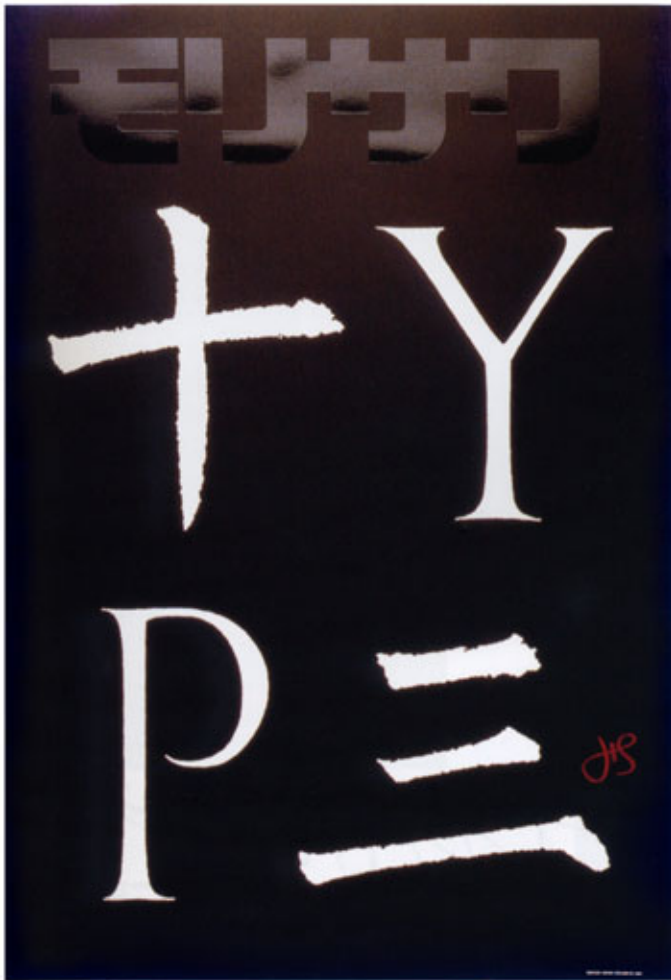**Book launch AGI: Graphic Design Since 1950**
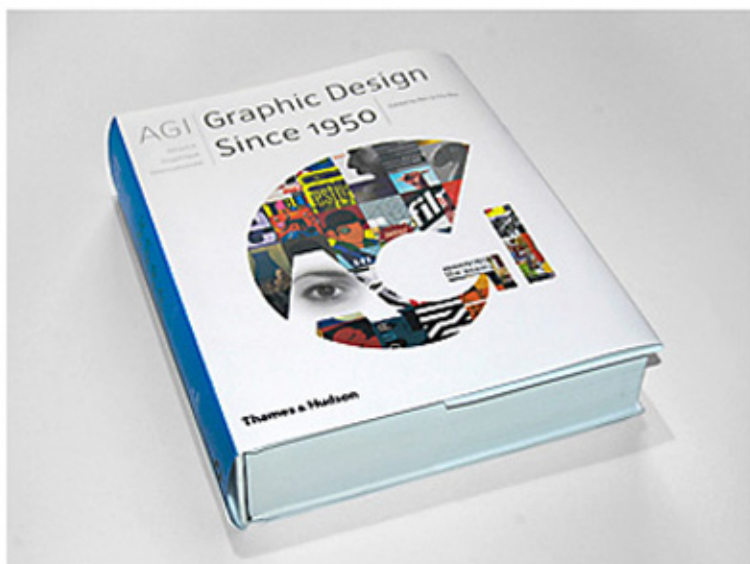
This book is an 800 page publication about the history of the Alliance Graphique Internationale with 2000 illustrations in full colour and 550 biographies of prominent graphic designers across the world.
The book includes essays covering many different aspects of graphic design, such as stamps, bills, transport, posters, corporate identities, movie titles, typography and book design. The book is chronologically organized and provides a clear and comprehensive survey of the evolution of the graphic design profession.
It is designed by Dutch designers Wout de Vringer and Ben Faydherbe and contains contributions by many famous designers and authors.

The book is edited by Ben Bos and Elly Bos and is published by Thames & Hudson, London/New York. It will be launched on 26 September 2007 in the Amsterdam Warehouse De Zwijger during the AGI Conference.

Henry Steiner [China]

1934– born in Vienna, Austria
Admitted to AGI, 1980
International President 1994–1997

TYPE, Japan, 1991. Poster for the Japanese typesetting company Morisawa; their logotype is in Japanese katakana lettering. The white letters suggest stone engraving common to both Chinese and Roman writing systems.

