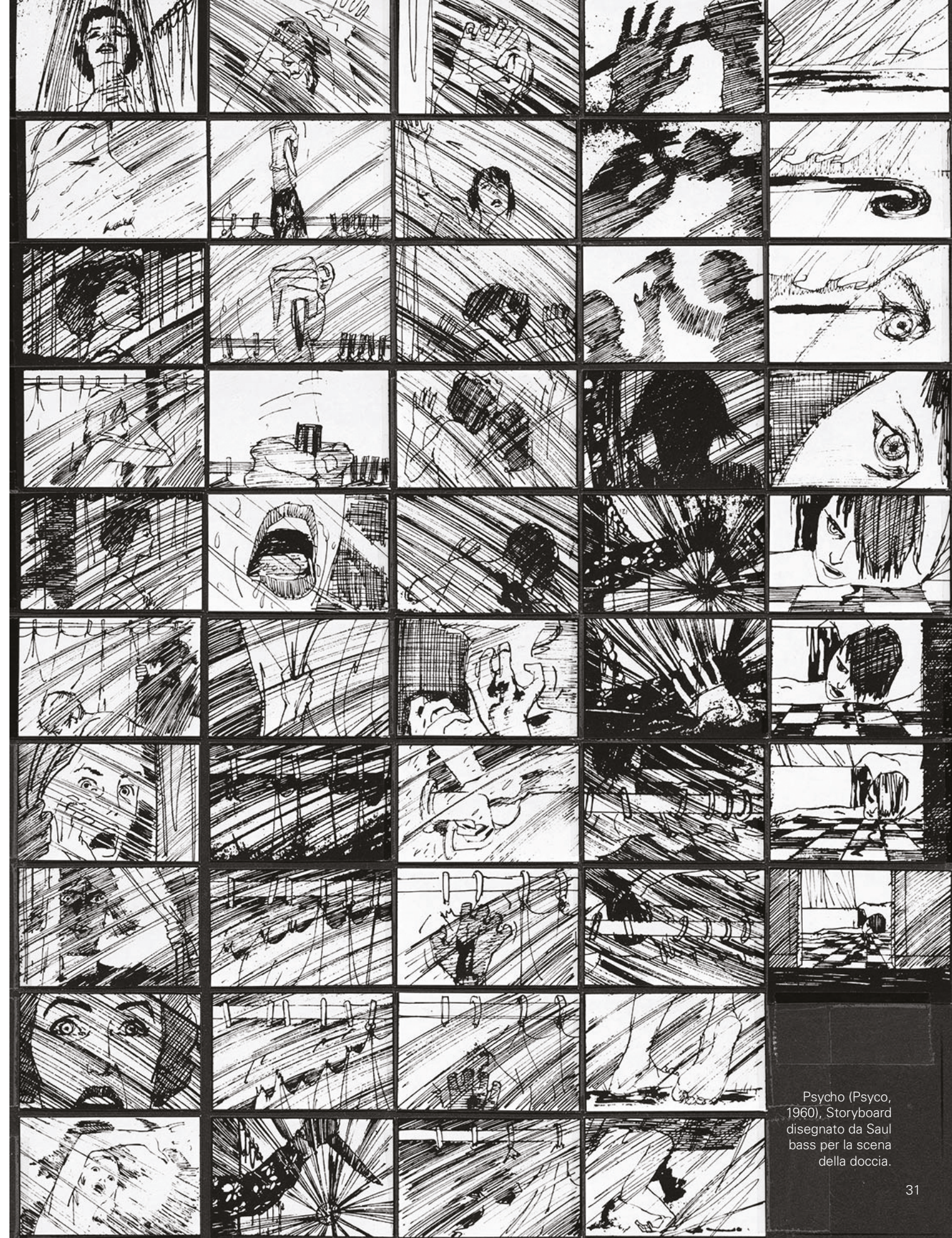
Bass Jennifer, Kirkham Pat, Saul Bass. A Life in Film & Design, Laurence King Publishing, Londra 2011.

Why Man Creates (1968, durata 25 min), visionato su [www.vimeo.com](http://www.vimeo.com)

P. Kirkham, Saul Bass and Billy Wilder: in conversation, in "Sight and Sound", n. 6. giugno 1995

B. Radatz, The Seven Years Itch (1955), <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/the-seven-year-itch/>

Art Of The Title: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/>



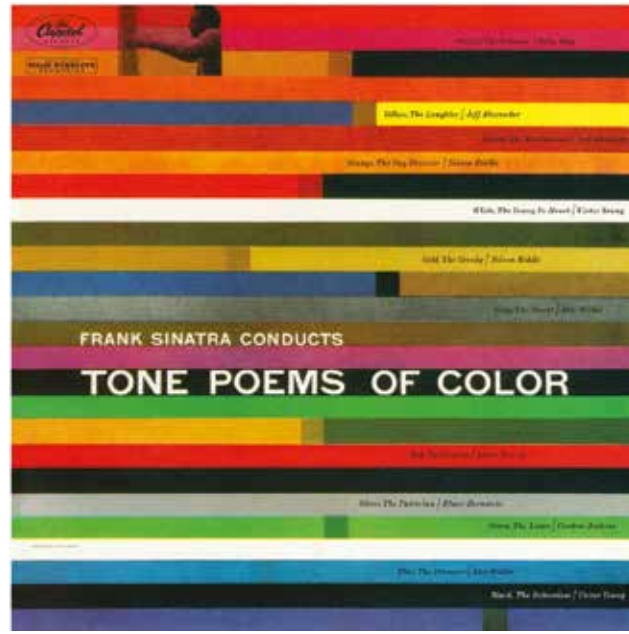
Psycho (Psycho, 1960), Storyboard disegnato da Saul Bass per la scena della doccia.



## Design, pubblicità e corporate identity

Saul Bass, oltre che alla pubblicità cinematografica e ai titoli di testa, si dedicò a tantissimi altri aspetti del design: dalla pubblicità alla televisione, dal packaging alla corporate identity.

Al di fuori della grafica a due dimensioni, Bass esplorò anche il mondo dello spazio e del volume, dedicandosi alla creazione di imballaggi e in diversi casi anche di alcuni elementi architettonici.



**A sinistra:** Saul Bass, copertina dell'album di Elmer Bernstein, Blues and Brass, 1956.

**A destra:** Saul Bass, copertina dell'album di Frank Sinatra, Tone Poems of Color, 1956.

**Sotto:** Saul Bass, campagna pubblicitaria per la British European Airways, 1957.



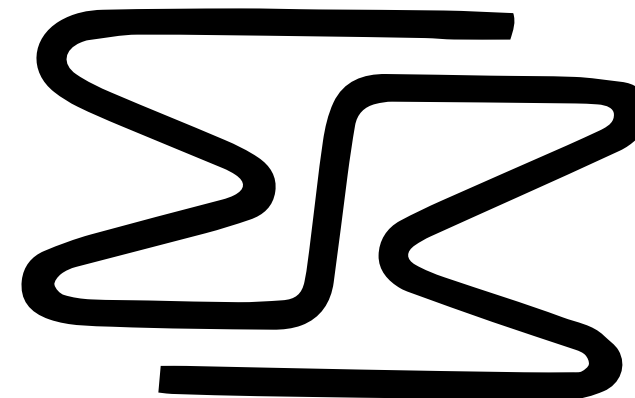
Gli anni Cinquanta segnarono un punto di svolta nella carriera di Bass: fu in questo periodo, da quando nel 1952 si mise in proprio, che iniziò a dedicarsi a un numero sempre crescente di progetti nel diversi ambiti della graphic design. Realizzò marchi per diverse aziende che si diffusero in quegli anni e reinventò l'immagine di società già esistenti attraverso nuovi spot pubblicitari, loghi e imballaggi per i loro prodotti. Tra i primi lavori a cui Bass si dedicò vi sono alcune copertine per album discografici. Egli fu uno dei primi grafici a muoversi in questo campo: nel 1948 la Columbia Records mise in commercio il primo LP (i cosiddetti 33 giri) e già nel 1949, infatti, realizzò la sua prima cover per l'album Barber Shop Harmony dei The Sportsmen Quartet, ideando quattro simpatici cantanti dai grandi baffi. Dal 1954, Bass iniziò a realizzare le copertine per gli album delle colonne sonore dei film per cui realizzava la campagna pubblicitaria. È proprio mentre lavorava a *The Man with the Golden Arm* che conobbe Frank Sinatra e Elmer Bernstein, il compositore delle musiche del film. Per entrambi, nel 1956 realizzerà due copertine dalle forme armoniche e dinamiche: quella di *Tone Poems of Color* di Frank Sinatra e quella di *Blues and Brass* di Elmer Bernstein. Alla fine degli anni Cinquanta, il grafico newyorkese si dedicò alla creazione di manifesti per alcune importanti società britanniche. Tra queste ricordiamo la British European Airways (BEA), per la quale disegnò due manifesti dalla grafica essenziale ma molto diretta ed efficace: il primo rappresenta una serie di bagagli abbelliti da colorate bandiere nazionali e il secondo un aereo da cui si diramano le numerose



**Sopra:** Saul Bass, loghi

«I loghi sono un'estensione grafica delle realtà interne di una società»

Saul Bass



**Sopra:** Saul Bass, monogramma personale



AT&T Archives: Saul Bass Pitch Video for Bell System Logo Redesign

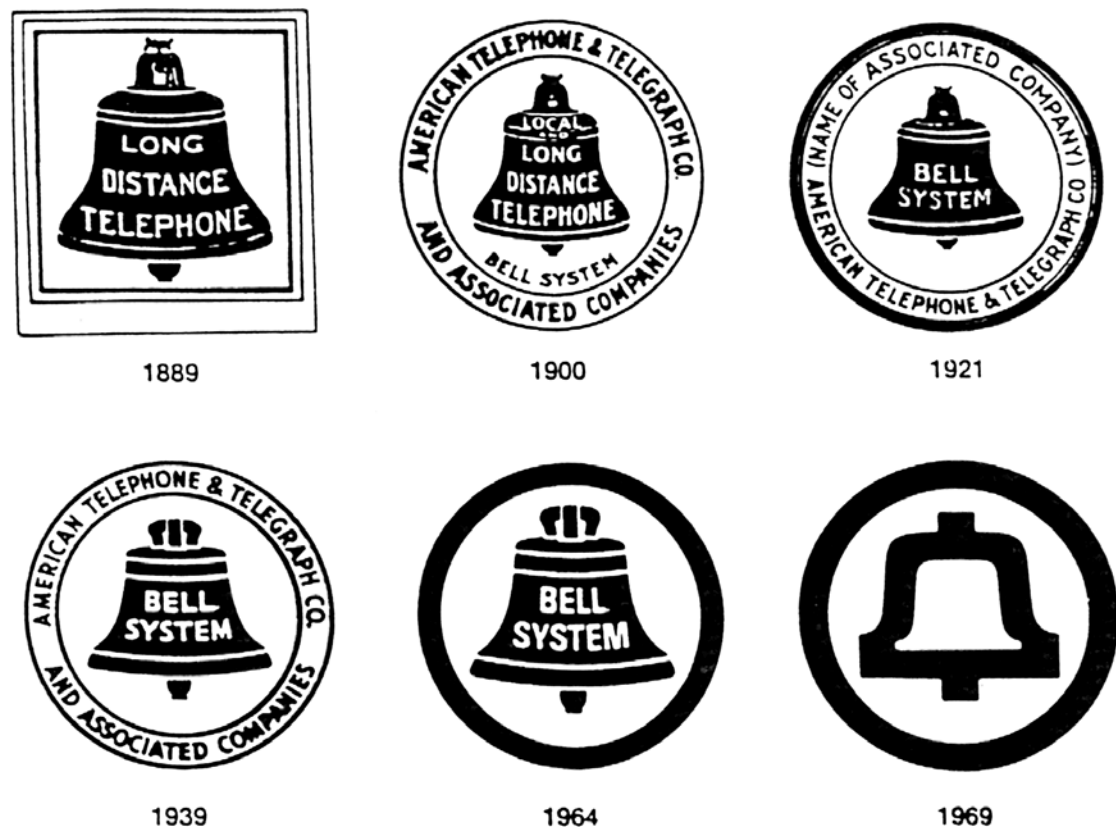
destinazioni che si potevano raggiungere volando con "la compagnia aerea più importante d'Europa". Sempre in questi anni Saul realizzò anche i manifesti per la Shell Oil, un'azienda che da sempre dava molta importanza alla propria immagine pubblicitaria, ingaggiando negli anni famosi designer, tra cui Edward McKnight Kauffer, di cui Bass era stato un grande ammiratore. La pubblicità realizzata da Bass ha preso ispirazione dal settore principale della compagnia, quello automobilistico: le linee colorate suggeriscono l'idea di velocità e l'andamento della strada che l'omino stilizzato sta percorrendo.

Dalla metà degli anni Cinquanta mise mano a diversi progetti: dalle confezioni per cosmetici ai giocattoli per bambini, passando per i dispenser dei famosi Kleenex fino alle piastrelle in ceramica realizzate per la Pamona Tile Company nel 1958. Nel 1957, inoltre, collaborò con gli architetti Buff, Straub e Hensman per la realizzazione della Case Study House n. 20, realizzata grazie al programma promosso dalla rivista "Art & Architecture", nato nel 1945 con l'obiettivo di far conoscere il nuovo Stile Internazionale e il design di stampo modernista.

«L'obiettivo fondamentale dell'alterare l'aspetto visivo e il marchio di fabbrica di ogni azienda è quello di rendere il cambiamento rappresentando fedelmente la compagnia, e riflettendo il ruolo che essa svolge nel contesto»

Saul Bass

Saul bass con Mark Kramer, 1966.



Evoluzione del logo della Bell System dal 1889 al 1969

«Il modo più stimolante per arrivare ad una soluzione di un problema deriva dal problema stesso. Questa è la vera chiave. Il problema definisce la soluzione. E quando si guarda a ciò che fanno gli altri che si è costretti nell'arrivare ad una soluzione stereotipata al tuo problema. Ogni problema contiene elementi unici. Nessun problema è esattamente uguale all'altro. L'unica via per trovare una buona soluzione è capire chiaramente qual è la richiesta. Non puoi trovare la soluzione usando quella di un altro per un'altra richiesta. Non sto nemmeno dicendo che questo è male. È semplicemente falso. Non è tanto una questione morale. Semplicemente non funziona!»

