National College of Art and Design

Department of Visual Communication

Faculty of Graphic Design

"The Film Posters of Saul Bass"

by

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Introduction

Few designers in history have been as versatile or prolific as Saul Bass. Born in 1920 in New York City, Bass began his 56 year career there as a lowly commercial artist by day while studying art by night. His accomplishments in graphic design include creating some of the largest corporate identity programmes in the world for AT&T, United Airlines, Minolta and others. Bass also excelled as a film maker (winning an Academy award for 'Why Man Creates') and as the acknowledged master of movie title design. Bass was a creator. His multiplicity of talents and his dedication to his work ensured he would excel at anything he put his hand to. As a young designer in New York he decided that movie advertising was what he wanted to do, and in 1946 he moved to Los Angeles in search of fame and fortune. He would work on the west coast for the rest of his life. For almost a decade after his arrival, Bass worked for agencies in Hollywood. He eventually went into business for himself founding Saul Bass Associates in 1955. This led to his collaboration with Otto Preminger, one which was to produce some of his most famous work. Bass had a passion for graphic design. He loved assignments that had a real effect on people, he loved to be challenged, to create an unusual solution, a beautiful solution, he loved to revive a dying brand, to position a company in a useful way for growth and watch it grow. he thrived on receiving an assignment that, when he first saw he had no idea how to solve. He craved the sort of assignments that had driven others nuts. These were the things that made him tick - he loved to be challenged, and invariably rose to the challenge and created beautiful and memorable work.

This combination of energy and talent arrived at just the right moment in the history of American graphic design. Exciting things were happening; society was changing and media was evolving. America was flourishing after coming out of the Depression, and economic growth was at an all time high. These exciting times served as a catalyst in the career of the young Saul Bass. The consistent freshness of his work and the many avenues of creativity that he explored reflect this. I intend to look into one area of Bass's work; the posters he designed for film.

Bass's film posters and their impact have been largely and quite rightly closely associated with his moving title sequence work. I set out to look at Bass's film posters specifically, in relation to his other poster designs as well as to the film poster design that was predominant when Bass was working. I will attempt to set

Bass's film posters apart from his animated work, and analyse them as I would other two dimensional work.

Largely because of the extent and excellence of Bass's work in the fields of corporate design and movie title design, his two dimensional film work, alone sufficient to describe a successful career, has been criticised under the heading 'film work', and his graphic work, mostly corporate design, analysed separately. After all, how could one look at the poster for 'The Man with the Golden Arm' (Figure 3.2) without thinking immediately of the wonderful sticatto music and the disjointed jabbing movements of the arm in the title sequence? What I intend to do in this thesis is to spotlight the graphic elements of Bass's two dimensional poster work, particularly for film. After all, it's these posters that get the audience into the movie theatre in the first place. I will first look at the climate that Bass began designing in; the trends in corporate design, advertising, and TV that effected graphic design thinking at the time. I will look at the work of some of the people that influenced Bass's early career and his design philosophy. I will then focus on the movie posters of Bass,analysing them with reference to his design philosophy and comparing them with some of the work being done at the time in the major studios in Hollywood.

Literature relating to Bass's work, I have found to be one of two things; contemporary magazine articles relating to his movie advertising and title work, or chapters in graphic design books dealing with Bass's involvement in the New York School, and his corporate design work. After his death in 1996, many design manuals and magazines published obituaries which document Bass's extensive career from his early graphic work in the 1930s to his movie title designs of the 1990s.

Chapter One

Saul Bass's influences

American graphic design during his working life

Bass arrived at an exciting time in the history of American graphic design. America was at an economic high after the Second World War. 'Good design is good business,' became the adage of graphic designers throughout America. 1945 through '55 saw major developments in design, both industrial and graphic. The Museum of Modern Art popularised design by housing a series of shows called 'Good Design' which displayed mass-produced consumer items highlighting their design attributes. The 1949 exhibition and publication Modern Art in Your Life. (Figure 1.1), cover

design by Paul Rand) was symbolic of the Museum's championing of modern indus-trial and graphic design. The corresponding rise of corporate identity as an essen-tial part of the graphic designer's portfolio in the 'fifties was influential on the path Bass's career would take. Professionally designed identity programs began to become widely used by many industries, marking an important step in the profes-sionalisation of graphic design. This was largely due to the work of William Golden in the position of art director at the television network CBS. In 1951 he designed the CBS 'eye'(Figure 1.2) which was to become one of the most successful cor-porate designs of the twentieth century.As well as on the television screen, it was used on the corporation's multitude of printed material, from shipping labels to press releases to napkins and matchboxes.
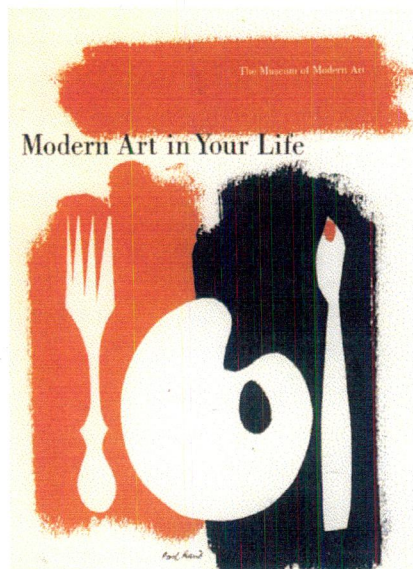
Figure1.1 , Modern Art in your Life, Paul Rand