Standard Chartered Bank banknote series, 2004. Fourth and latest iteration of a series of notes first designed in 1979. The denominations are identified by a hierarchy of Chinese mythological animals.

Conserve Nature, Hong Kong, 1992. This poster for recycled paper shows a wooden plate rack protecting a cloud. The inspiration is partly derived from a monumental column at the Forbidden City in Beijing.

His family escaped Vienna in 1939. Henry grew up in Manhattan. At Stuyvesant High School he learned to revere science, but it was not his vocation. At Hunter College, despite studying with masters like Robert Motherwell, he found that he was not a painter. Finally, at the Yale School of Art under Paul Rand, he discovered that the artwork he had been doing for school newspapers, yearbooks and theatre sets was called *'graphic design'*. He received a Fulbright scholarship to the Sorbonne, Paris. Then in 1961 Henry landed in Hong Kong for a nine-month assignment as *The Asia Magazine*'s first Design Director.

In the heart of Asia he found a home and is still there. Highlights of Steiner & Co.'s practice include eighteen years as consultant to HSBC, which produced many groundbreaking annual reports and the bank's famous brand identity. A long-running series of banknotes based on Chinese mythological creatures for Standard Chartered Bank is still in circulation. A member of many international design organizations, Henry has been named Hong Kong Designer of the Year, a World Master by Japan's *Idea* magazine, and one of Icograda's Masters of the 20th Century. Henry received an honorary doctorate from Hong Kong Baptist University and is honorary professor at two Hong Kong Universities.

Hongkong Bank, later renamed HSBC.
Henry Steiner, 1983.

PAM petrol, Benno Wissing, 1964.

Corporate Identity,

the Designers' Playground of the Century

The young profession of graphic design reached maturity during the 20th century. Within that new professional world, the sphere of work called
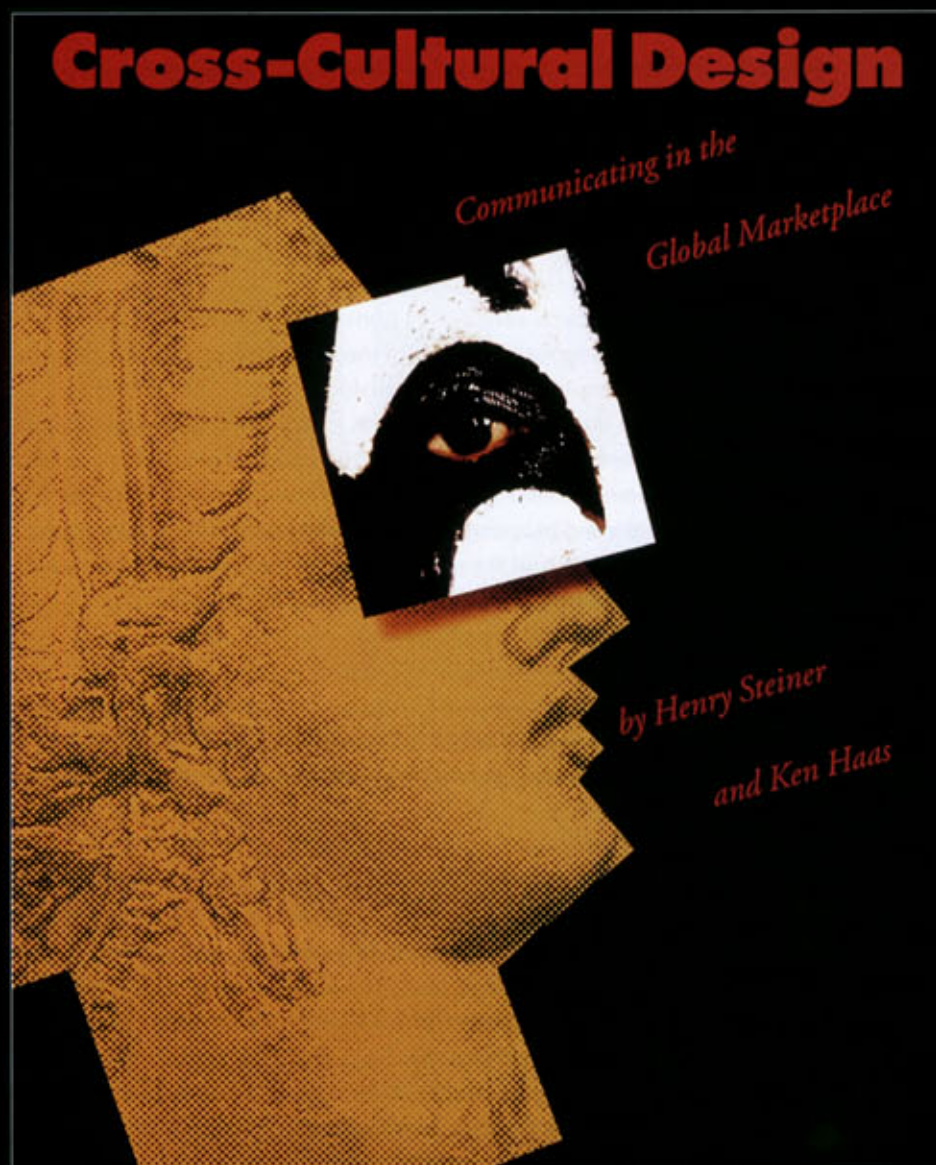