Saul Bass

All'inizio degli anni Sessanta, poi, Bass si buttò a capofitto nel settore che, insieme al title design, gli conferirà i più importanti riconoscimenti: l'identity design o corporate design. Con questi si intende l'identità dell'azienda, ossia l'immagine che i clienti percepiscono riguardo una determinata associazione o società. È un concetto che nasce alla fine del XIX secolo ma si diffonde soprattutto a partire dagli anni Cinquanta del Novecento. La personalità e l'identità di un'azienda si costruiscono attraverso tre ambiti fondamentali: il comportamento (le azioni reali dell'azienda), la comunicazione e i simboli. La comunicazione, in particolare, non ha solo lo scopo di promuovere il prodotto, ma anche quello di contribuire a diffondere l'immagine dell'azienda in modo da accrescerne il prestigio. L'immagine dell'azienda, a sua volta, si diffonde non solo attraverso le pubblicità ma anche tramite la creazione di simboli facilmente riconoscibili dal cliente: i marchi e i loghi. A Saul fu affidato molto spesso il compito non solo di creare marchi e loghi ex novo ma anche di rinnovare l'immagine di diverse società. La pro-

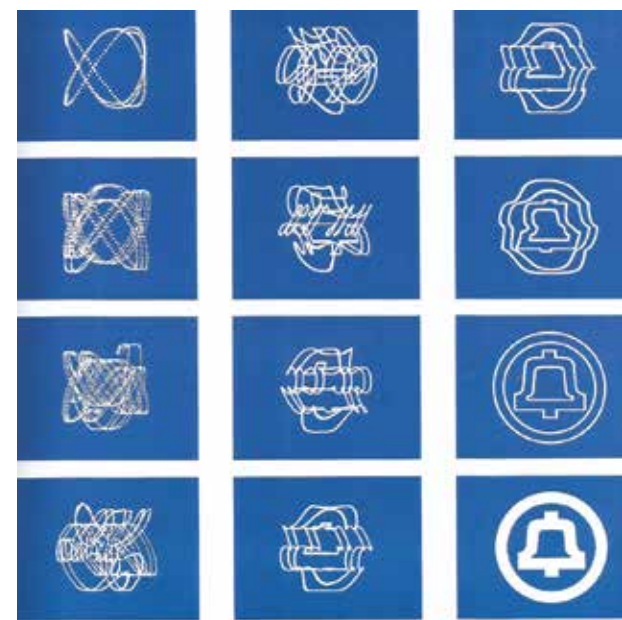
lifica attività di Bass in questo settore ha fatto sì che egli sviluppasse un'impostazione mentale e un procedimento creativo molto simile a quello messo in pratica per la realizzazione dei titoli di testa e dell'apparato iconografico dei film. Con la differenza che, in questo caso, si trovava spesso a collaborare con industriali e dirigenti di aziende che avevano poco a che fare con l'ambito artistico e visivo. Saul sviluppò la dote di comprendere i desideri e i bisogni del committente, le idee e gli obiettivi di un'azienda, affrontando i progetti come se fossero un problema da risolvere. Il lavoro per il cinema di Bass fu quello che generò attorno a lui le maggiori attenzioni, ed è per questo che si tende a trascurare il fatto che egli fu parte integrante di un piccolo gruppo di designers americani (Paul Rand, William Golden e Leaster Beall tra i più importanti) che hanno contribuito a sviluppare un approccio di tipo razionalista nel campo del corporate identity design. Saul Bass, inoltre, per quantità e qualità del suo operato, può essere considerato il designer più prolifico in questo campo nell'arco di tempo che va dal 1960 al 1996, anno della sua scomparsa. Collaborò con le più importanti aziende e società del mondo: Bell System, United Airlines, AT&T, Minolta, Quaker, Alcoa ecc. Saul fu anche il primo designer americano a realizzare dei manuali di stile per le aziende, utili per tramandare il progetto grafico e comunicativo a chi, dopo di lui, si sarebbe occupato della realizzazione dell'identità visiva di quella determinata società. I primi manuali da lui realizzati furono quelli per l'Alcoa nel 1963 e per la Celanese nel 1966, ma quello più famoso è sicuramente quello creato come supporto alla commissione affidatagli dalla Bell System nel 1968. In quegli anni la Bell System era la più importante corporation del mondo nel settore delle comunicazioni. Il suo aspetto grafico, però, era decisamente datato e non al passo con i tempi: a Bass fu affidato il compito di realizzare un'immagine corporativa moderna, che però mantenesse un legame con il passato originario dell'azienda, e che, soprattutto, fosse in grado di adattarsi ai diversi rami di cui si occupava la società, in modo da creare un apparato visivo e un'identità unitaria.

Bass rivisitò la storica ed emblematica campana, simbolo dell'azienda, creando una versione moderna, stilizzata e inserita all'interno di un cerchio. Nel giro di due anni, il tasso di riconoscimento del logo della Bell aumentò quasi del 90%.



«Il marchio ideale è quello che, seppur spinto ai suoi limiti estremi in termini di astrazione e di ambiguità, resta ancora leggibile. I marchi sono di solito metafore di un tipo o dell'altro. E sono, in un certo senso, il pensiero reso visibile.»

Saul Bass



Distorsione e disturbo ottico del logo della Bell System.



«Potevano ora affidarsi a cartelli pubblicitari firmati semplicemente con la nuova campana e la frase 'We Hear You' e tutti avrebbero capito che si trattava della compagnia telefonica»

Saul Bass



Un altro esempio di rivisitazione del logo avviene nella commissione affidatagli dalla Quaker, azienda alimentare americana. La società era da sempre legata all'immagine del cosiddetto signor Quaker, un uomo dal viso simpatico e rassicurante, ideale per assicurarsi la fiducia delle famiglie. Rinunciare al logo originale sarebbe stato controproducente per l'azienda e Bass capì che realizzare un logo nuovo, eliminando l'uomo simbolo della Quaker, si sarebbe rivelato un grosso errore. Ne realizzò quindi una versione moderna, dai tratti stilizzati e poco decorativi, ma ancora facilmente riconoscibile dai consumatori e, soprattutto, capace di trasmettere gli aspetti essenziali dell'azienda: qualità, comfort, semplicità e genuinità.

Testi tratti da:

Marta Satta, Tesi di Laurea Magistrale  
"Saul Bass: L'arte nei titoli di testa",  
Università di Pisa, 2014.

Bass Jennifer, Kirkham Pat, Saul Bass.  
A Life in Film & Design, Laurence King  
Publishing, Londra 2011.

Art Of The Title:  
<http://www.artofthetitle.com/>

## Saul Bass: Analisi e stile

Questo excursus lungo la carriera di Saul Bass è dimostrativo della sua versatilità in campo artistico e di alcune caratteristiche portanti del suo lavoro creativo. Come abbiamo potuto notare, Bass parte da un totale rifiuto della “specializzazione”: nonostante il campo del title design sia quello a cui il suo nome viene maggiormente associato, egli non si può definire un autore “specializzato” in tale campo, avendo affrontato tantissimi altri settori del design, e non solo. Egli ha sempre ritenuto la settorialità del lavoro del design molto limitante per la creatività e ha fatto sì che i propri progetti comunicassero spesso tra loro, delle volte autocitandosi e altre volte utilizzando tecniche e stili che aveva già sperimentato in precedenza e in altri contesti. Questo approccio anti-specialistico ha permesso, inoltre, di dar vita a un metodo creativo abbastanza analogo per ogni ambito da lui affrontato: secondo Bass, infatti, la ricerca necessaria allo sviluppo di un progetto è sostanzialmente la stessa per qualsiasi ambito, dal packaging, ai titoli di testa, alla pubblicità, cambiano solamente gli ingredienti e le tecniche utilizzabili. Sono le stesse parole di Bass a spiegare al meglio il suo processo creativo. Attraverso le interviste e le sue dichiarazioni – e molto spesso anche grazie ai suoi stessi lavori – si è riusciti a definire non solo il suo metodo di lavoro ma la sua reale idea di creatività. Egli stesso ha dichiarato più volte che il punto di partenza di ogni commissione era quello di intenderla come un problema a cui era necessario trovare una soluzione:

**«Solitamente noi veniamo coinvolti perché una compagnia ha un problema pratico. Hanno cambiato il loro nome. Si sono unite con altre. Hanno avuto lo stesso marchio per lungo tempo e i loro affari sono cambiati così che il marchio non riflette più quello che fanno. Oppure, può essere necessario un aggiornamento. Noi abbiamo sviluppato un metodo di approccio che rende più comprensibile ciò che facciamo ai non designer. È una semplice tecnica indirizzata alla risoluzione dei problemi, molto utilizzata dai consulenti di design al giorno d’oggi».**

La prima fase del processo creativo di Bass e del suo staff consiste, come di consueto, nell’analisi del problema da risolvere: si inizia osservando attentamente l’attività del cliente da soddisfare, studiando le caratteristiche dei prodotti e dei servizi nel caso si tratti di una azienda, analizzando lo stile, il genere e la trama se si tratta di un lavoro per un film. Un aspetto molto importante, e invece del tutto originale, del metodo di Bass sono le interviste. Riguardo al suo lavoro nel campo della corporate identity egli spiega:

**«Di gran lunga l’elemento più importante dei nostri studi sono le interviste con gli esponenti chiave dell’azienda e con il personale. In alcune aziende parliamo con i funzionari primari, come il capo del settore marketing o alcuni capi-reparto. Ma in altre potrebbe essere più importante parlare con un membro esterno del consiglio di amministrazione, un assistente del presidente o uno**

**scienziato importante. Il punto è che ogni azienda è differente e dev’essere affrontata come tale.»**

Il dialogo con l’azienda e con la produzione cinematografica è essenziale per il lavoro di Saul Bass, essendo alla base di un concetto fondamentale del suo metodo creativo: la funzionalità. Ogni progetto portato avanti da Bass e dai suoi collaboratori, infatti, non è mai fine a se stesso ma risponde a dei precisi criteri che lo rendono funzionale all’idea più generale che sta alla base di un’azienda o di un film. Secondo Bass l’atto creativo inoltre, dev’essere in grado di creare determinati rapporti tra immagini e idee che il design deve comunicare allo spettatore (o consumatore), facendo sì che egli recepisca non solo l’esperienza “artistica” ma anche l’esperienza emozionale e intellettuale. Parlando del film Saul ammise:

**«Il processo creativo è un tipo di attività imprevedibile e disperata, ma anche disciplinata. Ha la disciplina dell’ordine, ma il coraggio di ciò che accade (durante il processo creativo) proviene da altre fonti. Io penso che le dichiarazioni in questo film siano vere – su cosa si prova durante il processo creativo, su come la società tende a vedere un giovane creativo, sull’importanza di ciò che che (il creativo) fa, nonostante la tendenza generale della società a rifiutarlo. Io non critico il comportamento della società, mi limito a descriverlo. La società ha molte buone ragioni per essere riluttante ad accettare nuove idee. Molte sono irrealizzabili o rischiose. Ma alcune di loro sono quelle che fanno sì che la società si evolva, la fanno muovere in avanti, permettono che (la società) faccia i conti con le cose che ha da capire e risolvere così da poter sopravvivere e crescere».**

Dal punto di vista puramente tecnico dopo svariate analisi di film e immagini coordinate si può riassumere la filosofia e la creatività artistica di Saul Bass in alcuni tratti fondamentali come l’utilizzo di pochi colori (a tinta unita, senza sfumature o gradienti), l’irregolarità delle figure utilizzate (seppur mantengano una geometria propria, da un certo punto di vista anche funzionale) e in semplici stilizzazioni che generano un’emozione nello spettatore. La sua attenta capacità di analisi di un problema inoltre gli ha permesso di arrivare ad avere una forte abilità nel sintetizzare i tratti salienti di un film o di un’azienda all’interno di semplici forme e pochi colori.

Testi tratti da:

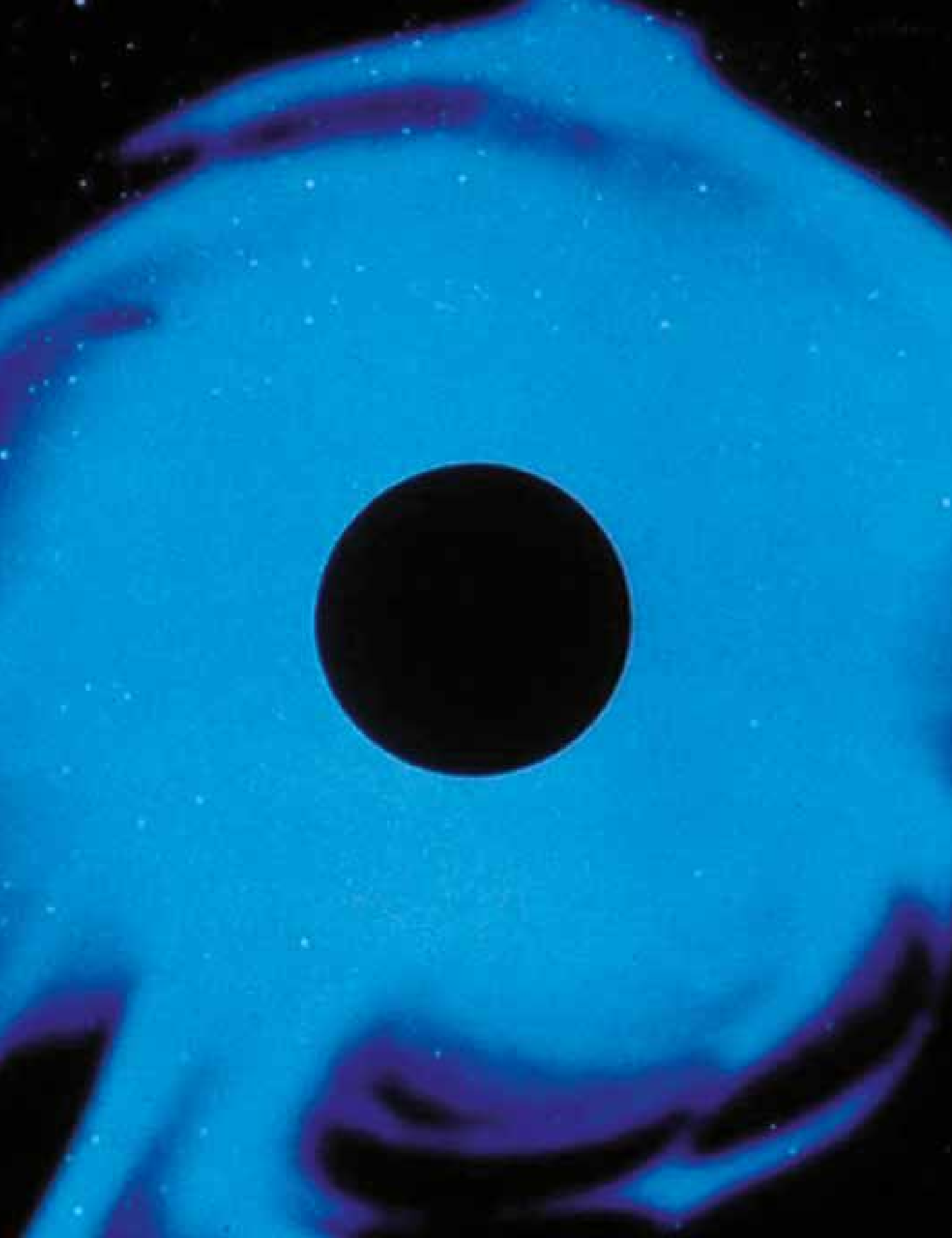
Marta Satta, Tesi di Laurea Magistrale “Saul Bass: L’arte nei titoli di testa”, Università di Pisa, 2014.

Bass Jennifer, Kirkham Pat, Saul Bass. A Life in Film & Design, Laurence King Publishing, Londra 2011.





“Design is thinking  
made visual”



The image features a black background with several stylized, light grey hands with black outlines. These hands are positioned as if they are holding or interacting with various blue and purple rectangular shapes of different sizes and orientations. The shapes are scattered across the left and right sides of the frame. In the upper right quadrant, the word "BEHIND" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

BEHIND

“ I MAY HAVE BEEN THE YOUNG KID IN THE OFFICE  
BUT I WAS THE CREATIVE PERSON  
AND THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE IN HOLLYWOOD ”

## The Master

It was while he was working at Blaine Thomson that Saul met Gyorgy Kepes, the Hungarian-born artist, designer and teacher, who was to have an enormous influence upon him. Saul often told the story of how, casually browsing in a bookshop, he discovered Kepes's *Language of Vision* (1944), a seminal publication that featured contemporary American advertising and student exercises, all heavily influenced by the Bauhaus and other European Modern Movement design. To Saul's astonishment, the blurb on the book's cover noted that Kepes, who had worked in Germany with his compatriot and former Bauhaus teacher, László Moholy-Nagy, and had headed the Light and Color Department at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, taught advertising design, and was now teaching at Brooklyn College. Saul enrolled immediately.

Kepes helped transform the ways in which Saul thought about design, helping him make the transition from a talented designer with a burgeoning interest in Modernist graphics to a major player. It is difficult to know exactly how well acquainted with Modern Movement design through Trafton's classes, with "modern" expression in French, German and Soviet cinema, loved surrealism - especially Magritte - and greatly admired Man Ray, Cassandre, Paul Rand and others whose designs appeared in Kepes's book. He had read Moholy-Nagy's *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture* (first published in English in 1932), but his knowledge was piecemeal and mainly visual. That would change with Kepes's class.



G. Kepes, Juliet in Camouflage Jungle, 1942  
G. Kepes, Juliet's Shadow Caged, 1939

Kepes took a highly intellectual approach to design. He believed that visual tensions produced by certain combinations of visual elements form the basis of a universal language of vision, and that graphic design and motion pictures could play a major role in changing the world because they were less hide-bound by tradition. Such ideas resonated with Saul's political beliefs and artistic sensibilities, while the elevation of graphics and moving images to the top of the artistic hierarchy validated Saul's own area of work in ways that no one else had done.