Figure 1.2 , CBS eye, William Golden

An important influence on Bass was Paul Rand, whose graphic work stood out because of its simplicity, sense of humour and Bauhaus approach. The playful, visually dynamic, and unexpected often find their way into his work. Rand, a con-temporary of Bass, was a very important player in the evolution of American graphic design. His writing and teachings on graphic design were highly influential at the time, and remain an inspiration to students of design today. One of Rand's most famous pieces of design is his logo for IBM (Figure 1.3), which is cleverly pictorial and typo-graphic. In his 1959 poster for the film 'No Way Out', (Figure 1.4), Rand's design language – integrating photography, typography and graphic shapes is in marked contrast to other film posters of the period. His method of surrounding active form with passive white space was to be a strong visual lesson to the designers that
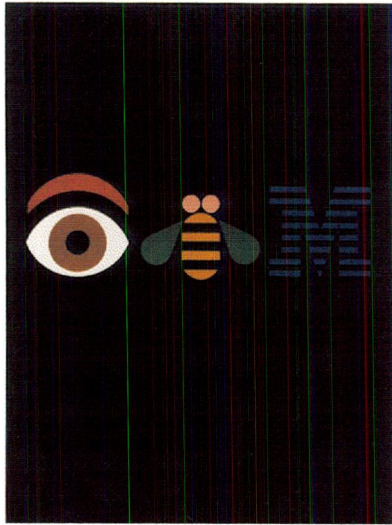
Figure 1.3, IBM, Paul Rand
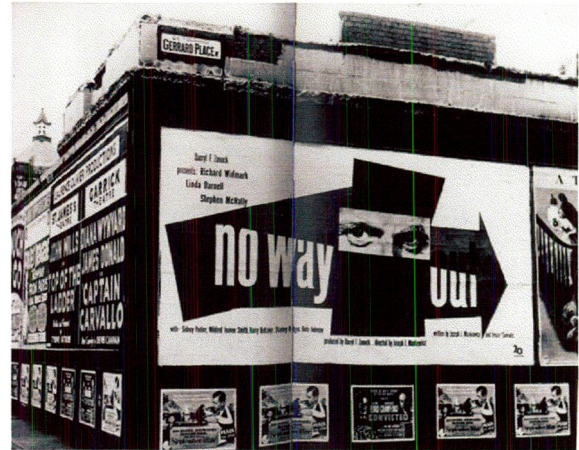
Figure 1.4, No Way Out, Paul Rand.

followed him, including Bass, as I will discuss later. This poster embodies Rand's design philosophy. In his view, the designer "unifies, simplifies and eliminates superfluities. He symbolises – abstracts from his material by association and analogy." (Meggs,1983, p 403). With this poster Rand paves the way for designers such as Bass, Eric Nitsche and Ben Shahn. Herb Lubalin said of him: "Paul Rand was the Pablo Picasso of graphics, his innovativeness encouraged our inventiveness." (Lubalin, 1979, p. 41-85)

He speaks for Bass, as well as all others influenced by Rand. In 1947, Eric Nitsche and Paul Rand both designed posters for a subway campaign aimed at attracting retailers to advertise in the subway. Both solutions, Rand's (Figure 1.5) and Nitsche's, (Figure 1.6), display the 'new visual thinking' – simplicity of shape, vivid colour and an immediacy that was a sign of things to come. When compared with a poster commissioned the same year, to the same brief, done by Jean Carlu, 'Stop 'em to Sell 'em', (Figure 1.7), we immediately see the difference in style. Carlu's poster lacks the vibrant dynamism of Nitsche's and the humourous quality of Rand's. From today's perspective his poster looks dated, and is reminiscent of a war time propaganda poster such as Koerner's 'Someone Talked' (Figure 1.8). Both Rand and Nitsche are moving away from the fear and gloom portrayed in such graphic work, and towards a broad and easy style, one which reflected Americas positive economic conditions in the 1950s.
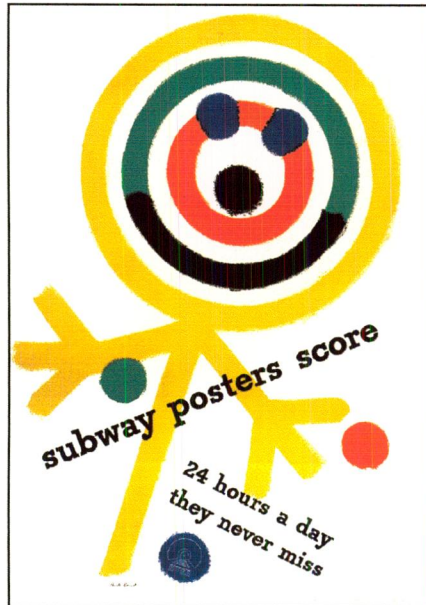
Figure 1.5 , Subway Posters Score, Paul Rand.
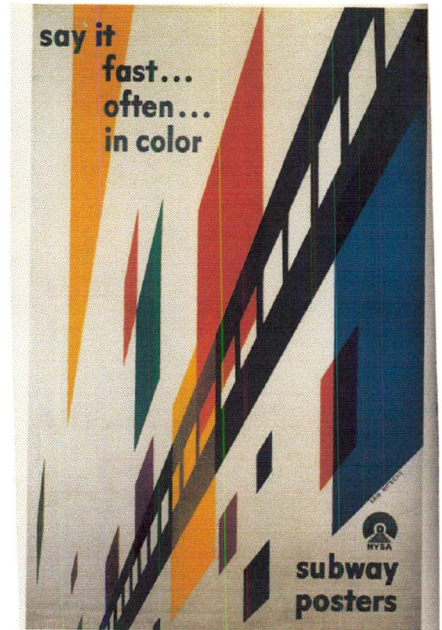
Figure 1.6 , Say It Fast Often In Color, Erik Nitsche
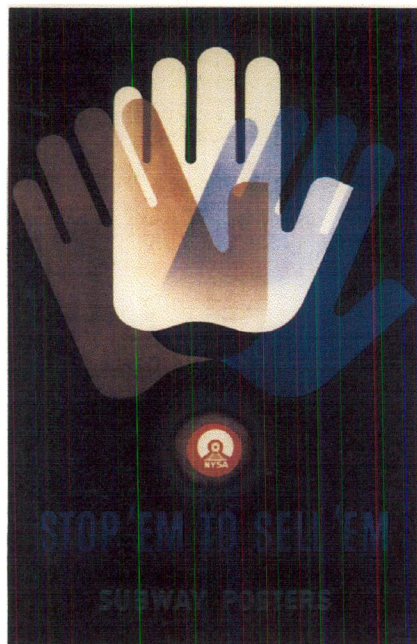
Figure 1.7, Stop 'em to sell 'em, Jean Carlu
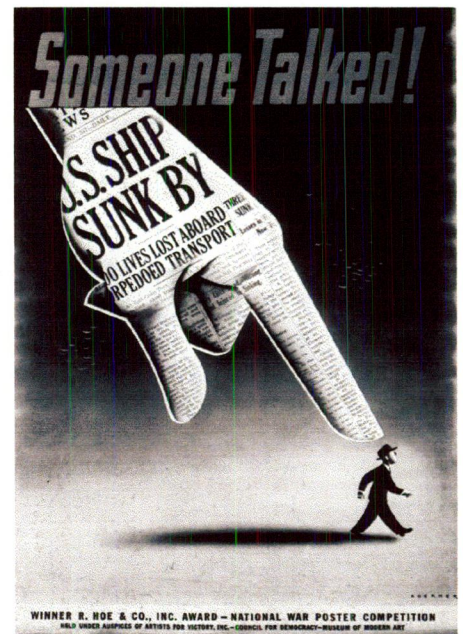
Figure 1.8, Someone Talked, Henry Koerner