'corporate identity' became a true metropolis.

There are a few classic examples of this development, and all historical surveys mention the visionary approach of AEG, the German pioneers in the realm of electricity, founded back in 1886.

Furness Holding, Ben Bos, Total Design, 1968.

Book cover design by Henry Steiner.

FusionCrash

In 1995, **Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace** was the first book to anthologize what Ken Haas and I saw as a growing design phenomenon: the achievements of designers working in cultures other than their own, along with a useful vocabulary for this new discipline. We even unveiled a mantra:

> Business is global.
>
> People are different.
>
> Communication means survival.

As I write this, in 2006, it is obvious that interest in the subject has endured and blossomed. This summer in Seattle there was a major conference on cross-cultural design held by AIGA in collaboration with Icograda. My presentation there explored the *'crash'* of cultures as against the concept of design fusion.
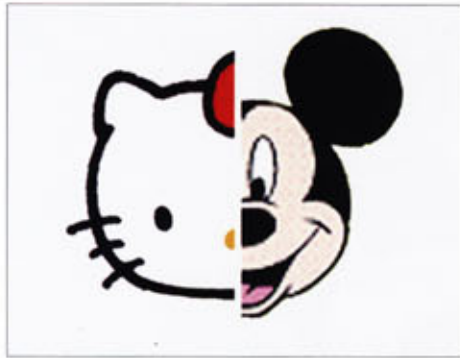
From colonialism to globalism

No sooner had the British colony of Hong Kong been returned to China in 1997 than Southeast Asia's economies went emphatically south. This event and several other rough spots convinced its new Beijing-appointed Chief Executive to undertake crowd-pleasing diversions. Thus was born, among other things, Hong Kong Disneyland, which opened its gates in September 2005 to mixed reviews.

Hong Kong loves brands, not just Mickey and Hello Kitty but more aspirational ones too, which explains the trainloads of ladies who head north to shop across the border in Shenzhen for counterfeit products labeled Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Prada or Rolex. Ironically, planeloads of mainland Chinese simultaneously head south to fill countless shopping bags with genuine articles of these brands bought in Hong Kong's Central district.

No Logo

Canadian activist Naomi Klein loved brands as a teen mall rat until she became aware of the evils of globalization and published a book in 2000 on the subject, indicting logos as symbols of unfettered capitalism. There are several fascinating contradictions in her stance. For one, she is shooting the messenger: logos are not inherently *'evil'*: not the swastika, not Paul Rand's Enron mark. To paraphrase Washington D.C.'s gun lobby, logos don't victimize workers; corporations do. In fact, the supposedly exploited third world produces some of the most enthusiastic consumers of branded goods, genuine or otherwise. Any traveller in the developing nations will see the proliferation of Nike and Playboy, for example, in the most incongruous and inauthentic settings.

The proselytizing industrial designer, Victor Papanek, had once been schooling African students in classic Bauhaus methodology. He described how disappointed he was when he asked what they would like brought back by him from a brief visit to Europe. His protégés unanimously requested Mercedes hood ornaments to wear as necklace pendants.

There is little doubt as to Ms Klein's credentials (her grandfather was fired for attempting to organize labour at Disney) or her sincerity. Like Milton Glaser with his *'I ♥ NY'* design, she didn't claim authorship rights to the *No Logo* logo; she refers to this altruism as *'copyleft'*. Paradoxically her book's logo has been widely copied; I imagine many of the NoLogo pirates would be disappointed to know that they were not actually stealing someone's intellectual property.