Kepes's student exercises in *Language of Vision* remain instructive models. "The basis of every living process is an inner contradiction," wrote Kepes, "The living-quality of an image is generated by the tension between the spatial forces; that is, by the struggle between the attraction and repulsion of these forces." Similar exercises at Brooklyn College led Saul to a greater understanding of this and other things such as dynamic equilibrium, compression, the unity of opposites, the interpretation of lines and planes and the physical modulation of light

Although the basis of his training with Kepes was in Bauhaus-style graphics and the "New Typography," Saul increased his familiarity with other aspects of European Modernism, from Cubism and Constructivism to De Stijl and Surrealism. Saul's fascination with psychology ensured that he soaked up Kepes's views on the importance of the psychological response to design. Saul's work changed dramatically, becoming more dynamic and abstract.

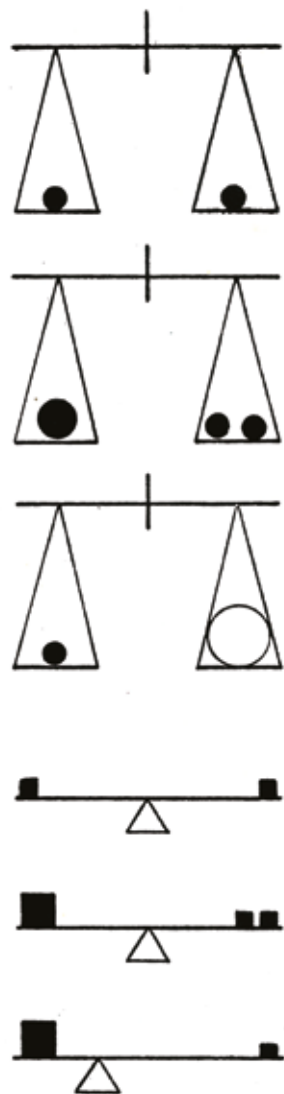
Saul applied what he learned in Kepes's class to his work. His advertisement for a hair product (Tylon Cold Wave), which resulted from one of Kepes's exercises based on spatial tensions, won Saul his first award from the New York Art Directors Club. It broke generic conventions by not referring to beautiful hair or glamorous transformations, instead using the idea of balance to link the written and visual images.

Many graphic designers besides Saul have testified to the excitement of studying with the most gifted and evangelical of teachers. Reminiscing about the fast learning curve he experienced, Saul said that he felt as if he had discovered "The World" and described Kepes as opening up a new world for him.

The Modernist concern with paring away the extraneous and the decorative marked Saul's work thereafter, and he developed greater facility with, among other things, montage and the expressive possibilities of lettering and typography. Kepes recognized Saul's talent and invited him to collaborate on several projects, including an exhibition for the Office of War Information and the French Government about American public housing during World War II (1945).

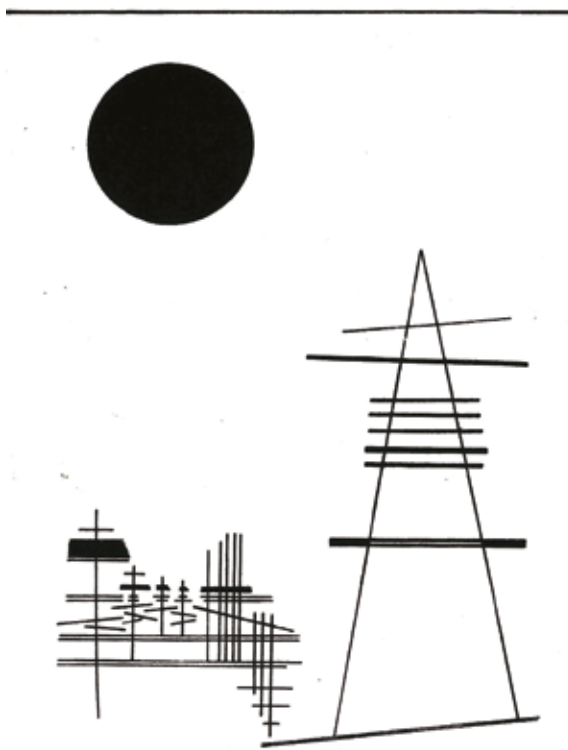
The geometric centre of the pictorial field is identified with the optical axis and assumed as the gravity centre of every force acting on the pictorial surface.

Gyorgy Kepes, from *The Language of Vision*.



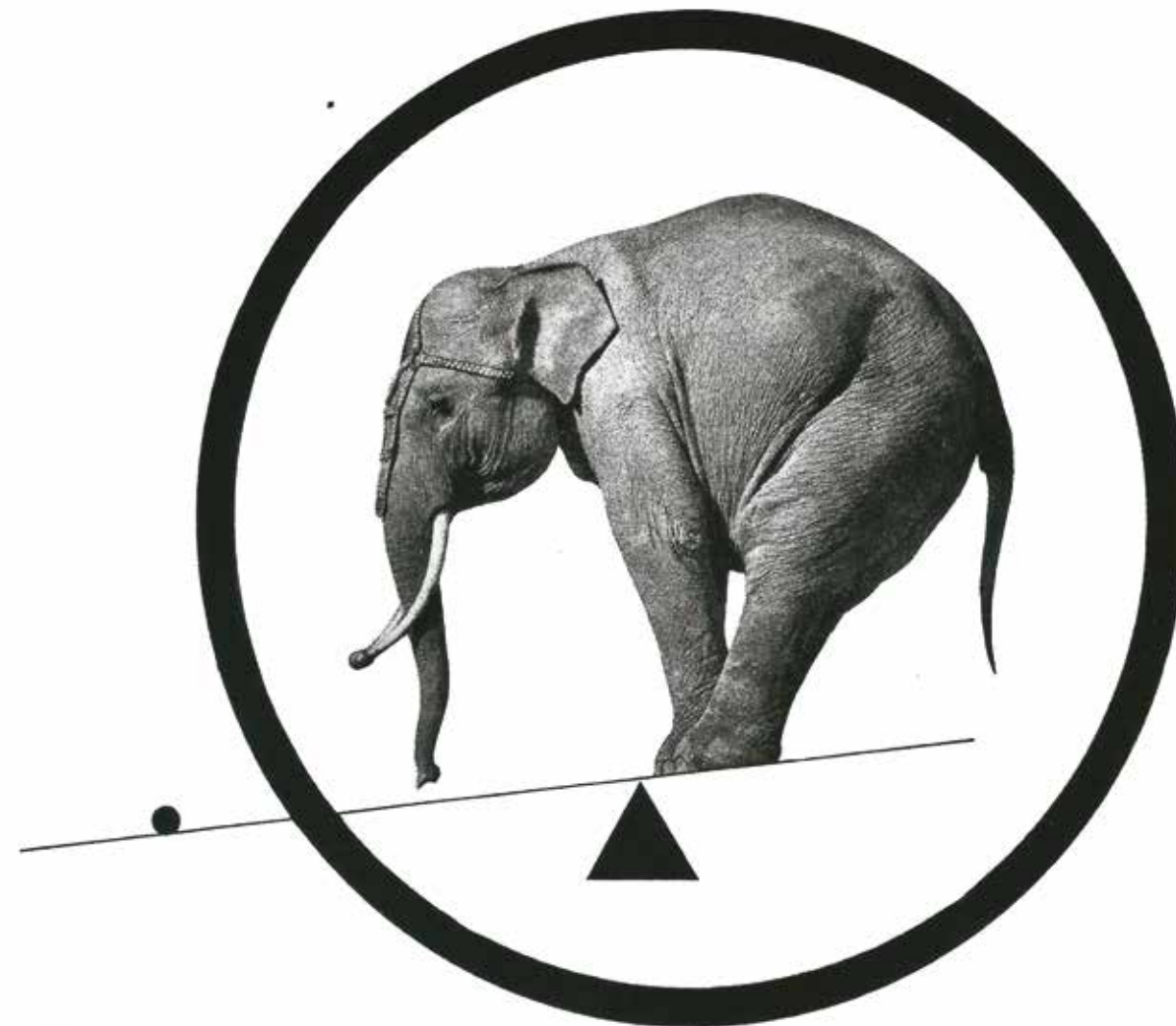
G. Kepes, Study on Balancing optical weight taken from the Book *Language of Vision*. Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944

From the book *Saul Bass: a Life in Film and Design*, Jennifer Bass, Pat Kirkham, Laurence King Publishing, 2011.



W. Kandinsky, Light lines balance the heavy black circle

Saul Bass, Tylon Cold Wave Advertising, 1945



**OKAY, YOU CAN GET DOWN NOW, GERTRUDE . . .**

We were thinking how to show you the kind of absolute control you get with Tylon, and in walked Gertrude. We'd forgotten the appointment. She hadn't, of course. You know how it is with elephants. We persuaded her to demonstrate what we mean. Cost us a few bales of hay, but it seems worth it. • Absolute control and perfect balance in all Tylon cold wave solutions—that's gospel. (Okay, you can get down now, Gertrude.) That's what keeps its popularity soaring. • That, plus the fact that you can give three Tylon cold waves in the time it takes for two others. Makes it nice for everybody. Speed . . . simplicity . . . absolute control. Just what you're looking for, isn't it? (Okay, you can get down now Gertrude!) • And that reminds us, big things are happening at Tylon. More excitement than a circus! George Barrie came over as vice-president and general manager, and John Zerbo joined us as technical director in charge of product development. (Gertrude, get down will you—the performance is over!)

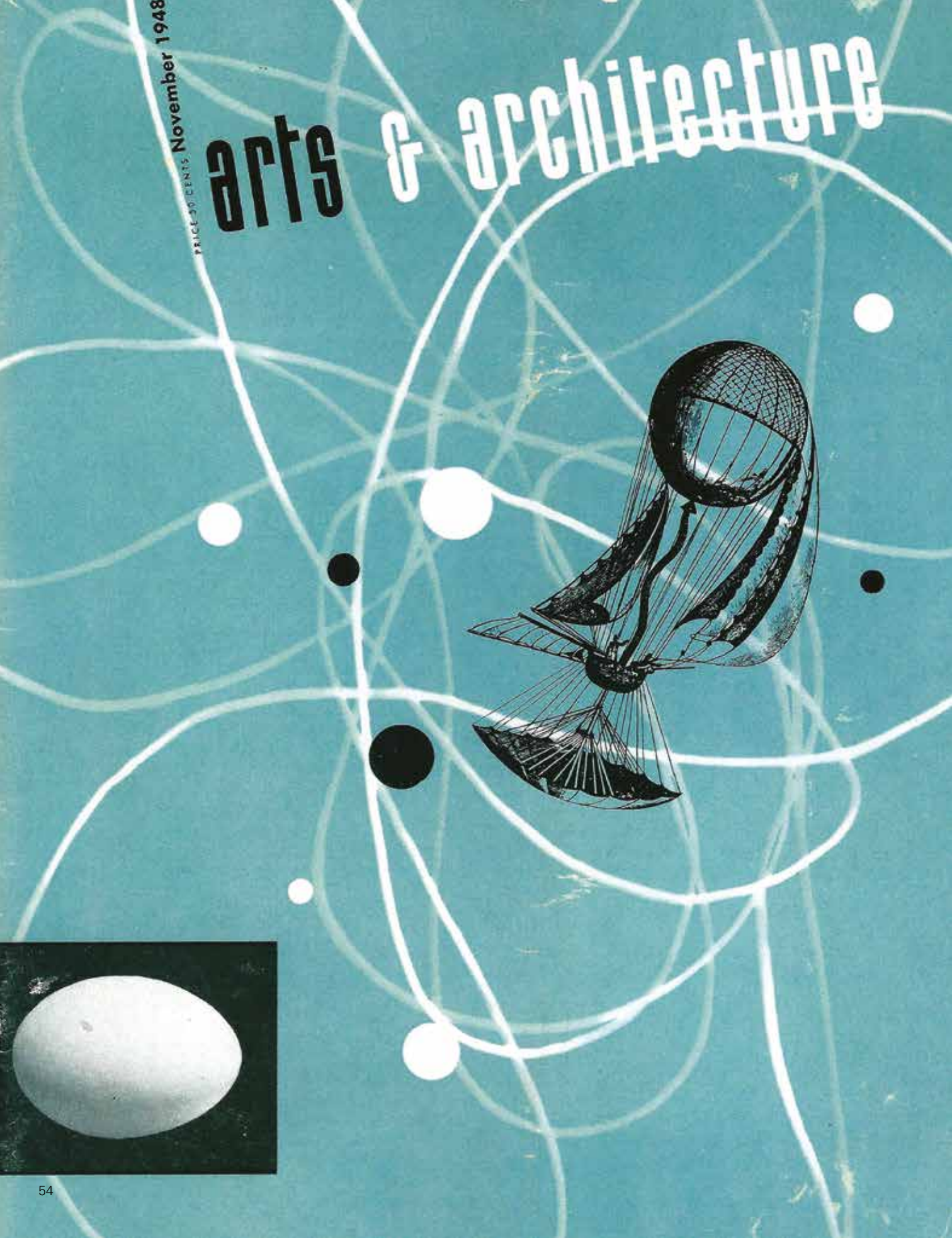
*Tylon* COLD WAVE • contains genuine TYO

Tylon Products, Inc., 251 E. 139th St., N. Y. 51, N. Y.

## Lands to L.A.

At the time of Saul's arrival in Los Angeles, the city was a Mecca for young artists and designers. The thriving progressive, creative and cultural life dated back to the 1920s when Aline Barnsdall, Louise and Walter Arensberg and other patronized modern art, architecture and design. Photographer Edward Weston, artist Rockwell Kent and the young Lloyd Wright congregated at Jacob Zeitlin's radical bookshop, while more politically focused artists, designers and intellectuals gravitated to the circle around the Viennese Modernist architect Rudolph Schindler. Other émigrés who lived there in the 1920s and 1930s included architect Richard Neutra, filmmakers Josef von Sternberg, Billy Wilder and Oskar Fischinger, weaver and designer Maria Kipp, composers Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg and writers Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood. Many figures in the film industry were known for their interest in and promotion of contemporary art and design, including Wilder, Von Sternberg, Vincent Price and Edward G. Robinson. In 1940, Man Ray moved to Southern California and exhibited in the Sunset Boulevard gallery, then recently opened by Frank Perls, whom Saul remembered as one of the great showcasers of avant-gard art and design. Bertold Brecht, Thomas Mann, Theodor Adorno and Ray and Charles Eames were among the new arrivals of 1941. In 1942, designer Margaret Harris and architect Griswold Raetzle left MGM's art department to join the small team working with the Eames to develop plywood and metal products. Architect Gregory Ain, and Harry sculptor joined the Eames office that year. In 1946, Alvin Lustig moved back to Los Angeles, where he designed interiors, furniture, textiles and buildings, as well as the graphics for which he is better known. Other designers contributing to what is now known as "LA modernism" at the time of Saul's arrival included architect and product designer Greta Magnusson Grossman, landscape designer Garrett Eckbo, glass designer Dorothy Thorpe, textile designer Dorothy Liebes, fashion and film costume designer Bonnie Cashin, potters Otto and Getrude Natzler, Edith Heath and Peter Voukos and the group around *Arts & Architecture*.



**On the left:**

The November cover, designed by Saul Bass

**On the right:**

From left to right, from top to bottom, the covers for the magazine during 1948. The July magazine's cover was designed by G. Kepes.

**On the previous page:**

G. Kepes, Hand

The Los Angeles-based and Internationally influential magazine *Arts and Architecture* had a considerable influence on many of Saul's generation:

**"It spoke of things i wanted to hear and was receptive to"**

Edited by John Entenza and packed with Modernist images, it favored all things progressive, commenting on a wide range of activities, from art, architecture, design, photography and film to dance, music and politics. It featured individuals whose work Saul admired, from Kepes and Moholy-Nagy, to Hans Hoffman and Mies van Der Rohe. Saul Remembered particularly the freshness of the graphics of Matter and Lustig and the photographs of Julius Shulman.

At first Saul did not feel able to approach the well-known people who put together the magazine; "I was one of the younger kids in town. Even Charlie Eames, whom i later knew to be extremely approachable, seemed 'way up there' - his exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (1946) really put him on the map."

By 1948, however, Saul was sufficiently well regarded to be asked to design the cover for the November issue. In the "functionalist" prose then popular with the *Arts and Architecture* crowd, he explained that the forms represented "man's conflict" and that the "natural machine" - the egg - was "a symbol not only of order but also of purposeful growth," while the "air machine" - a hot-air baloon - suggested "man's struggle ... to pass on the new stages of development."