Paul Rand also played a pivotal role in the coming of age of corporate design in America. His work for IBM is a role model for corporate design guidelines, it is universal, timeless and versatile. The 1950s annuals for IBM set the style and standards for corporate literature for many years. Bass learned from Golden and Rand

and produced many fine corporate identity programs, including AT&T, Quaker Oats Company and Exxon Oil. He grasped the essence of corporate design - a strong elemental symbol, timeless, simple and versatile, that can, and must be used on everything produced and related to the company, in a uniform fashion. I will illustrate how Bass brought this insight and understanding of corporate design 'to the movies,' both in terms of design quality and unity of packaging. Golden had given corporate design its platform; Rand perfected it, but Bass brought it further, expanded the possibilities, and infused it with his unique personality.
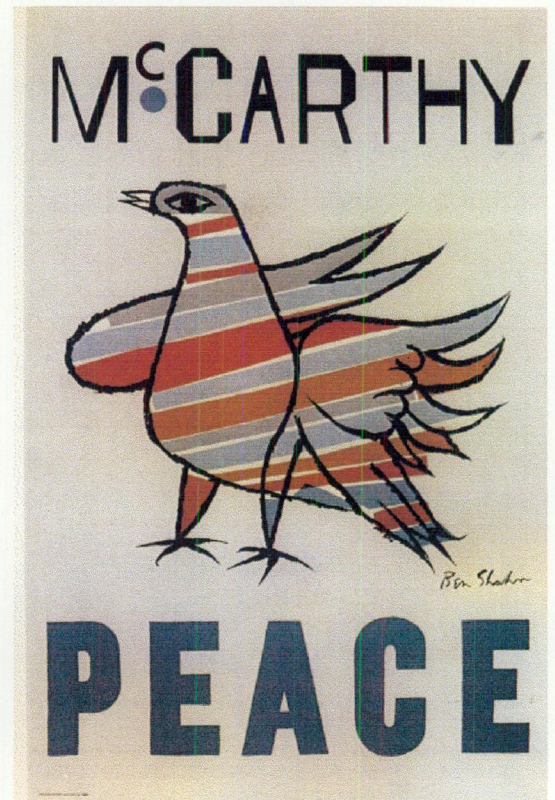
Figure 1.9, McCarthy Peace, Ben Shahn

Ben Shahn played a vital role in the development of typography from 1950s America to the present day. As well as being a talented illustrator and photographer, Shahn was a gifted poster designer. In 'McCarty Peace' (1967) (Figure 1.9), we see Shahn use a single, simple graphic image in the middle of the page, a technique used widely by Bass. He uses his Folk-lettering typeface, based on a collection of hand lettering collected by Shahn while travelling in the States during the depression of the 1930s. The uneven weight of the lettering halts the readability of the piece, which forces the reader to focus on the meaning of each word individually. This is a technique used by designers such as Paul Peter Piech when design-

ing human rights awareness posters, and was employed by Bass in many of his movie posters to add tension and give greater depth of meaning to the text. This use of type is in marked contrast to the Swiss School, where legibility and clarity were all important, and signifies the change in direction taken by American designers in the use of type, compared with their European counterparts. In America designers were as likely to use freely drawn letters or handwriting as they were typography. Herb Lubalin wrote in a special Typography issue of Print Magazine:

> "Graphic expressionism is my euphemism for the use of letterforms, not just as a mechanical means for setting words on a page, but rather as another creative way of expressing an idea, telling a story, amplifying the meaning of a word or phrase to elicit an emotional response from the viewer."(Lubalin, 1979, p 41-85)

Advertising and Television

This new way of thinking pervaded the advertising world also. Bass came to prominence at a time when unorthodox advertising strategies had transformed the look and practice of advertising.The Volkswagen ads epitomised this 'new advertising' wave. They utilised humour and wit and were, for the first time, self- conscious about advertising. Dobrow, in When Advertising Tried Harder places great importance on the roll of graduates from urban art schools and colleges in transforming the profession:

> "To compete effectively and successfully in the sixties, advertising agencies were suddenly faced with the need to recruit a new kind of employee with non-traditional attitudes and unconventional notions. How could talent like that be found ? Where was it developed? Mainly in the streets and schools of New York City, with an occasional assist from Chicago and points West."(Dobrow, 1984, p. 104)

Bass was one such person, and this explains why he was so successful at the time in America.