Urban legend

When Enron collapsed in 2001, superstitious designers blamed it on Paul Rand's skewed *'E'* mark. Analogous guilt was attached to Paul's similarly positioned NeXT logo, which had expired in 1996. Having practised in Asia for many years, I appreciate the *feng shui* principle of visual stability implying prosperity. Recently, designers on the web have been speculating on the bad luck which Dell's logo might have courted with its tilted *E*. Was it pure coincidence that Dell this year saw a massive recall of their laptops due to the risk of burned fingers? Perhaps.

Red Who?

1995 saw the unveiling in Geneva of the winning design in a competition to find a substitute for the Red Cross emblem. A negative rendering of the Swiss national emblem might seem inoffensive, but to a large portion of faith-based humanity it is cruciform and thus blasphemous. (Renaming it *'Red Plus'* seems not to have been considered an option.) The selected logo, ominously balanced on one point, is called *'Red Crystal'*. Accompanied by a cross or crescent it may be coming soon to a scene of calamity near you. Personally, I'm not holding my breath.

The F word

After the end of history, welcome to the long war between followers of divergent religions. Contrary to the false dawn promised by globalization, the digital revolution, and Hollywood's cultural exports, there is no more security on offer than there was in, say, Spain when her Catholic rulers expelled their Moorish and Jewish neighbours. To a degree I blame the current situation on the Political Correctness ideology which denies racial, religious, and gender differentiation. By suppressing such sources of conflict, and thereby denying the possibility of resolution, PC only makes the eventual explosions more potent.

The PC attitude has echoes in the design arena where the creation of any peace poster is seen as a positive contribution. I know of none which ever resolved or prevented any form of violence. (If only several peace posters had been prominently displayed at airports in Boston, Newark and Washington D.C. on the morning of 11 September 2001…)

There are two possible approaches to conflict in our profession. The PC one is often called *'fusion'*. This implies some mixture which will be universally accepted. The more likely result is a bland, inoffensive, and forgettable product.

The euro banknote, which was launched in 1999, exemplifies the fusion approach. It has an appropriate visual theme: bridges and windows in historical styles progressing from the earliest on the 5 euro denomination to the contemporary on the 500. But due to the various sensitivities involved, no actual pieces of architecture in specific locations could be shown. Robert Kalina, the Austrian designer of the series, had the difficult task of depicting, say, an anonymous Roman aqueduct which could not be identified with any one country. Even the background landscapes had to be neutral to avoid offence.

Of course there are also no people shown, let alone portraits of specific individuals. The result, like the Red Crystal, is *'devoid of any national, religious and cultural connotation.'* The feeling recalls the impersonal, generic hotel suite in which an astronaut finds himself towards the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey.*

The alternative approach to fusion is design which welcomes contextual conflict and visual contrast. The result may offend somebody somewhere, as the French were initially offended by Shakespeare's rough vitality, so different from the restrained formality of Corneille. But wouldn't one prefer the clamour of the marketplace or playground to the classical serenity of a tomb?

Near the end of my introductory essay in *Cross-Cultural Design*, there is a passage which remains, if anything, even more valid today:

'When designing across cultures … the goal is to achieve a harmonious juxtaposition; more of an interaction than a synthesis. The individual character of the elements should be retained, each maintaining its own identity while also commenting on and enriching the other… Combination, mixture, blending – these are useless concepts as they will result in a kind of mud. Street stalls in Hong Kong serve an understandably unique beverage called Yin-yang, *a combination of tea and coffee. It tastes as you*

would imagine: the worst characteristics of both are enhanced. In the Tai Chi (the yin-yang symbol) the elements don't merge, they stand for positive/negative, male/female, light/dark, and they are complementary, yet discrete.'

L'envoi
To mark the tenth anniversary of Paul Rand's death, I'd like to share a little-known cross-cultural anecdote.

In Tokyo I was told about Paul having once been guest of honour at a geisha party, probably hosted by Kamekura Yusaku. As is standard on these occasions, one of the girls asked him: *'Where do you come from?'*

'Brattleboro', Paul replied, giving the name of an exclusive town located in deepest New England.

Several of the girls struggled to repeat the name: *'Bladderbolo? Bwatabowo?'* Their tongues were virtually knotted from the effort.

It sounded authentic: pure Paul – cocky and mischievous. Impromptu, he had come up with the perfect shibboleth, unpronounceable by the Japanese. Still, I wanted to verify the story and asked him, at one of our meetings in New York's Yale Club, if it was correct. He confirmed that it was and went on: *'But I'm not from Brattleboro, I'm from Brooklyn.'*

Henry Steiner, Hong Kong, 2006