From the book  
*Saul Bass: a Life in Film and Design*,  
by Jennifer Bass, Pat Kirkham,  
Laurence King  
Publishing, 2011.



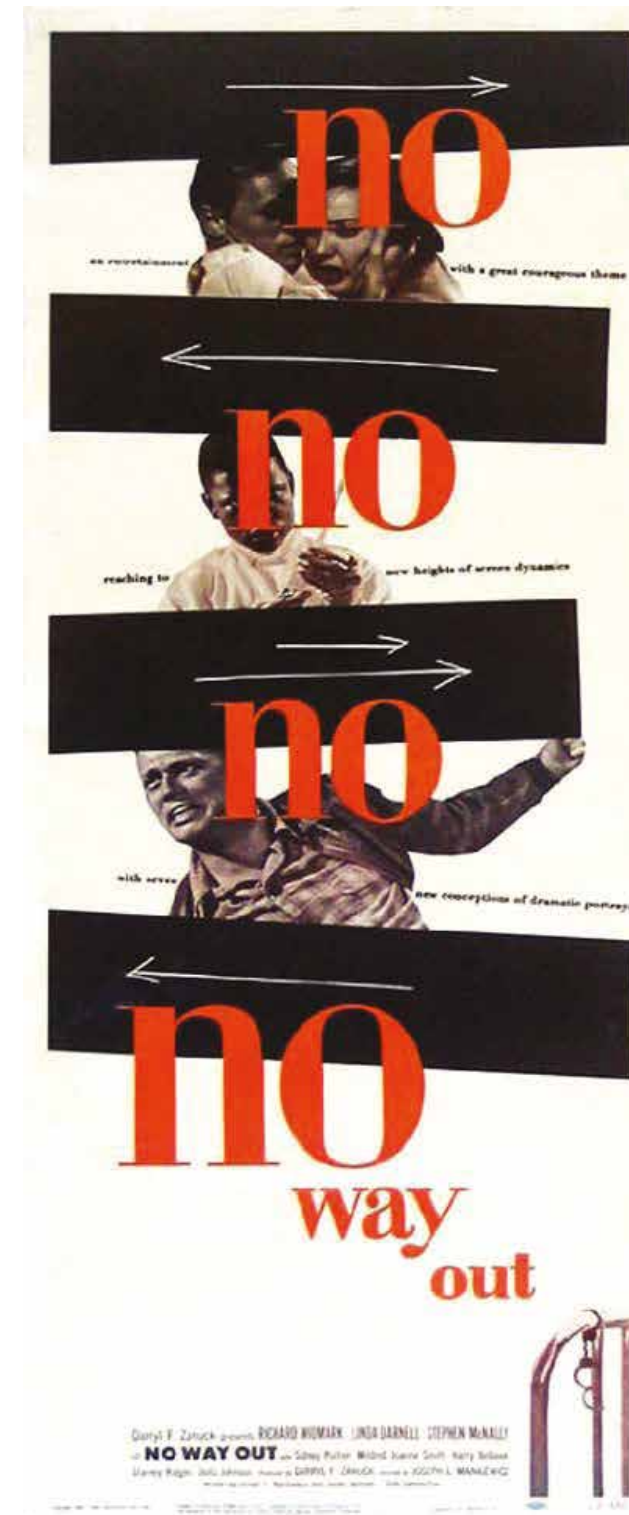
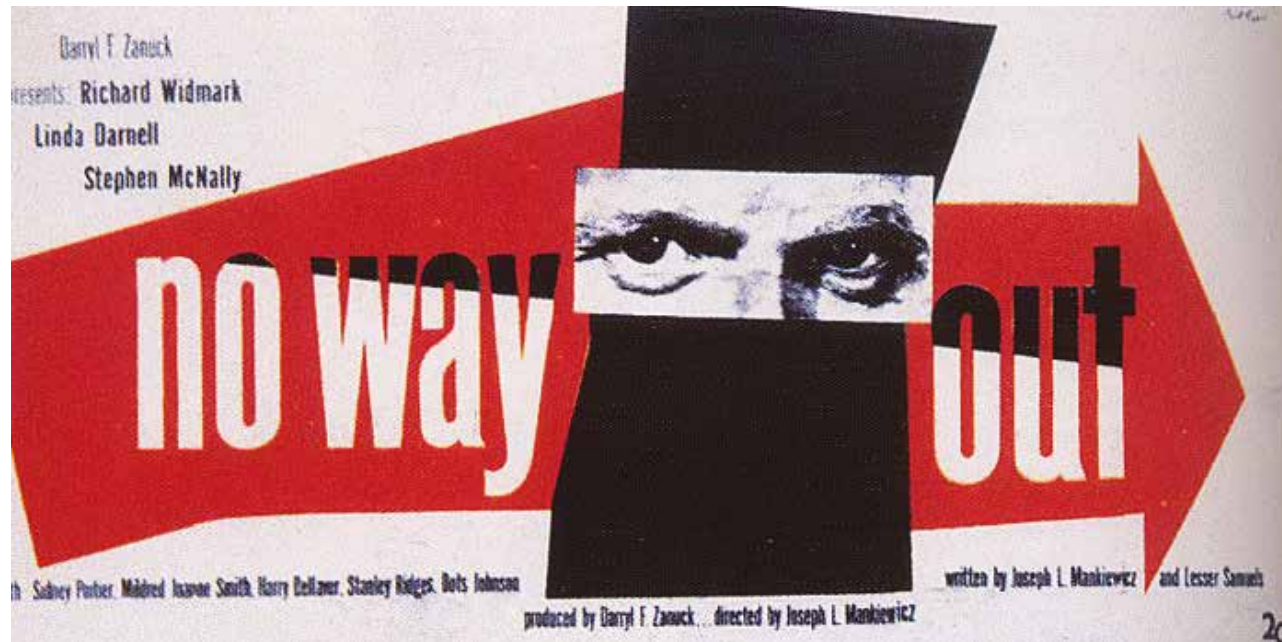
# The first challenge in Hollywood

“We commissioned work from Paul Rand and Erik Nitsche, which was quite good. But we were still concerned. Saul was in New York, and he came in to talk about it. I told him I needed the work Monday morning. He said he was staying over the weekend at the Algonquin, so we had a drawing board delivered to his hotel room. He worked all weekend at the hotel and on Monday morning he came up with the campaign.”

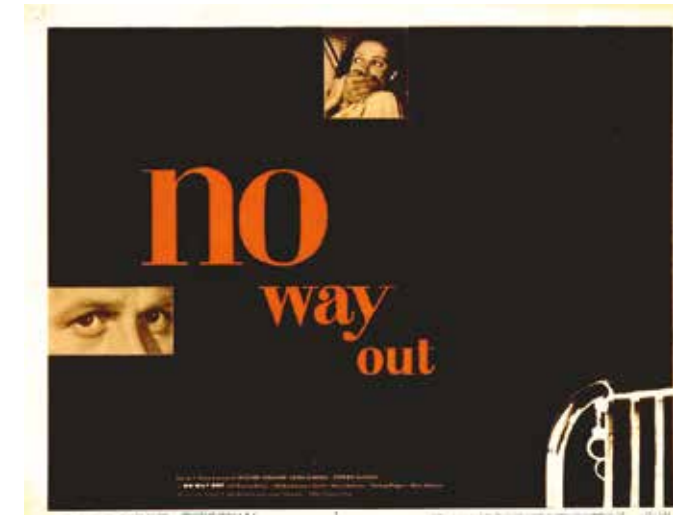
Jonas Rosengfield, head of advertising for “No Way Out” (1950 dir. Joseph Mankiewicz) speaks about the Campaign for the movie.



On this page: Paul Rand, No Way Out posters, 1950



This campaign is extremely significant in the history of Modernism movie advertising. The press book referred to the “history-making conceptions of graphic art” and, together with Erik Nitsche’s campaign for All About Eve (1950, dir. Joseph Mankiewicz), it put Modernist graphics on the map in terms of film advertising. A trade as by Nitsche was regarded as sufficiently arresting to feature on the cover of the No Way Out press book, while Rand’s brilliant billboard design is on the back. Both men had their names on their designs but Saul’s do not bear his, probably because he was not a freelance designer at the time. Indeed, Saul did not sign his film advertising designs until about 1954, and even then not consistently. The signature notwithstanding, Saul was on his way to becoming “Saul Bass.”



On top: Erik Nitsche, No Way Out poster, 1950  
On the left: Saul Bass, No Way Out poster, 1950

From the book *Saul Bass: a Life in Film and Design*, by Jennifer Bass, Pat Kirkham, Laurence King Publishing, 2011.



# Walter Paepcke, a patron of Design

A major figure in the development of American modern design beginning in the 1930s was a Chicago industrialist, Walter P. Paepcke (1896-1960), who founded the Container Corporation of America (CCA) to become a national company and the nation's largest producer of packaging materials. Paepcke was unique among the large industrialists of his generation, for he recognized that design could both serve a pragmatic business purpose and become a major cultural thrust on the part of the corporation. His interest was inspired by his wife, artist Elizabeth Nitze Paepcke (1902-94), who prompted her husband to hire perhaps the first corporate design director in America.

In 1936 Egbert Jacobson was selected as the first director of CCA's new department of design. As with Behrens's design program for AEG early in the century, CCA's new visual signature (and its implementation) was based on two ingredients: the vision of the designer and a supportive client. Jacobson had an extensive background as a color expert, and this knowledge was put to use as mill and factory interiors were transformed from drab industrial grays and browns to bright colors. A new trademark was applied to stationery, checks, invoices, vehicles, and signage. A consistent format used sans-serif type and a standard color combination of black and shipping-carton tan.

Paepcke was an advocate and patron of design. He had maintained a long-standing interest in the Bauhaus, perhaps as a response to the school's experiments with paper materials and structures. Moved by Moholy-Nagy's commitment and determination, Paepcke provided much-needed moral and financial support to the Institute of Design. By the time of Moholy Nagy's tragic early death from Leukemia on 24 November 1946, the institute was on a firm educational and organizational footing. CCA's advertising agency was N.W.Ayer, where art director Charles Coiner (1898-1989) made a major contribution.

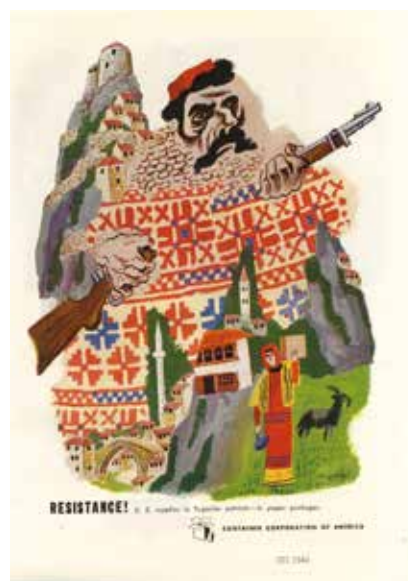
Herbert Bayer, Advertising Design



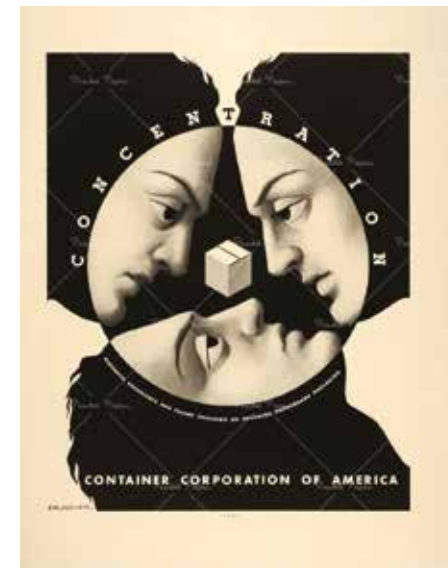
Herbert Matter, Advertising Design



Gergely, Container Corporation of America, Yugoslavia, 1944



Beginning in May 1937, Cassandre was commissioned to design a series of CCA advertisements that defied American advertising conventions. The traditional headline and body copy were replaced by a dominant visual that extended a simple statement about CCA. In contrast to the long-winded copywriting of most 1930's advertising, many CCA advertisements only had a dozen words.



Cassandre, advertising design, 1937

The United States demobilized millions of troops and converted industry from wartime needs to consumer markets after World War II. Seeking another institutional advertising using fine art, CCA decided to commission paintings by artists from each of the then forty-eight states. A simple copy line appeared under each full-color painting, followed by the CCA logotype. The series served to advance a Bauhaus Ideal: the union of art with life. Once selected, artists were allowed the freedom of their artistic convictions. A major corporate art collection, now housed in the Smithsonian institution, was assembled.

United State Series, Arizona



From the book *Meggs History of Graphic Design* by Philip B. Meggs, Alston W. Purvis, Fourth Edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2006.

United State Series, Arizona



## Great Ideas

After the state series was completed, CCA developed one of the most brilliant institutional campaigns in the history of advertising. Elizabeth and Walter Paepcke were attending the Great Books discussion group conducted in Chicago by Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer Adler. These two scholars were also editing the Great Books of the Western World series, which included two volumes discussing the ideas contained in the series. Walter Paepcke approached Adler with the possibility of an Institutional ad campaign presenting the great ideas of Western culture. Each would present an artist's interpretation of a great idea selected by Adler and his colleagues. The Paepckes joined Bayer and Jacobson to form a jury to select the visual artists who would be asked to bring graphic actualization to these abstract concepts. Beginning in February 1950, this unprecedented institutional campaign transcended the bounds of advertising, as ideas about liberty, justice, and human rights were conveyed to an audience of business leaders, investors, prospective employees, and molders of public opinion. The campaign ran over three decades, with 157 visual artists creating artwork for almost two hundred "Great Ideas" advertisements. Art ranged from painted and sculptural portraits to geometric abstraction, symbolic interpretations and collage.

From the book *Meggs History of Graphic Design*, by Philip B. Meggs, Alston W. Purvis, Fourth Edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006.



### On the right page:

Jacques Nathan Garamond on Alexis de Tocqueville, 1955

### On the following pages:

Saul Bass on John Stuart Mill, 1957

Herbert Bayer on Theodore Roosevelt, 1959

Great Ideas of Western Man | ONE OF A SERIES

### John Stuart Mill ON THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

Not the violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil; there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides; it is when they attend only to one that errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood. (*On Liberty, 1854*)

would put an end to the evils of religious or philosophical sectarianism. Every truth which men of narrow capacity are in earnest about, is sure to be asserted, inculcated, and in many ways even acted on, as if no other truth existed in the world, or at all events none that could limit or qualify the first. I acknowledge that the tendency of all opinions to become sectarian is not cured by the freest discussion, but is often heightened and exacerbated thereby; the truth which ought to have been, but was not, seen, being rejected all the more violently because proclaimed by persons regarded as opponents. But it is not on the impassioned partisan, it is on the calmer and more disinterested bystander, that this collision of opinions works its salutary effect. Not the violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it, is the formidable evil; there is always hope when people are forced to listen to both sides; it is when they attend only to one that errors harden into prejudices, and truth itself ceases to have the effect of truth, by being exaggerated into falsehood. And since there are few mental attributes more rare than that judicial faculty which can sit in intelligent judgment between two sides of a question, of which only one is represented by an advocate before it, truth has no chance but in proportion as every side of it, every opinion which embodies any fraction of the truth, not only finds advocates but is so advanced as to be listened to. We have now recognized the necessity in the mental well-being of mankind (and which all their other well-being depends) of freedom of opinion, and freedom of the expression of opinion, on four distinct grounds; which we will now briefly recapitulate. First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility. Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of

ARTIST: SAUL BASS

CONTAINER CORPORATION OF AMERICA 


GREAT IDEAS OF WESTERN MAN . . . one of a series

### THEODORE ROOSEVELT on the preservation of America

The things that will destroy America are prosperity at any price, peace at any price, safety first instead of duty first, and love of soft living and the get-rich-quick theory of life.

(Letter to S. Stanwood Menken, January 10, 1917)  
From "The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt," Harvard University Press



CONTAINER CORPORATION OF AMERICA 

## The Furthest Past

If you hadn't done with your life what you've done, what would you have done?

**Saul:** Either I was an archeologist in my last reincarnation or will I be one in my next life because I have a passionate interest in archeology.

For a person who is as concerned with contemporary culture as you are, this interest in the past is particularly curious.

Where does it come from?