The rise and popularity of television had a great impact on printed graphics, demanding higher standards and a new way of thinking visually to compete with this new medium.Lupton in Graphic Design in America describes the impact of television on magazine design as making a transition from 'word thinking to visual think-

ing ... greater attention to images and faster delivery of content were required' (Lupton, 1996, p. 53) In a sense Bass was perfect for the job. He used his spatial intelligence and talent with animated graphics on a two-dimensional surface. This can be seen in 'Just The Two of Us' (Figure 3.13) and 'Vertigo' (Figure 3.10) as I will discuss later on.

Bass, brought professionalism to the realm of the movie poster and to design for film in general, incorporating advertising, logo, titles, and all graphic material in between. What William Golden had done for CBS, Bass did for Otto Preminger for his film 'The Man with the Golden Arm' in 1956. He transformed film advertising and movie title design using the knowledge and teachings of those who had gone before him combined with his enthusiasm for design, both still and moving, and his sense of being a part of a new and exciting era in American graphic design, but mostly, Bass used himself, his talent and determination. When asked what did he want to be when he grew up, he thought the answer he gave was funny. He said, 'Saul Bass.' It was no joke.

Chapter Two
The posters of Bass not relating to film

Bass, in the late 1930s, worked in the art department of the New York offices of Warner Bros. designing movie posters. Here he was a victim of the system that was in place at the time governing the design of film advertising, a system I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three. Unable to create the reductionist New York School designs that he tended towards, Bass had had enough and quit his job, replacing it with one in an agency that did non-movie advertising. This was to be an area that Bass would spend much time exploring over the span of his career. He was commissioned to design posters for the Girl Guides of America, for the Los Angeles Olympics, and for numerous festivals and events concerned with social issues. I will now look at some of these posters, and attempt to identify the design criterion that Bass employs in these posters, one which he would bring eventually to the design of movie posters.

Bass, early in his career, made the decision never to knowingly use his talents for the benefit of any product which was harmful to living things. He believed that he had the obligation to stand for something, to have values, and he did his best to support the values in which he believed. Bass worked on design for many social
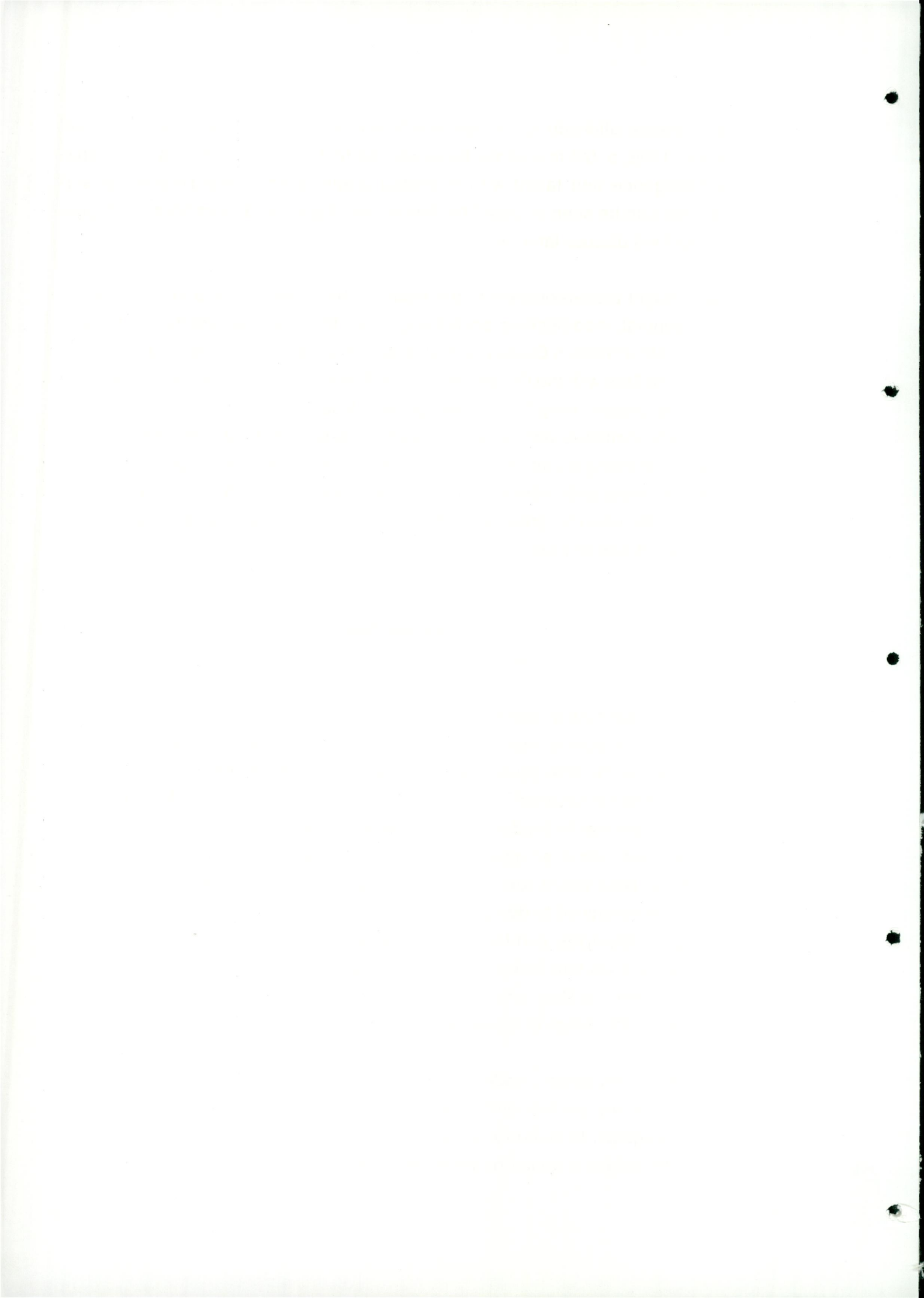
issues. 'Human Rights Week' (Figure 2.1) is one such poster. Despite the serious subject matter, Bass retains an air of humour and light heartedness in his design. This is an inherently positive image, which, at the same time, burns with a dangerous passion and immediacy. The brilliant fire takes up the bulk of the space, but it never gets boring - the intricate interplay of the orange and red lines within the image keeps the eye busy. The text takes the form of the torch -symbolising the fuel for the fire. Bass employs a familiar tool of his - the block of upper case text at the bottom of the page. This gives invisible boundaries to the image when coupled with the single line of text at the top of the page. This imaginary square heightens the interaction of positive and negative space.