**Saul:** First of all I am not just interested in the past, but in the very, very, very distant past. What fascinates me is the mystery and unreality of it all. The most intriguing culture is one about which we know a good deal but not everything. That leaves holes which can be filled with our own fantasies and imagination.

Is that why you collect fragments of ancient civilizations?

**Saul:** Yes, Those kinds of objects, in addition to their intrinsic beauty, bring with them a special kind of mystery – a quality of the unknown that reaches a very deep and hidden place.

Your art collection seems to me unique in that you tend to collect many examples of one kind of thing. How come?

**Saul:** I'm fascinated by how each artist will find a way of putting his own individual stamp on a sharply defined form. A form which has been established by ritual or convention. So that while superficially the pieces may seem identical, they are when put next to each other, highly unique and individual.

from the book *Saul Bass & Associates*, IDEA edition, Tokyo, 2003





# BEYOND

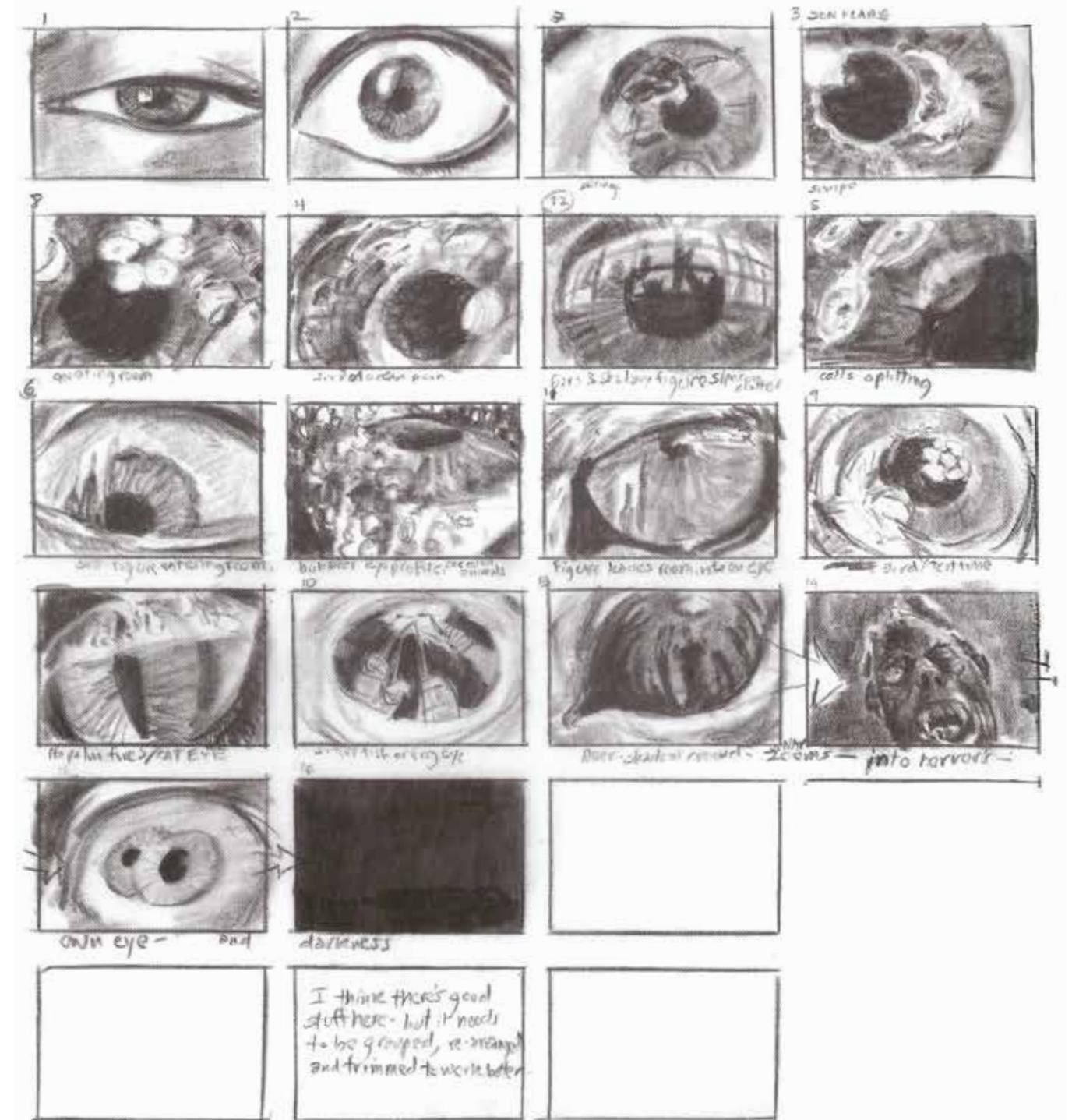
“ I’M FASCINATED BY HOW EACH ARTIST  
WILL FIND A WAY OF PUTTING HIS OWN  
INDIVIDUAL STAMP ON A SHARPLY  
DEFINED FORM”

## Saul Bass' legacy

So, what is your advice to students?

“Learn to draw, if you don’t you’re gonna live your life getting around that and trying to compensate for that. It’s like know so the problem is there, instead of doing a draw when you have to do it, you know, to deal with the communication, you find another lesser way to do this, is like you have to do this instead of forthright dealing with it; you have to sort of turn your arm and push your shoulder and do a solution that comes out as a square, or a triangle or a circle and that’s ridiculous. You can’t get away with that, it’s a crippling absence and the unfortunate thing is: you can get by without it, and you can even get a job and you can move to a certain point, but then, when you realize, that’s when you realize, that you really wish you would and it’s too late because you never go back to school, you never have the discipline to take a night class and you can’t afford the drop in salary any more, you’ve geared your life to that money and you’re finished. You never gonna learn how to draw and it’s awful.”

Saul Bass, Advice to Design Students



Interview to Saul Bass for the project “20 Outstanding Los Angeles Designers”; 1986.  
Viewed on: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S710mlzx\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S710mlzx_I)

Kyle Cooper, The Island of Dr. Moreau (1996)

## The dark genius of Kyle Cooper

In the boutique industry of crafting title sequences Cooper is king, he is regarded as a landmark in motion graphic design history. Although he's not the first designer to take possession of this liminal creative space, Cooper is one of the most recent figures to bring it to its current narrative fever pitch – and certainly the first to garner higher praise for his titles than the films have elicited themselves.

He has designed the lead-ins to 150 features – including *Se7en*, *Donnie Brasco*, the 1996 remake of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Spider-Man*, *Sphere*, *Twister*, *Flubber*, *Dead Presidents*, *Mimic*, *The Mummy* and *Arlington Road*.

Between his collaborations: Martin Scorsese, Robert Redford, Oliver Stone and Brian De Palma. For his work in title sequence design, Cooper is often compared to Saul Bass.

### Saul Bass' influence on Kyle Cooper

Among the designers that establish themselves in 1990s, the one who is most frequently addressed as “heir of Saul Bass” is Kyle Cooper. Cooper himself highlights frequently the greatness of his teacher.

What's in common among the two designers is the importance given to abstraction of shapes and their composition, to the combination/contrast of graphic elements in order to reach more simple and effective visual metaphors. Besides, Cooper's technique, as the Saul Bass's one, is based on editing “Editing that has a narrative value and tries to animate things and characters marking their rhythm through the coherent juxtaposition of frames... I live the editing table as a refuge from external world where chaos exists but can be controlled frame by frame.”

Cooper, towards his work, shows the typical approach of graphic design. In fact he strongly believes in the functionalities of his creations and even more in thinking to his projects as problems to be solved, as Saul Bass did: “As a graphic designer I have to solve [the director's] problem, and if I'm not listening to the director and not giving him something that works in the service of his movie that's not going to get me any work.” If Cooper may be considered Saul Bass's heir, this should be appointed to the fact that he begins exactly from his same considerations “I believe that title sequences should be primarily understandable and

have information purposes, as showing names of the large number of collaborators. Otherwise they can be thought as the initial part of the film and therefore create expectations. When lights starts turning off and people look with attention to the screen a sense of excitement towards what is going to be watched is stimulated.”

Another element that joins Kyle Cooper and Saul Bass is the attention paid to the lettering. The written information and illustrations have the same relevance in the scene so to ensure the desired effect on the spectator. In David Fincher's 1995 film *Se7en*'s title sequence the typeface used (Helvetica and handwritings) is meant to give the sensations that those writings are the killer's one. Therefore, the written information relate with all the other elements of the sequence to contribute creating the meaning.

### Typography: animating words

Cooper takes American typographer Beatrice Ward's idea of type as a “crystalline goblet” – a transparent, neutral vessel of content – and shatters it into jagged pieces. He does this all the more effectively because he knows the tenets of typography from his time at Yale, and claims to hire only designers who have a particular sensitivity to type.

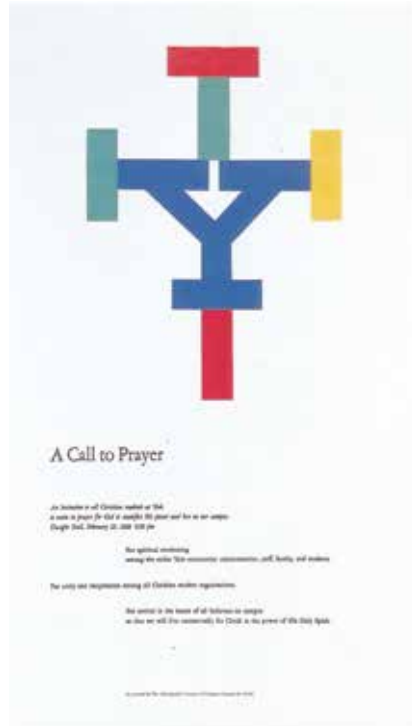
To this day, he holds up Paul Rand as one of his greatest



Kyle Cooper, Dawn of the Dead (2004)



Saul Bass, Psycho (1960)



Kyle Cooper, poster "A Call to Prayer" (1988)



Kyle Cooper, typographic experiments (1981)

personal influences, the man who taught him that an idea is only as good as its execution – a rigorous benchmark that Cooper admits to be still working toward. One poster created at Yale in 1988 reflects Cooper's distinctly Randian sensitivity to type and symbolism: "A Call to Prayer" for all Christians on campus takes the serifs on Yale's famous blue "Y" and extends them into a crucifix. Long before Cooper even knew who Paul Rand was, though, he began playing with text by taking words from the dictionary and drawing them in a way that mimicked their meaning. One experiment in 1981 had Cooper rendering the word "extort" with a gun-wielding hand as a serif on the "r" and "extinguish" with an upside-down "u" that looks like a bucket pouring out water. Without realizing it, Cooper hit upon a method that would become emblematic of his later work.

In many of his title sequences, Cooper creates what could best be described as a typographic method acting, wherein words animate in a way that is appropriately symbolic of the film's content. In *Twister* (1996), a film about meteorologists chasing the tornado of a lifetime, the routine names of cast and crew fly across the screen as storm-strewn debris, arrange themselves long enough to be legible, then splinter apart. For *Spider-Man* (2002), Cooper has letters coalesce into names and title that look like flies stuck in a spider's web. A similar effect occurs in *Flubber* (1997), a remake of Walt Disney's '60s-era *Absent-Minded Professor* featuring mathematical notations that whizz around the screen to form the credits, and *The Mummy* (1999), which draws upon Egyptian hieroglyphs and vertical as well as horizontal lettering.

### Career

Therefore, influenced by Saul Bass and Pablo Ferro, Kyle Cooper was one of the first graphic designers to reshape the conservative motion picture industry during the 1990s by applying trends in print design and incorporating the computer to combine conventional and digital processes.

After studying under legendary designer Paul Rand at the Yale University School of art, he worked for seven years at R/Greenberg Associates first in New York and then in Los Angeles. Propelled by *Se7en*'s success, Cooper left the design firm and in 1996, with RGA colleagues Chip Houghton and Peter Frankfurt, founded Imaginary Forces, which quickly established itself as the hottest design shop in Hollywood, creating everything from the Netscape browser's comet field logo to the increasingly elaborate main titles for dozens of films. As Imaginary Forces grew, Cooper found he was spending more time managing than creating. In 2003, he sold his share in the business and began a period of

experimentation, exploring possibilities as an independent director and as a collaborator with Garson Yu, a long-time friend from Yale days and founder of the Los Angeles-based motion-graphics firm yu+co. "To be honest, the move was about me just wanting to do my own work," he says. "People stand in line waiting to ask you things. I prefer to execute my own ideas." With his new venture, Prologue Films, Cooper has scaled back and refocused. He promises to make only a few films at a time and not to grow the staff beyond eight, give or take a few freelancers. "I'm not sure Prologue will take the design world by storm, but I do know that we will never do anything that I do not think is perfect. I will never compromise again." Like a lot of Hollywood heavies, Cooper is translating his skills to videogames. His goal is to enliven game openers with interactivity. Cooper's success has brought new attention to an art form that has long been considered an afterthought, spawning a host of rivals and copycats. "There's a lot of people trying to be Kyle now," concedes Cooper.

### Cooper's ambiguous personality

Cooper's credits – which operate as minifilms in their own right – consistently stun and entertain audiences. Kyle Cooper is a postmodern paradox. He is an iconoclast who loves what he transgresses, whether the tenets of modernist typography. He is by nature betwixt and between, not quite fitting into the commercial world of Hollywood and not entirely at home in the realm of high-design discourse. He is a true-believing Christian whose oeuvre has often lingered on the sinister themes of murder and madness. The work that he has created over the past decade distinctively plays off this tension to great effect.

Cooper's work is marked by something that seems all but lost in our cleverness-as-king culture: earnestness. This may sound as an odd description for a designer who first came to frame with the opening titles for *Se7en*, a sequence characterized by degraded, hand scrawled type and neverejangling imagery. But Cooper has realized something important: desecration is all the more effective when the ideals being torn down are ones that are dearly held by the desecrator. Nowadays Kyle Cooper's short-form artistry is particularly appreciated because it delivers intense experiences in quick bursts.

### The fatal fascination for dark topics

If *The Man with the Golden Arm* by Saul Bass was highly influenced by the work of jazzmen like John Coltrane, then Kyle Cooper's most primal cues come from American horror film. Cooper spent his childho-



Saul Bass, Exodus (1960)



Kyle Cooper, Dead Presidents (1995)



od reading horror comicbooks. Yet rather than delving deep into horror genre, Cooper spent his time working the literal surface – trying to figure out how to build realistic sculptures of zombies with arrows piercing their eyes. Such verisimilitude required familiarity with the body’s inner workings, and Cooper also immersed himself in medical journals, studying the myriad ways in which things can go wrong. While Cooper’s youthful emphasis on replicating the physical manifestations of the horror genre has been replaced over the years by a focus on its psychic machinations, this early obsession with flayed bodies and anatomical pathologies seems to have led to a desire to tear away at the surface of things – to reveal the metaphorical blood and guts that lie just beneath the skin of reality. In the same way that Alfred Hitchcock was known to set the most dastardly plots against the backdrop of national monuments such as Mt. Rushmore (*North by Northwest*) or the Golden Gate Bridge (*Vertigo*), Cooper repeatedly picks away at American icons, in order, more often than not, to reveal something sinister.

#### Obsessive precision

Although much of his oeuvre lingers on dark topics, Cooper claims his real fascination is with the visual complexity of nature.

Despite having studied under hyper-modernist Paul Rand during graduate school at Yale University, Cooper seems in most instances to have cast aside a less-is-more approach in favour of an attention to baroque detail.

Cooper is all about precision when doing a two-minute movie, being obsessive about every cut, every transition, and every manipulation of every letter is a job requirement.

No matter how densely layered or visually fraught his sequences appear in real time, pause on a frame and there is most likely an intentionally thought-out composition frozen on screen.

“The obsessive part of me wants to have not one frame that I would second-guess,” says Cooper.

The production on *Spider-Man 2*’s titles, for example, from conception to delivery, has stretched almost an entire year. Cooper began by digitally scanning dozens of vintage Spider-Man comics and editing them together in a blink-and-you-miss-it five-second montage that encompasses the entire story arc of the first film. After that, “the credits get caught in the web. I love the moment when you kind of figure it out,” he says. Unlike the first Spider-Man’s title sequence – which took months of tweaking with software apps including Cinema 4D, Adobe After Effects, Maya, and

Photoshop – Cooper this time relies on old-school filmic techniques. The credit’s primary conflict between Spidey and arch nemesis Dr. Octavius is presented in striking stop-motion animation. “I always liked the black cat fighting the white cat in the main titles for *Walk on the Wild Side*,” Cooper says, citing Saul Bass’ classic work. In homage to Bass, Cooper pits his spider and his octopus against each other. “They both have eight legs and very similar body designs,” he says, showing off the photos he took of his pets for inspiration. “The metaphors of these animals already existed. I just thought the animals fighting would look good together.”

#### A window to the soul: the eyes

Be that as it may, Cooper has been heralded repeatedly in mainstream magazines such as Entertainment Weekly – he was even voted one of the “Top 100 Most Creative People in Entertainment” in 1997 – and featured in countless design publications and competitions. Despite such recognition, he manages to assume the persona of an outsider looking in. Fittingly, the most recurrent motif in his oeuvre is the eye – wide, naked and very often a mute witness to extremes in human behaviour.

Publicity shots of Cooper are revealing; often he highlights his eyes by covering his mouth or peeking through outspread fingers in unspoken reference to the horror genre that so impressed him as a child. If eyes are symbol of humanity, Cooper’s sequences often violate, or even negate, the individual.

Perhaps Cooper’s familiarity with being on the outside looking in served to fuel the impeccable creative solution he directed for the main titles of *Donnie Brasco*, the mob film by Mike Newell in which an FBI agent (Johnny Deep) goes under cover to infiltrate the life of a Mafioso (Al Pacino). The sequence begins with a full-on black-and-white image of Deep’s dark-circled, troubled eyes looking downward. The action of the titles and the accompanying music – Beethoven’s slow-moving Pathétique – begin the minute his eyes look up, and the rest of the sequence comprises primarily black-and-white and colours stills taken in film-strip surveillance fashion. The credits drifts on and off in delicate white all-capped sans serifs that are oddly kerned in a subtle indication of subterfuge and imbalance. The combination results in a mood so redolent of conflict and melancholy that New Yorker critic Anthony Lane was moved to write in the first line of his film review, “The most beautiful thing about *Donnie Brasco* is the opening credit sequence... No one has had eyes like that, not since El Greco stopped painting saints.”



Kyle Cooper, *Se7en* (1995)



Kyle Cooper, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996)

Text adapted from:

Codrington Andrea, *Kyle Cooper*, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2003.

Gibson Jon M., *The dark genius of Kyle Cooper*, *Wired*, 06/01/2004.

Available on: <http://www.wired.com/2004/06/cooper/>

Krasner Jon, *Motion Graphic Design: Applied History and Aesthetics*, Focal Press, Burlington, 2013.



Kyle Cooper celebrating the art of Saul Bass

### Collaboration with directors and other designers: a way to creativity

Lane's comment about Cooper's appetizer being more satisfying than the director's main course has been echoed a number of times. Lane has also written about Cooper's credits for Brian De Palma's *Mission: Impossible* (1996) as being "so tense and sexy that you could leave the theatre immediately afterward without suffering the letdown of the film itself." And then there is Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* writing of Cooper's "rousing, majestic montage" for Rob Reiner's 1996 film about the Civil Rights movement, *Ghosts of Mississippi*. "None of what follows," she concludes, "matches the impact of this title sequence."

Critic Elvis Mitchell, in his *New York Times* review of *Dawn of the Dead*, summed up the Cooper effect: "The opening and closing credits are so good, they're almost worth sitting through the film for."

Indeed, the word in Hollywood is that some filmmakers have refused to work with Cooper, says *Dawn of the Dead* director Zach Snyder, because he's "the guy who makes title sequences better than the movie." Not since Saul Bass' legendary preludes to *The Man With the Golden Arm* (1955) and *Vertigo* (1958) have credits attracted such attention. Cooper counts Bass' work, along with Stephen Frankfurt's lead-in for *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), as his greatest influences. Directors don't call on Cooper for a signature style; they hire him to dig under the celluloid and tap into the symbolism of a film.

That aptitude first became apparent in 1995, with the abrasive and highly stylized intro to David Fincher's *Se7en*. In it, the letters – hand-scratched by Cooper with a needle onto film stock, frame by painstaking frame – disintegrate to the industrial rhythms of a remix of Nine Inch Nails' "Closer." The oft-imitated setup perfectly captured the addled mind of the movie's serial killer and set the tone for the entire film. "It's a unique blend of auteur and creative genius that makes his sequences memorable – but not at the expense of the film," says Grant Curtis, coproducer of *Spider-Man* and *Spider-Man 2*. "That's what makes Kyle truly unique, his innate sensibility that opening title sequences are not separate from the film, they're part of it."

To penetrate these densely coreographed mini-narratives it is often necessary to splinter the surface of real time; pause, rewind and pause again to

understand the contortionist constituents that go into making a seamless motion-graphics sequence. The film-title genre may present a narrative continuum, but such temporal solidity is merely an illusion born of countless hours in the editing room.

In many ways, film titles have everything to do with the parallel genre of music videos. It comes as no surprise that Cooper's most stunning and deffective title sequences have been created in collaboration with filmmakers like David Fincher and Mark Pellington, who began their careers directing music videos and understand the tenets of visual compression. According to Cooper, however, no two collaborations are alike. "For me it's less about the project and more about the relationship I have with the client," he says. Separating out who did what on project is an especially sticky issue when you're working in a film. Unlike with more solitary art forms like writing, painting or composing, film is by nature a collaborative effort. Designers are known to cross over and be directors and directors often serve as designers. "I love the challenge of trying to solve something," Cooper admits, "but I don't want to do it by myself. I have always felt insecure about my executorial skills, which is maybe why I like to collaborate with other people."

Although Cooper acts as the company's centre of creative gravity, he concedes that Imaginary Forces' success is due to the talent of all the designers there, including newer partners like Karin Fong, Mikon van Gastel, Safron Kenney, Kurt Mattila and Michael Reilly.

The company is broken up into creative teams, with each partner leading his or her own core team. Often, people are paired up for the very reason that they disagree in the hope that the creative friction will produce something remarkable and unexpected.

At the same time he admits: "It's a little bit difficult to work with filmmakers whose creative point of view you don't necessarily agree with, especially when their direction is inconsistent with what you think is either appropriate or tasteful."

Asked whether he would prefer to direct films rather than create title sequences or commercials, Cooper is thoughtful: "Before I go into another feature, I want to be more cautious about a lot of things. I'm not even sure that a live-action director career is more important to me. Design is design. There isn't any kind of work that I think should be treated as lesser."

## Danny Yount and contemporary title-sequence design

The amazing thing is how broadly the 1960s animated title sequences by Saul Bass continue to resonate in contemporary motion graphics and title design. In his title sequences, designer Danny Yount, the creative director responsible for the Emmy-award winning title sequence for *Six Feet Under* and for the recent Saul Bass-styled titles *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, continues this legacy. Joe Russ chats to Danny Yount about his works and the latest evolution of title-sequence design both in television and movie industry.

**How do you plan a good title sequence, and where do you get inspiration for the imagery?**

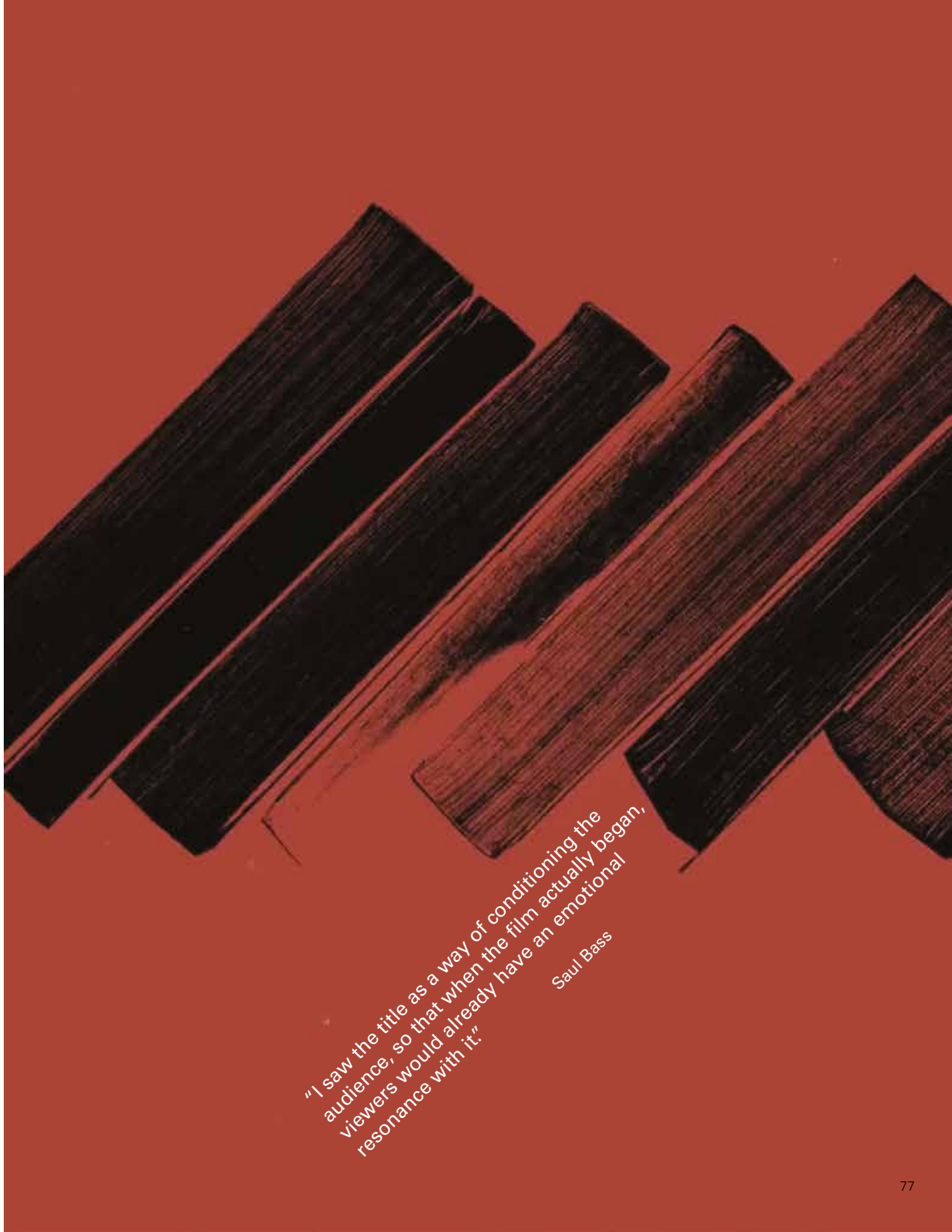
**Danny Yount:** I listen to the client. A good client will communicate very clearly what is important and what the film title should express, and be open to my interpretation.

**Tell us about your credit sequence for *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*. Did Saul Bass influence the design?**

**Danny Yount:** Very much so. After reading the script, which is based partly on fictitious crime novels of the 60s, I thought it would be best to take the viewer to that time period flattening live action figures into 2D spaces simplified silhouettes, minimizing the color palette to create striking visual effects (I took advantage of the contrast between white, black and red) and including writings in the graphic context. Bass titles ruled back then, so it was appropriate. I wanted to keep the titles unpredictable.

**The titles for *Six Feet Under* formed one of the most famous sequences you have directed. How did you plan them?**

**Danny Yount:** The pilot episode started with a death, so we started there. I came across an image one day of feet on a hospital trolley. It was a beautiful photo, and I liked the fact that you couldn't see the person's face. So I built a concept around that. When I heard Thomas Newman's musical score for the first time, I thought it sounded like it could be someone working. So I tried to hold the piece together with a mini-story about an average day in the life of a mortician. Ironically, I ended up being the guy pushing the trolley - I was hunched over like an old man.



"I saw the title as a way of conditioning the audience, so that when the film actually began, viewers would already have an emotional resonance with it."

Saul Bass

Danny Yount on designing film and tv title sequences



PRODUCED BY  
JOE SILVER

Danny Yount is the man behind that impeccable short film that opened *Six Feet Under*, a title sequence that was peerless at the time, and won Yount an Emmy for outstanding main title design in 2002. He still recalls the process, how he and several of his colleagues at the Seattle-based firm Digital Kitchen envisioned different directions after being given Thomas Newman's sprightly opening theme as inspiration. From a bunch of treatments—one of which featured a graphical journey through a tree's root system, another tracing the bloom-and-rot cycle of roses—Yount's was chosen. His sequence, which symbolizes the release of death, and follows a mortician through his quotidian tasks, remains a perfect example of what the difference thoughtful titles can make—even if it was a little ahead of its time.

**Danny Yount:** A lot of people didn't really understand it. They thought of it as something edgy and cool, not as something that would take the viewer into this ethereal, visceral space.

A decade later, the television title sequence is still not something most people think of as art—but it is, to a greater degree than ever before. An audience now expects to feel something before the show starts—and not to be simply introduced to a cast. Titles are making giant leaps on the cachet front, as well: November 2011, the Museum of Modern Art showcased the work of legendary graphic designer Saul Bass, whose experiments in kinetic typography in the films of Alfred Hitchcock continue to influence title designers today. But on the rapidly evolving television landscape, the type of title sequence that has the potential



Danny Yount, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005)

to overshadow the show it's introducing is still somewhat of a rarity.

**Danny Yount:** We're the final link in the chain, the part that comes after everyone has already done their work. We come in when everybody else is ready to be done with the thing, so there's not always a lot of enthusiasm about it.

There aren't opportunities to create a *Six Feet Under* credit sequence every day, because there's not a *Six Feet Under* making it to the airwaves every day. And the most important thing for a title to do is mesh well with what's to come in sequence, rather than, say, a detailed graphical rendering.

This is the frustration for a title designer in the New Golden Age of Television. There are huge opportunities, but not as many as there should be, because the type of television that most people watch isn't the place for elegant, rewindable title sequences. Major networks will always opt for brief title-card reveals wherever possible (see *Smash*), rather than sucking up valuable advertising time indulging a designer's vision—no matter how talented the designer or singular the vision. Ian Albinson, a designer who founded the blog *Art of the Title*, doesn't think the migration to title cards is necessarily a bad thing, citing *Lost* and, more recently, *Awake* as examples. "I think it depends on whether it fits with what the show is and what it's trying to accomplish," he says.

**Danny Yount:** I think it's a missed opportunity. You only have a moment to grab them. It's like putting dessert before dinner.



Danny Yount, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005)

**Is there any up-and-coming designer in your industry that you admire?**

**Danny Yount:** I like a directorial team called Ne-o. They have a great quality. I also like a piece about boxes created by Naked.

**On the same subject, how did you get your first break?**

**Danny Yount:** I'm self-taught, so I knew I would have less of a chance to get a real design job. But I constructed an interactive portfolio back in 1992 when people weren't doing much of that. I got the attention of a great Annual Report designer and fine art photographer called John Van Dyke in Seattle. He taught me all about design and helped me to develop my own voice in the industry.

**You must have to pitch concepts all the time. Do you get frustrated with work that doesn't make the cut?**

**Danny Yount:** No. It provides an opportunity for me to learn something. Failure is a great teacher.

**Are there concept pieces of work you've done that you think are better than the winning concepts?**

**Danny Yount:** Yes, at least in my opinion. But that will always be the case. In commercial work there are many variables and marketing agendas that can seem to limit the work in order to hit a larger target. But in the end I just want the satisfaction that I did my best and pushed myself.

Text adapted from:

Alston Joshua, TV's Amuse-Bouche, *Vanity Fair*, 04/12/2012.

Available on: <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2012/04/tv-credits-mad-men-six-feet-under>

Computer Arts, Q&A: Danny Yount, *Creative Bloq*, 03/14/2006.

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Critical Commons Manager, Legacy of Saul Bass in title sequences, *Critical Commons*.

Available on: <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/ccManager/commentaries/legacy-of-saul-bass-in-title-sequences>

Mcfadden Eilish, How has the work of Saul Bass influenced contemporary motion design?, 12/09/2013.

Available on: <https://eilishmcfadden.wordpress.com/2013/12/09/how-has-the-work-of-saul-bass-influenced-contemporary-motion-design/>

## Deygas and Kuntzel: the opportunity of creating an authentic and personal work

Ian Albinson and Will Perkins held a discussion with the Paris-based Florence Deygas and Olivier Kuntzel, creative directors of the title sequence of *Catch Me If You Can*, one of the most well known Saul Bass inspired title sequences.