In Figure 2.2, the poster for 'The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy,' Bass uses colour to convey danger. This sense of danger is in contrast to what we first see - the gentle and protective clasping hands. Again, there is contrast here between these hands and the dangerous shards that they protect. The shards, simple triangles, have an uneasy kinetic energy about them. The subtle use of the jagged line at the top of the black box creates further subconscious tension. Here, Bass creates a psychological edge by using colour and shape delicately, without ever compromising the aesthetic quality of the design.

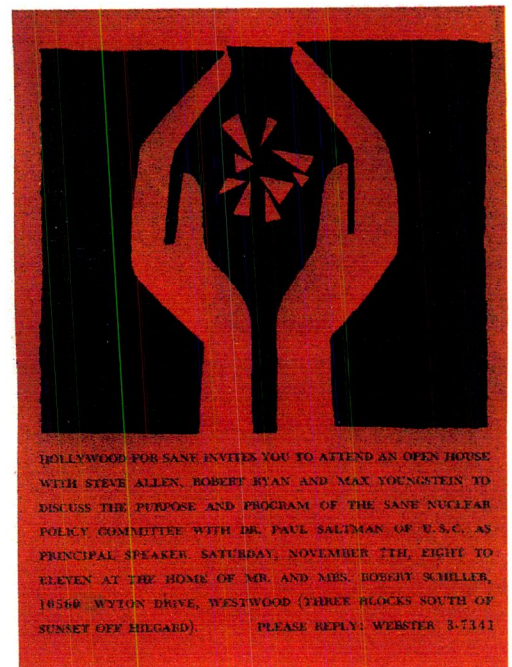Figure 2.1, Human Rights Week, Saul Bass

Figure 2.2, Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, Saul Bass

The 10th Chicago International Film Festival poster (Figure 2.3), is and example of Bass's broad and easy style. He is very confident in his work and uses large areas of white space and hand lettering in a way that only an experienced designer can. A simple photographic approach, the concept, however, is deceptively simple. The colours used represent the variety of styles and nationalities of films. The shape of the film, a 'C' indicates the location; Chicago, and the use of film gives the image relevance.The shape that the film has 'fallen' in suggests fun and festivity, like ribbons from a streamer. Alternatively it may represent the cutting-room floor, referring to the contemporary nature of the Films shown. Although the symbolism of the image may seem childlike in its simplicity, Bass maintains a level of sophistication by using an unusual layout and offsetting the image carefully with the lettering. The minimalism and lack of superfluities keeps the design fresh and immediate. This poster is unique in that nowhere in it is there an element that will date or go out of fashion. The colours are bold primary colours and the hand written letters, by their nature cannot become out-dated. Film is still being used today, and even if it were to be replaced, the visual recognition of celluloid film has lasting power. It is regrettable in fact that the year is mentioned in the copy. It does however put into perspective Bass's ability to produce pure and undiluted visual communication which still has great impact a quarter of a century after its creation.

Figure 2.3, 10th Chicago International Film Festival, Saul Bass

Figure 2.4, Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad Los Angeles, Saul Bass

Bass' design for the 'Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad,'(Figure 2.4) also employs a totally photographic approach. This is a striking image of a very dramatically fore-shortened swimmer who appears to be flying as well as swimming. The use of a fish-eye lens makes the horizon appear curved, and creates the illusion of a mini globe. The swimmer appears to be swimming around the globe with some determination. Perhaps the visual reference to Superman is unintentional, but the athlete certainly appears to have superhuman strengths. This is the essence of the subject matter after all, the Olympics. This is a great action shot, and elevated from his element, the water, the swimmer embodies the spirit of the Olympics - to rise above the ordinary and achieve the impossible, the superhuman. He strives forward with great determination, and is a strong visual representation of the Olympic Spirit. In this poster Bass further broadens Rand's theory of the 'abstract expressive symbol.' In essence the figure in the poster is this expressive symbol, but by using photography, an image of a real athlete, Bass has used a medium that is universally understood. He has modernised Rand's thinking. Rather than use strategies like collage, montage, childlike drawing, visual puns or other devices influenced by such artists as Klee, Braque, Kandinsky and Miro, as Rand would have done, Bass has brought the same design philosophy to the world in a popular and modern way.

CHAPTER THREE
The movie posters of the 1940s and '50s

The movie poster industry of the 1930s and '40s was controlled by the major studios. The designer was secondary to the studio needs and, as a rule, wasn't credited for his or her work. John Engstad, who supervised Paramount's stills gallery from 1929 to 1941 remembers.