A gifted young grifter scamps and stamps across the screen, his fugitive flights aided by doctored documents and lying lawyers. The scurrying swindler dares viewers to keep up with his caper, but this race is now a chase with a “top man” on his case. Flowing type, smooth lines and cool jazz are a playground for this pursuit, snaking and sneaking across the colorful jet-set world of our confidence man’s creation, slowly fading to reveal the darkened truth.

Kuntzel and Deygas stylistically transpose the hand-made design of Saul Bass using decidedly modern means. Accompanied by John Williams’ unexpectedly unctuous score, the duo’s title sequence for Steven Spielberg’s *Catch Me If You Can* is simply outta sight. The film was set during the 1960’s which was when Saul Bass was extremely popular, there for taking influence from him seemed the logical thing to do. This sequence does not only capture the look of some of his work but it also sets out to achieve one of the things that Saul Bass found the most important when creating a title sequence.

**“My initial thought about what a title can do was to set mood, and the prime underlying core of the film’s story, to express the story in some metaphorical way. I saw the title as a way of conditioning the audience, so that when the film actually began, viewers would already have an emotional resonance with it.”**

What Saul Bass is saying is that each title sequence isn’t just something to showcase names; it is an opportunity to deliver a story in a unique way to the audience. Titles sequences can act as a prologue to the films narrative, a device to set the mood of a film or to hint at the plot, sub plot or twists that are only noticeable when you re-watch the film. Keeping this in mind it is easy to understand how important a title sequence is for a film especially a well designed one.

Deygas Kuntzel, *Catch Me If You Can* (2002)



**Tell us a little bit about Kuntzel + Deygas.**

**Florence Deygas:** Olivier graduated from Olivier de Serres Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués et des Métiers d’Art (ENSAAMA), in visual communication. Then he started to work for advertising agencies as an art director, but was soon attracted to making creations for himself, and in a more independent way. I graduated from Gobelins L’Ecole de L’image, studying film animation. My school was not at all theoretical, which suited me perfectly. After studying theatre and being a self-taught illustrator, I needed to learn real skills, to learn how to use some tools. The theory side, I preferred to study on my own.

**About the conception of the sequence: The Saul Bass aesthetic clearly served as a jumping off point of some kind... Was “Bass- inspired” how the filmmakers pitched the sequence to you, or did you pitch it to the filmmakers? Were there other concepts for the sequence?**

It’s very interesting to see how many people talk about a possible Saul Bass influence in the title sequence we created for *Catch Me If You Can*. In a way we are very proud to be judged at that level. If you open any *Graphis* magazine from 1960 to 1970, you’ll be amazed to see how many graphic designers have created works that could have been judged “Saul Bass-esque”.

Look at the work of Paul Rand for example. It was part of the spirit of that time. A time when designers had no computers, and the hand of the artist was delivering a strong message. As far as I know, Paul Rand have never created for the movies. Saul Bass did, and his name stayed as THE reference point for that kind of graphic design sequence.

We feel the genius of Saul Bass was to find an idea linked with the music. For example, the *Carmen Jones* title sequence is great because it’s simply a burning rose for one minute, with a musical score that delivers just the right emotion.

In *Catch Me If You Can*, the action takes place between 1963 and 1969. We designed the characters with sixties haircuts, clothes, and postures, but the music by John Williams brings a lot more of that sixties feeling! Try another piece of music and you'll see it does not fit.

But we feel that it's no coincidence that the Saul Bass feeling is there. We had the chance to work in the very same conditions that an artist in the sixties would have: total respect and confidence from the "client", no marketing tests, no advertising agency trying to exert control. We worked in our atelier, in our own atmosphere. We feel Spielberg wanted to have a sequence made by an artist, not by a studio, in order to keep the charm of a "human hand". It's a very rare opportunity nowadays. The result is not perfect, but this imperfection imbues the sequence with a strong feeling of an authentic and personal work. It directly transmits the pleasure we experienced while creating it. Saul Bass's lasting legacy also enabled us to leave our mark on the title sequence as its creators.

Today, many designers forget that they have the right to sign their creations. In the sixties, signing the main title (see Maurice Binder, Fritz Freleng) was proof of authenticity, as with a painting. Audiences knew who created a sequence because they saw people's names credited, not an agency. Thanks to all that great artists from the past, we were authorized to sign our name to our sequence. We really hope this will help artists win the battle against marketers!

As an aside, we'd also like to say that Saul Bass is a very important person, an artist who should not be reduced to just title sequence design.

#### What was your approach to directing the opening credit sequence and how did you go about developing the "stamp style" animation?

In order to capture the spirit of Leonardo DiCaprio's character, we chose to employ a creative process that did not resort to the use of high technology. We used the same techniques as the film's protagonist, by imagining the characters in stamp form, made from the same cutters as those used in the film by Frank Abagnale Jr. We wanted to preserve that crudeness. Even though Spielberg has made significant use of modern technology in recent times, we realized that high tech did not mesh with this film.

Beneath his powerful style and incredible technique, we understood that we had to surprise him by heading towards something that reclaims the "artist's" work. What mattered was not our know-how but the emotion that we could transmit to a simple thing. The original stamps, that we created in a few hours, are those that exist in the final product. The magic of the first try was not altered. The force of the sketch

Deygas Kuntzel, Catch Me If You Can (2002)



Catch Me If You Can: rubber stamps.

remained. That seemed to cohere with the Spielberg spirit. When it was time to sync our title sequence with his film, we asked him to send us some images from his Avid or via the Internet, but we also received an actual piece of film because he edits his films the old-fashioned way, on a Moviola.

#### The color palette does so much to set the feel of the jet setting era in which the film takes place. Was there an intentionality to the colors that you selected and if so, what materials did you reference?

The film takes place in the 1960s and Spielberg desired for us to transplant the audience into a varied universe, with a bit of chic and a sense of drama (certainly not a humorous cartoon).

We decided to take on the same approach as those who created title sequences during that era: as if we were in that era, working amongst colleagues. Not in terms of technological means, but in terms of philosophy. We wanted to deliver a personal creation that has our mark, that works in contrast to studio title sequences in which the artist's hand is less visible. We wish to have the audience of this film rediscover a paradise lost.

The colours signal geographical and temporal transitions. The silhouettes stem from our own graphic vocabulary with a sixties twist so it adheres to the subject matter. We decided to employ them here for their symbolic force. The silhouette evokes a character we all ignore – the hero is a trickster. Those are in fact hand-carved stamps, animated in a traditional manner on paper by hand. That "handmade" aspect belongs to title sequences of that era. Embedding such lovely handmade animations into a precise, down-to-the-millimetre décor on a computer served as a bridge between the past and the present. The audience was able to taste a remnant of that past through the visual comfort of which they are used to today.

#### What is your collaborative process like? Who does what on a project like this?

When we develop a project, we don't both do the same thing; each one of us has their own specialities. For instance on a shoot, we're not both behind the camera. When we draw, we're not both holding the pencil even though we both can draw. Our field of action is not still, it's always on the move, and its limits are always floating. We can switch parts depending on how much affinity we have for the project. If a project requires Olivier's graphic design skills, then I will do all the things around the graphic design, taking on direction for instance. This role sharing has no defined rules, but is necessary so that each one of us can express ourselves 100% on one point and not 50% on each detail.

There were many notable title sequences to come out of the 1960s, do you have a favorite from the era?

**Olivier Kuntzel:** Florence Deygas and I are fascinated and motivated by the attitude of artists and designers in the 60s (Bass certainly, but also Paul Rand, Binder, etc.) who knew how to face and deal with an art: Hollywood Cinema, something that can very easily become very commercial. That's what we also try to claim for in our work.

I remember **Carmen Jones**, the rose that is burning over and over again, like a fire without an end.

I remember **Seconds**, a close-up on a distorted face, very experimental. Saul Bass explaining that it was actually the result of a deformed projection on a wall that was re-recorded.

I remember **Nine Hours To Rama**, a close-up, very captivating, needles, pendulums, something about time, very rhythmical underlined by Indian music.

I remember **Grand Prix**, with the stopwatch, faces, racing cars, a division of the screen (symbolizing the idea of a competition), something very stylish and very dynamic.

I remember **Walk On The Wild Side**, the famous opening title sequence set in an urban environment with a black cat that is chasing away a white cat, filmed in black and white. Very jazzy, very nightlife.

I remember having been even more impressed by **In Harm's Way**, the movie is about passion on a Naval base. The opening titles are a series of close-ups of a beach, small waves, waves getting bigger and bigger, a thunderstorm at its height and then back to stillness.



Text adapted from:

Mcfadden Eilish, How has the work of Saul Bass influenced contemporary motion design?, 12/09/2013.

Available on: <https://eilishmcfadden.wordpress.com/2013/12/09/how-has-the-work-of-saul-bass-influenced-contemporary-motion-design/>

Perkins Will, Catch Me If You Can, Art of the Title, 08/22/2011. Available on: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/catch-me-if-you-can/>



# Mad convergence of reality and dream

A discussion with Producer Cara Mckenney, and Creative Directors Steve Fuller and Mark Gardner about the brainstorming and battles that went into the refined and cryptic opening title sequence of *Mad Men*, produced by Imaginary Forces.

A shadowed figure enters his office, sets down his briefcase, and the room collapses around him. As he tumbles through a chasm of diamond rings, happy families, and women in pantyhose, the glossy veneer of advertising gives way, revealing the rough humanity of a man lost.

RJD2's jazzy "A Beautiful Mine" conducts the viewer through the parallel worlds of the philandering, chain-smoking Madison Avenue boys' club and the idyllic nuclear family, introducing us to some of the themes underpinning the Emmy award-winning show, *Mad Men*.

Tell us about the initial development of this project.

**Cara Mckenney:** Matthew Weiner, the writer, came to us with a compelling brief: a man walks into an office building, enters his office, places his suitcase down and jumps out the window.

But that never makes it simple to push through. My two leads to work out the pitch were Mark Gardner and Steve Fuller, both creative directors. Mark and Steve have different sensibilities, but I knew they would both bring something meaningful.

Then it was a matter of making it work with their schedules, working with them to strategize, to create an open dialogue between Matthew and them about the design.

**Steve Fuller:** Mark and I had collaborated before on other projects and when we heard about the show we were both really interested. During our first call with Matthew Weiner, Mark and I both felt like, "This guy really knows what he's doing."

**Mark Gardner:** For him, those years around the end of the '50s and the beginning of the '60s were the most important in 20th century American history and that enthusiasm is infectious.

**Steve Fuller:** Matthew said, "You know, it's not just a show about advertising in the '50s and '60s, it's about American life and culture." He loved the idea of this main character selling the American Dream, but also being totally confused by it. He's trying to find himself throughout the show – to define himself. Matthew wanted to touch on that and he wanted something that was going to catch people's attention.



**Mark Gardner:** He wanted the sequence to sum up the ideas of the show. We managed to find something that combined both, making it look cool and sophisticated while still showing that there are actually two stories: the one that you see, but also the real story that you only get glimpses of.

**Steve Fuller:** Yeah, one thing that Matthew said kept echoing in my head. He said, “This is an era of guys wanting to be the head of the PTA but also drink, smoke, and get laid as much as possible.” That was the kind of dual life these guys were leading and that’s what was interesting.

#### How did it progress after that?

**Mark Gardner:** There were a few people here at Imaginary Forces that had already worked on it, each with different directions, but Steve really started getting the look down. The first few frames of a semi-silhouetted guy running and being chased — those were frames that Steve was playing with and they had a great look to them. They had pared-down color so that it was almost a monochrome world.

**Steve Fuller:** I was hovering around these ideas and I saw this nice, precise calendar in one of my books with a horse jumping over numbers, and it had this great 3D thing and that led me to the idea of skyscrapers made out of graph paper. I was also thinking that the character could be trapped in the ads, but I couldn’t figure out how to bring it all together.

Mark took that initial mood and some of the ideas and simplified it to have it all happen in one fall, a fall through a skyscraper canyon: that was when it all started making sense.

**Mark Gardner:** In the beginning AMC were totally against the idea. So Matthew had to do a lot of selling to them. I think where we got away with it was because we ended up with a question that is, “Is this a dream? Which part of it is actually real? Is

the pose at the end real, or is the helpless fall real?”

**Steve Fuller:** Mark put in the moment at the end when the “falling guy” snaps out of it and is totally composed. That made it all come together so that we could get away with having a guy falling out of a skyscraper.

#### Where did everything go after the boards?

**Steve Fuller:** After we were awarded the job, we started gathering our favorite scenes from films of guys falling past skyscrapers. We wanted the fall not to have the continuous CGI camera move that you often see nowadays, so we decided to put cameras — all different kinds of cameras: super wide shots, medium shots, and telephoto lens shots — on the surrounding buildings to make it more sophisticated.

**Mark Gardner:** Like Steve said, normally people think, “We can do anything with the camera” and so they do, but it’s not always best.

**Steve Fuller:** If you’re going to do something with illustration and a black silhouetted figure, you need to counteract that in order to keep it looking like a cartoon. We’ve seen stuff go badly because people misuse the camera in 3D. I’m a huge Saul Bass fan, but Matthew Weiner said, “I don’t want it to look like the ’60s.” I like to think that it’s kind of an update of Saul Bass.

The styling, the production design of the show... it works on its own. The graph paper skyscraper idea, and the ’60s architecture inside the agency, it all feels very geometric, very right angle. The skyscrapers were ultimately done in After Effects 3D. The falling guy was done using Softimage, but I think everything else is After Effects.

**Cara Mckenney:** A key part of this was the animatic — it was the step where we realized that the pacing and the tone were working with the shots Mark and Steve wanted to use. We decided we wanted Caleb Woods to work with us on getting the timing — he



Saul Bass, North By Northwest (1959)



Imaginary Forces, Mad Men (2007)



Imaginary Forces, Mad Men (2007)

is really talented, with a great ear and a pared down sensibility — I knew he would get the tone and he was an asset to this part of the process.

One of my favorite moments was pretty far down the road when we had a solid animatic and the iconic RJD2 song that Matthew had chosen. We played the sequence and then came a comment from the network conference room far, far away saying, “I don’t know Matthew, this whole thing is kinda off — it’s weird. It reminds me of the opening to *The Twilight Zone*.” It was priceless! One of those instances where things become totally clear — to us, this comment, though negative, was actually a positive. The title sequence had created a tone that was unique, enigmatic and maybe a touch peculiar. To someone else, it was just weird and creepy — something that made them uncomfortable.

Needless to say, we moved forward.

**The adverts that we see in the finished opening, did you consider fabricating them completely or had you always wanted them to be real ads from that time period?**

**Mark Gardner:** We wanted to use real ads, but we assumed that we couldn’t, so we did start fabricating some. That was really, really hard.

We wanted them to be those gray, early ’60s photographs that almost looked like illustrations. It saved us in the end when they were able to do some deals and get rights to the ads.

**Cara Mckenny:** We had to be building these ads at the same time as we were developing the landscape since the geometry the guys were putting in place was very specific — the only way you could tell if an image was going to work was to try it out in the environment.

Once we got our hands on images I got them to the design team who would work with them and the geometry we had going for the buildings — it was important to get them as many options as possible. Mark and Steve managed to create a space that was both visually beautiful and thematically meaningful for the show.

**What was your time-frame for this?**

**Mark Gardner:** We were on it for quite a while and we had a lot of people working with us. We had a couple of people purely working on the falling figure. Then we had three people working on the rest of the environment. The music changed and then Matthew found this track that he really liked, so that changed things as well. I can’t remember exactly how long the project was, but I get the feeling it was a couple of months of work.

**Cara Mckenny:** We had about four months from pitch to delivery.

**When did the idea of the office falling apart come in?**

**Mark Gardner:** It was something that Matthew wanted. In the original storyboards, we start on the guy’s back as he falls away from the camera. The fall went all the way through until the very end. But Matthew didn’t want that and he was the client: he wanted to have some sense of the office, but he didn’t really know what he wanted so we had to come up with the idea where the guy puts his briefcase down. There’s no ground plane or sky: the room is just defined by a few lines.

Getting it so that you really knew what was going on and felt a sense of the guy and his room crumbling around him: that was the most complicated bit of the process to get right.