> "The main advertising department was in New York and we had a smaller group in Hollywood. As each picture finished principal photography the head of the department would call me here and discuss what kind of still he wanted. Sometimes he even gave me sketches and told me to copy them as closely as possible." (S. Schapiro & D. Chierchetti, 1979 p. 15)

The designer as we know him today did not exist. Poster design was broken down into categories: layout, lettering and illustration. Different technicians did

each task and executives passed on each step of the work. The finisher original would then be sent to the poster company where the colour separations would be made. The Movie Poster Book states that in the 1930s:

> "European poster artists signed their work or used an identifying mark. In the US however complete anonymity was the rule. While studios hired the best magazine illustrators in New York, they were careful not to let them use any characteristic traits that would reveal who executed a design. However different styles might be ordinarily, when an artist worked for MGM, their creations all looked the same." (S. Scapiro & D. Chierchetti, 1979 p. 16)

This had the effect of diluting the impact of a movie poster. If they all looked the same they were in effect useless; the whole point of advertising was undermined. The use of colour photography also had an influence on the decline of the movie poster design. As the fan magazines replaced traditional pastel drawings with photographs, the poster illustrations tried to look less like drawings and more like colour photographs. The exaggeration of colour and proportion that had previously given many posters their charm began to disappear.

Bass, in an interview in1968 for Communication-Arts-Magazine said of design at the time:

> "The existent esthetic level - what we would call the 'look' of the thing - was abominable. The paragraphs were so ugly, the illustrators so inartistic, the typography so bad, the layouts so dull and uninspired that if you made, what we called in those days a 'contemporary design' you were hoisted on shoulders and marched around the block. You would be singled out for awards and acclaim for doing what seems now a janitorial job...removing ugliness and clutter...simplifying and utilising the new visual thinking"(COYNE,1997)

An example of a poster executed without using this 'new visual thinking' is 'Sullivan's Travels', 1943 (Figure 3.1). Paramount had allowed Preston Sturges to make this unusual comedy-drama in which movie director Joel McCrea and his starlet girlfriend, Veronica Lake, disguise themselves as hobos and ride the rails in search of material for a movie. When it came to the time to plot the advertising campaign, however, the studio got cold feet. Veronica Lake's blonde hair and sultry manner had recently caused much stir in 'I Wanted Wings', (1941). The resulting poster for 'Sullivan's Travels' featured a pouting Veronica Lake in an evening gown,

Figure 3.1, Sullivan's Travels,
Unknown artist

even though the girl she portrayed in the film was a cheerful good sport who usually wore tramp clothes. There was nothing in the poster that would give any indication of the film's true plot, except for the tiny sketch of a car chase at the very bottom. Interestingly, Joel McCrea, the top billed man, wasn't on the poster at all. Schapiro suggests that his agents "must have neglected to insert a clause in his contract guaranteeing his face exposure in every poster" (S. Schapiro & D. Chierichetti, 1979 p. 16). This was common at the time, and very restrictive from a design point of view. Billy Wilder,commenting on a simple but powerful Polish poster for his 1959 movie 'Sunset Boulevard' asks "Why can't I do that, I ask myself? The answer is simple: it is because here they insist on the faces of the stars, and then the lawyers of the different stars argue about the size of the images". (Kirkham, 1995, p. 18-21) Bass himself had to deal with the typographic restrictions: "It's hard to deal with the typography in a film poster because frequently four names have to be on one line. One name cannot appear ahead of the other. You end up with tall, thin, compressed typography" (Kirkham, 1995, p. 18-21).

The movie industry itself at the time Bass began designing for it was in a state of flux. Motion picture production had decentralised; Hollywood was no longer the centre. New types of films, more adventurous films, were being made in England, France and Italy. Thus, new expressions of the aesthetic tradition of other cultures were infusing the film world. The rise of the independent producer and the break-

down of the production line approach to film making opened doors for Bass to change the standards and expectations of movie poster design. He began by treating the film as a whole, designing unified graphic material encompassing logo, posters, advertising and eventually animated film titles. The professionalism and high quality of his work was in stark contrast to what had gone before him. Bass had single handedly raised the status of the designer in the eyes of the movie industry. This he did through close working relationships with such talented directors as Otto Preminger, Billy Wilder, Alfred Hitchcock and Martin Scorsese. To Bass the understanding of a design problem came from good communication with his client. Bass, himself a hard working perfectionist, loved to work with the best in the industry. I will now discuss the posters created by Bass for the films of Preminger, Hitchcock and Wilder, as well as the client/designer relationship that existed in each case.

The Bass-Preminger collaboration

Bass began to design movie posters for Otto Preminger in 1954. Preminger, an independent producer/director, was a dedicated and passionate man who had a lot of clout in Hollywood, which he was willing to use. He trusted Bass's talent as a designer and gave him the freedom to do his job as he saw fit. Preminger and Bass's working relationship saw them through from 'Carmen Jones' in 1955 to 'The Human Factor' in 1979, working on such films as 'The Man with the Golden Arm', 'Anatomy of a Murder' and 'Such Good Friends'. Bass refers to him as "an infuriating but brilliant client"(Kirkham, 1994, p. 16) but it was this very working relationship that lead to such inspiring work as 'The Man with the Golden Arm' (Figure 3.2) in 1956. Bass uses reduction and fragmentation to depict the essence of this controversial film – drug addiction. He alights upon the essence of the topic and expresses it in a minimal way that has maximum impact. This abstract and minimalist style signalled the more widespread acceptance of modernism in US design. It was the first instance of its use in movie poster design. These graphic images were eventually extended into a full moving title sequence for the film also the first of its kind. Bass's use of cut paper in simple shapes with one elemental pictorial sign in the middle of the composition gives the poster a robust energy. Philip Meggs points out that "While the images are simplified to a minimal statement they lack the exactitude of measurement or construction that could make them rigid." (Meggs 1983 p. 403)
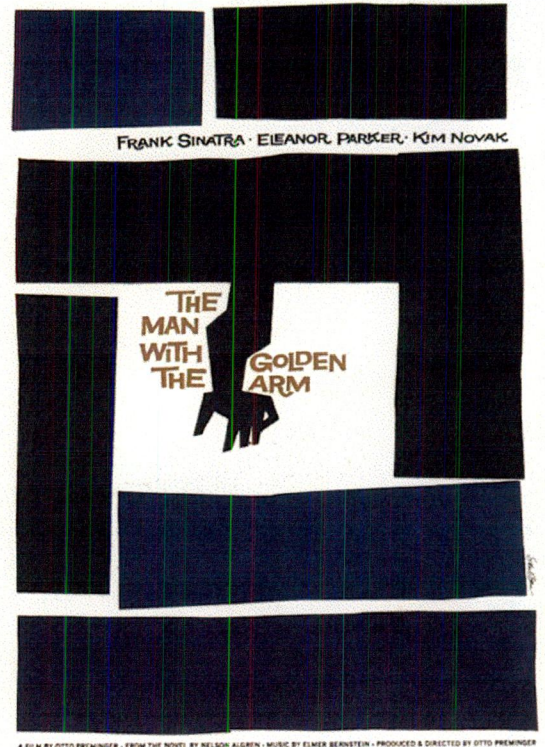
Figure 3.2, The Man with the Golden Arm, Saul Bass

This gives the image an almost casual quality about its execution. Bass's use of freely drawn decorative letterforms in the film title contrasts with the typography used for the director's name, but this serves only to add to the impact of the drawn letterforms. In Bass's use of letters we can see the influence of Ben Shahn's work: the viewer is forced to read and pay attention to each word individually. The type adds an element of personality and gives further meaning to the words.

Bass worked with Preminger on his 1961 movie 'Anatomy of a Murder'. The resulting poster, is a fine example of Bass's genius.(Figure 3.3). The minimalism of statement, the graphic impact of colour, form and type combine to create an unforgettable image that has never lost its visual appeal. Bass as an inventor of images has brought together strong simple forms cut out of paper and laid them slightly askew, unnerving the viewer. There is great movement in the image. It is dynamic and exciting while at the same time it evokes silence, murder and death. When one reads the word 'murder' on the torso, the image takes on an eerie stillness. The body seems to possess dead weight that holds and forces it downward. We observe from above the body, as if it lies on the ground below us. The psychological impact of the colours used ensure that we are fully aware of the gravity of the situation – we almost feel the urge to run away and conceal the murder weapon. Again, the
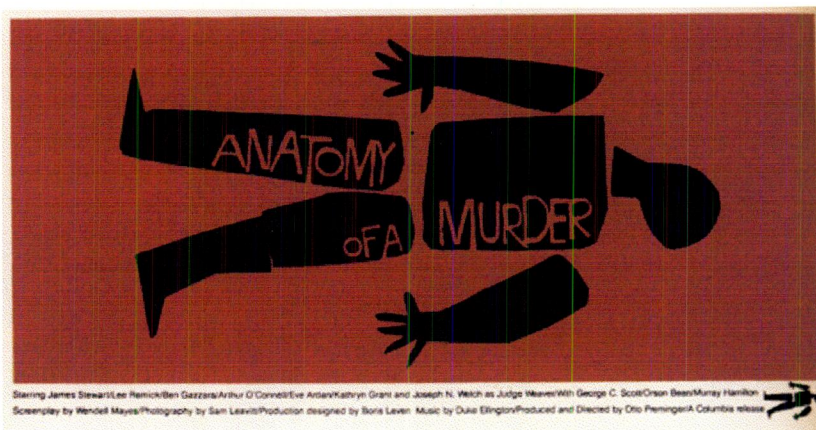
Figure 3.3, Anatomy of a Murder,
Saul Bass

image has an almost casual quality about it. It appears to have been easily achieved and not in any way forced. The lettering is taut and emotionally charged. It sets the mood and suggests in no uncertain terms what to expect of Preminger's film.

'Bonjour Tristesse,' (Figure 3.4) is a highly evocative image. Bass uses his 'less is more' philosophy and utilises the simplest of images to depict the most complex of emotions. It has the strong psychological edge that was lacking in the film posters of the '40s and '50s. In an interview for Graphis Magazine Stewart Frolic comments: "In Hollywood today, a film like that would be advertised like 'Gidget' – a teenage girl on the Riviera flirting with her father and having a love affair with a boy." (Frolic, 1991, p. 96)

What Bass chose to go after was the sadness of the girl. Frolic remarks that a major studio wouldn't allow a designer to make that choice today. Bass puts it down to 'the power and conviction of Otto Preminger'(Frolic, 1991, p. 96). In the image Bass commands the viewer to look into the eyes of the girl, and to see, in them, the love that she holds. Even without the tear drop we are convinced of the strength of her emotion. The tear drop further emphasises the emptiness of her feelings, acting as a contrast to, and mirroring, the symbolic heart in her pupil, but dwarfing it at the same time. The viewer's eye is led down to the typography, hand lettered in capitals the type is solid and playful. It makes its point and avoids rigidity.