Another thing that was a very practical problem was that AMC had done this deal where everyone in the show got a name card, which is unusual. It was a real issue trying to fit them all into the amount of time because, at one point, the title sequence was going to be a minute long. AMC was like, “There’s no way: it’s going to be 20 seconds.” We felt like it couldn’t be done in less than thirty. In the end, it was maybe thirty-eight or forty seconds, but even then if you watch it, the title cards are on for barely long enough to be legible and then on top of that, they had to be placed so they weren’t being affected by camera mo-

vement. There are all kinds of rules about how long credits should be on, and how they all have to be equal in size and everything, but when Saul Bass was doing titles, he'd put the whole list up!

Another part of the titles was the typeface and I think what we went with was probably the first typeface that I was playing with. They made us do a lot of changes to try a lot of different things. In the end, they just came back to the one that Steve had done first, which was better than everything else.

#### When did it start to solidify in terms of the final piece?

**Mark Gardner:** Pretty quickly. Matthew was very hands-on. He is very visually literate and he understands it all which is crazy considering that he's a writer. Virtually all of his comments and suggestions were good. We talked him out of a couple of things, but there were other things that he wouldn't budge on.

One thing that became a big deal was animating the falling guy and how much he moved. At one point we had somebody rigging just the clothing alone. The animation was very realistic, as if someone really was flying past skyscrapers with his clothing billowing. We initially thought that was what we wanted. We even had his hair moving and we had to take all that out — it was too much. It just wasn't working with the background and it needed to feel dreamier. It needed to feel surreal... much more dreamlike.

#### Are jobs usually started by one person and then continued by another?

**Steve Fuller:** This is common in any design company. I do think that ideas get better when they have two brains and with Mark and I, we've become friends. It's nice working like that because when you get stuck, the other person can help you.

**Mark Gardner:** Particularly when it comes to ideas, it gets better when you have to argue it and defend it. Style can be an individual thing and sometimes it's better when it's one person's vision, but I definitely think for working on concepts and ideas, collaboration is better.

It works with us because we're friends and respect each other's work. You've got to respect the opinion of the person who's critiquing your work otherwise there's nothing there. The simpler and the purer the

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concept, the better, but it doesn't usually start out like that. It gets there by talking about it and rationalizing it and getting rid of the bits that aren't necessary and don't work, and then you're left with the core concepts.

**Steve Fuller:** I think overall the reason that people really responded to the sequence was that it's ballsy to just have a guy falling. It's ballsy of Matthew Weiner to even accept that approach and it's ballsy for us to take him seriously.

**Mark Gardner:** I don't think a sequence like this would have happened if we'd been dealing with marketing people. Not dealing with the creators and writers leads to everything getting washed out and watered down. These opportunities don't come along very often.

**Cara Mckenney:** And one of the great things AMC did was let us create the network packaging for the show. It was fun to take what we established in the title to a graphic framework for on-air promotions and packaging. It's less and less common that title design work can be parlayed into network branding, but this was an example of how that was hugely successful and helped make the show so iconic. It's nice to see the title work live on in other mediums.

*Mad Men's* much discussed title sequence is the bridge between our world and Don Draper's.

The titles are not just the place where actors and writers get their contractually obligated recognition; it's the place where the reality and the fantasy collide, where we acknowledge that there is a person named Jon Hamm (the actor who plays the role of Don Draper), while being prepared to forget about him seconds later. For contemporary television storytellers, if the story is the dream, the title sequence is the sedative.

The suspension begins with that elegant curtain-raiser with the stuffed-suit silhouette plummeting from a skyscraper, which acts as the initial invitation into this world of social upheaval, self-reflection, and three fingers of scotch on the rocks. It's why a creative firm called Imaginary Forces spent weeks spitballing, storyboarding, and generally obsessing over a series of images that runs just shy of 40 seconds. It paid off—in 2008, they won an Emmy for their trouble.

Text adapted from:

Landekic Lola, *Mad Men*, *Art of the Title*, 09/19/2011.

Available on: <http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/mad-men/>

Alston Joshua, *TV's Amuse-Bouche*, *Vanity Fair*, 04/12/2012.

Available on: <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2012/04/tv-credits-mad-men-six-feet-under>

# Saul-Bassesque posters

Saul Bass was a ground breaking graphic designer who paved the way for the future of advertising and print design communities. Here some example of contemporary posters that, whether intentionally or subconsciously, pay homage to Bass' style of graphic.



Ad campaign for Allstate Insurance, designed by Leo Burnett/Chicago. The uneven colors and graphic shapes mimic the way Bass would utilize graphics that look as though they'd been cut out of paper.



In this theatre project series 03-04 "Cul De Sac", Dave Plunkert (Spur), unafraid to put a little of the past masters into his work, uses a Saul Bass-like solution to detail the juxtaposition of a man and a cul-de-sac (a set of homes at the end of a street with no outlet). He succeeds in making it his own. A blaze of orange for the second color accents the tension, as does the rough printing process.

Poster campaign for Santa Casa (São Paulo, Brazil) promoting a blood donation campaign and designed by Young & Rubicam.



Text adapted from:  
 Foster John, New Masters of Poster Design: Poster Design for the Next Century, Rockport Publishers, Gloucester, 2006.  
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A cura di Giorgia Giulia Campi



Henderson Bromstead Art Co, Secret Artists' Series 2000-01.  
From: Foster John, New Masters of Poster Design: Poster Design for the Next Century, Rockport Publishers, Gloucester, 2006



Celestino Piatti, Poster issued by the four largest religious communities in the Cnaton of Basle, demanding revision of the confessions clause in the cantonal constitution (Switzerland).  
From: Graphis Poster 74



Frantisek Belohlávek; Art director: Miroslav Brezina, Theatre poster commemorating the 25th anniversary of the end of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. Black and gold on white (Czechoslovakia).  
From: Graphis Poster 74



Announcement of change of address of Graphis.  
From: Graphis 172, 1974/75 page 3



Zdenek Seydl, Book covers Klíč editions, 1963-1966.  
From: [http://www.lidovky.cz/foto.aspx?c=A151019\\_104443\\_In\\_kultura\\_hep&foto=HEP5eb086\\_vystavy\\_2015\\_dohnat\\_a\\_predehnat\\_20.jpg](http://www.lidovky.cz/foto.aspx?c=A151019_104443_In_kultura_hep&foto=HEP5eb086_vystavy_2015_dohnat_a_predehnat_20.jpg)



Graham Coughtry, Small poster in black and red for the performance of opera by Canadian Music Associates.



H. Lubalin + R. Aron / B. Hampton + B. Gereshenzon; Agency: Sudler & Hennessey, Cover of a folder for a preparation from A.H. Robins Co. Inc. USA, curbing appetite in treatment of obesity.



Ryuichi Gamashiro, Poster protesting against atomic and hydrogen bomb. From an exhibition of such posters organised by the Japan Advertising Club.

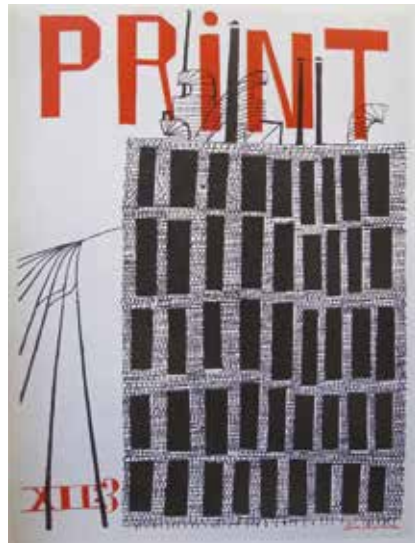


Peter + Bannwart, "1957 will also be beareable." New Year greeting advertisement from a Swiss manufacturer of fabricated wood products.



Georg Olden, Station breal promotion stills for Columbia Broadcasting System TV, New York.

From: Graphis Annual 58/59



Ben Shahn; Art director: Phil Franznick; Publisher: Print Magazine, W.E. Rudge Inc, New York, Cover for the graphic design magazine Print (USA).



Robert Osborn, Trade ad for Betterger architectural products (USA).



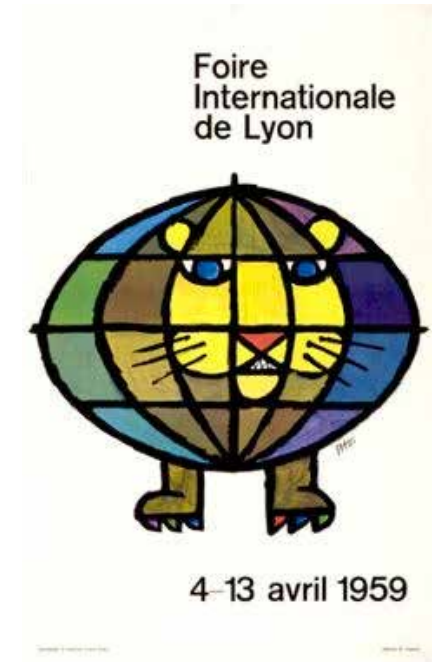
Ed Renfro; art director: Harry Fletcher; Agents, studios: harrington-Richards, San Francisco, Illustration from ad advertisement for Western Pacific Railways (USA).



Georges Calame, Poster announcing a "medica ball" (Switzerland).



Abram Games, On of pair of small poster placed on the front of London buses to promote bus advertising titles (Great Britain).



Celestino Piatti, Poster for the International Fair at Lion (France).



Philip Kirkland; Art director: Donald Egensteiner; Agents, studios: Young & Rubicam Inc, New York, Full-colour magazine advertisement for te Gulf Oil Corporation (USA).



Hans Schweiss, Series of direct mail cards for a tonic (Germany).

West Coast Designers; Art director: West Coast Designers, Announcement of change of address of Animation Inc, TV film producers (USA).



Giovanni Pintori, Cover of a book commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Olivetti works (Italy).



Arnold Varga, Small space ad for Cox's department store (USA).



Zdenek Seydl; Art director: Dusan Sindelar; Publisher: Svaz Ceskoslovenskych V Ytvarych Umelcu, Praha, Two-colour cover of an art magazine (Czechoslovakia).

From: Graphis Annual 59/60

## How Saul Bass changed logo-design

As a graphic designer Saul Bass created some of the most iconic logos in American corporate history. Tech culture owes at least some of its penchant for clean icons and minimalist designs to Saul Bass and his iconic works.

Google celebrated graphic designer Saul Bass with a doodle. It is only fitting that a brand praised for its sparsity tip its hat to the father of slick, simple corporate identities.

Mr. Bass created entire art forms from seemingly artless banalities. He breathed life into the sterile company logo.

Saul Bass did what great designers do: he surreptitiously moved people.

It's why Bass' legacy lives on today, long after his passing 17 years ago. Despite many companies abandoning his work in favor of flashier redesigns, it is hard to deny Bass's lasting influence on the clean icons and minimalist visual designs permeating tech culture today. He did to visual communication what William Strunk Jr.'s famous "Omit needless words" did to written expression.

"If it's simple simple, it's boring," Bass once said. "We try for the idea that is so simple that it will make you think and rethink."

The notion that something as pedestrian as a brand could induce contemplation was a novel idea when Bass began working on logos in the 1970s. Employing deceptively plain shapes and lines, he created iconic logos for some of the world's most well-known companies – Kleenex, Alcoa, Quaker, Girl Scouts, AT&T and many more.

The swooshing logo he designed for United Airlines in 1973 is one of his best, and perhaps his most recognizable. The so-called "tulip" is remarkable in its visual efficiency – evoking movement, winged flight, the American flag, and the company's monogram all in one fell swoop.

Bass captures with four lines in red and blue everything the company aspires to be. That knack for making a whole exponentially greater than the sum of its parts is why his work endures.

Through the years and changes of management, United Airlines, one of the largest carriers in the world, had developed a muddy image. Many variations of the basic identity were in simultaneous use, and the planes looked cluttered. Clutter in an airline is not simply a house-keeping issue. It directly impacts the



Prior identification elements of United Airlines.



United Airlines logo designed by Saul Bass in 1973.

air traveler's most basic concern – safety. The appearance of the airline contradicted the high technological competence that a modern airline must project. Saul Bass & Associates was asked to study the problem and make recommendations aimed at bringing the airline's image into alignment with competitor realities.

The objectives of this process were aimed at increasing awareness of United both as a contemporary, efficient and people-oriented airline and as a leader and finally at unifying the look of the airline under a cohesive visual umbrella, consistently applied and maintained.

The program that was developed consisted of four basic elements. First, a distinctive symbol based upon the United "U". Second, a type-face for the name "United". To match the way it's spoken, "Air Line" was changed to "Airline". A third element was a new color spectrum utilizing the original United red and blue colors but adding orange. Finally these signals were applied to United's fleet of aircraft. In order to create a cleaner, more contemporary and technological image, the entire aircraft fuselage was painted white. A horizontal 3-color stripe was added to this. The use of single or double stripe for airlines had become something of a cliché. But like all clichés, it got that way because it made sense. It did something valuable for the airplane, by reinforcing the aerodynamic look of the plane and feeding into the program's high technology requirements. Thus this traditional device was utilized, but refreshed by using new colors in a 3-stripe system. This new color spectrum provided United with a series of colors which by usage they could ultimately claim as theirs – unlike red, white and blue which anybody can own. This identification system was carried into many other areas of application such as ground equipment, ticket counter backwalls, signage, and print graphics.

At the time the program was begun, the energy crisis had placed a severe financial squeeze on all transportation companies. Working with United's management, Saul Bass & Associates devised a phased introduction of the program spread over a period of three years, and based on the normal maintenance repaint schedule for all United aircraft.

Saul Bass on making money vs quality work



Continental Airlines logo designed by Saul Bass in 1963.



United Airlines logo designed by Onoma Design in 1991 and then used also for United from 2010, when the two companies merged.



As a result, the total cost of conversion was reduced to a fraction of what it might have been. The plan also concentrated the first new planes into major routes, so their presence would be heavier where it counted, when their numbers were fewer.

A comprehensive Graphic Standards Manual was developed by Saul Bass & Associates, and later expanded by United, to include virtually every major application of the program. The program became “institutionalized” so that it became part of the basic business fabric of the company.

A program of this scope is never truly completed – it is an on-going, dynamic activity that in the case of United will eventually encompass over 1800 categories of items – from aircraft food service material, from terminal facilities to boarding passes.

When United hired design firm Pentagram to give the identity a facelift in 1996, the creative team was smart enough to recognize you cannot improve upon perfection.

“We were given an open brief when we began working with United,” the Pentagram team recalls in an online retrospective, “but we made one decision shortly after we began: we elected to retain the remarkable logo created for them in 1973 by Saul Bass.”

Such is the reverence for Saul Bass.

Still, it couldn’t last. In 2010 United merged with Continental Airlines, keeping the United name but dropping Bass’s logo. For visual identity, it opted to use Continental’s bland, blue-and-white globe instead.

This caused quite a controversy in the design world, because you don’t mess with a Saul Bass logo, neither

you can replace a Saul Bass logo with a generic clip-art-like version that’s much worse than the original. The design community mourned the loss.

“That elegant, understated U,” wrote Fast Company. “Can we all pause for a moment of silence for that beautiful U?”

“[[I]t’s impossible to see the new logo and not feel that there is something inherently wrong with this equation,” wrote Brand New, a corporate identity blog.

The cherished tulip isn’t the only Bass work to fade. His logos for Dixie, Quaker, AT&T and others have all been “updated” or ditched entirely. Most attempts to “refresh” or “modernize” these logos result in glossy 3-D imitations that somehow feel more dated than Bass’s evergreen originals.

The redesigns can’t take away from Bass oeuvre. He created identities for some 80 major corporations in his time. That’s on top of the groundbreaking film title designs he did for famous directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, and Martin Scorsese.

“Design is thinking made visual,” he is quoted as saying. That philosophy resonates today in the bare-bones Apple logo, the inviting simplicity of Google’s homepage, and the clean, touch-screen tiles of Microsoft’s “Metro” redesign for the Windows Phone.

Steve Jobs, himself a champion of sparse design and typography, is said to have adopted as a motto, “Real artists ship.”

If that’s the case, then perhaps Bass – whose work and influence surrounds us at every turn – is the real artist of them all.

**“If I do my job well, the identity program will also clean up the image of the company, position it as being contemporary and keep it from ever looking dated.**

Saul Bass

Text adapted from:

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