'Bunny Lake is Missing' was released in 1965 (Figure 3.5). Here the deceptively simple image has a multitude of hidden meanings. The child, arm outstretched, is at an unusual angle. Is she being held by an adult, outside the picture's boundaries?
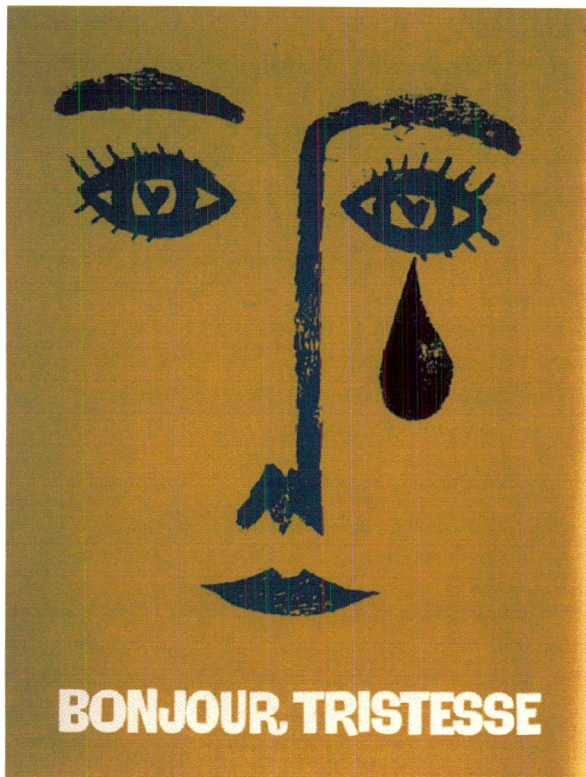
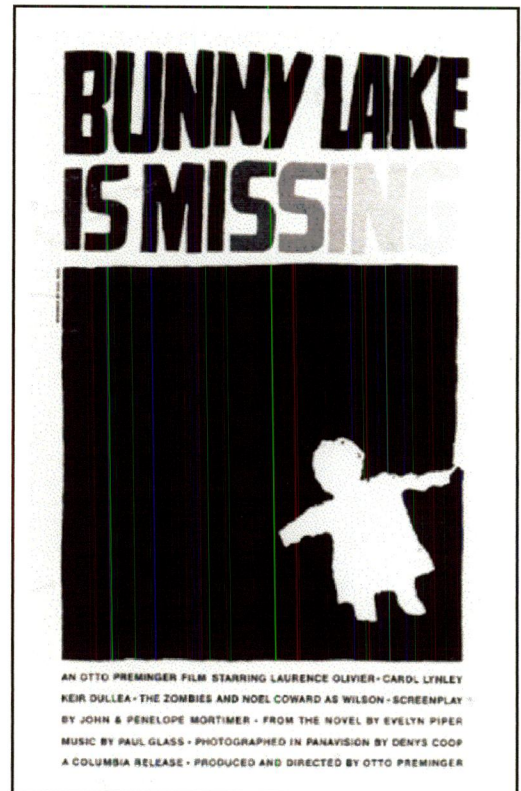Figure 3.4, Bonjour Tristesse, Saul Bass

Figure 3.5, Bunny Lake is Missing, Saul Bass

Is she calling for help or reaching out to catch the attention of someone? The dark square that frames her serves to illustrate the extent of her 'lostness'. Dwarfed by its size, and the bottomless, endless nature of it, the little child still conveys a glimmer of hope - if she faces forward, that is, if not, she walks away in the darkness - there is no way of knowing. Again, Bass is able to convey in simple graphic images all the emotional turmoil that goes with a missing child. He uses a visual device to do so: the square. So strong an image is the square that our minds long to fill it in and make it whole, to fill in the bit that is missing – Bunny Lake – to find her and put our minds at ease. Bass in his use of letters and colour combined conveys another powerful message. The fade at the end of the word missing suggests a fade out; as if like in a movie, the whole world will fade out when the sentence is finished and the meaning of the terrible words sink in. It suggests weakness, a mother fainting perhaps. The format of the poster is not unlike a missing persons poster. It announces, in large bold letters, who is gone missing and goes on to show us the missing child in the centre of the composition, and the details at the bottom.

In 'Such Good Friends,' another Otto Preminger film (Figure 3.6) Bass's use of imagery - a reclining nude female figure - is subtly provocative although the image reveals nothing that would be conventionally considered so. The curvaceous nature
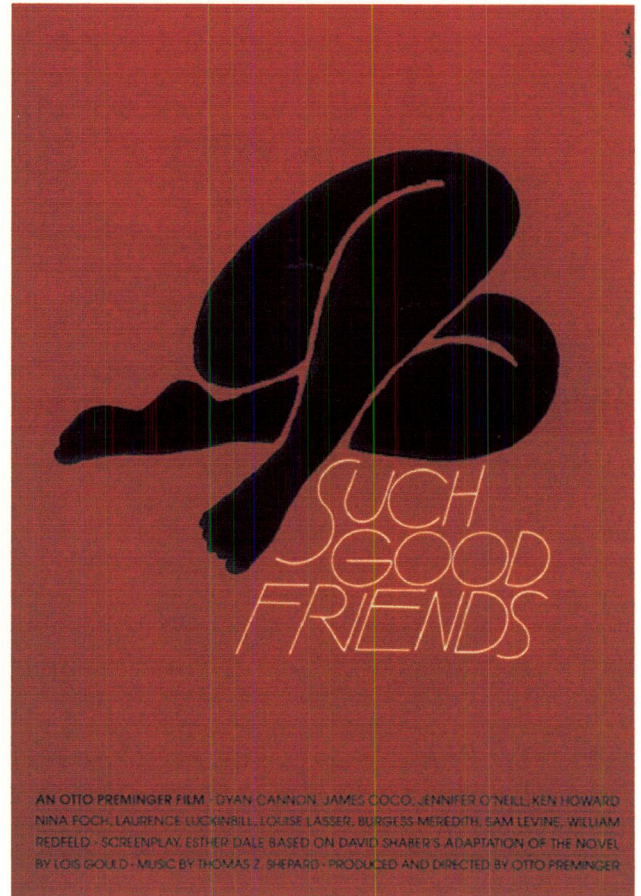
Figure 3.6, Such Good Friends,
Saul Bass

of the legs, and the passive and relaxed position suggest further intimacy than the title suggests - good friends. The image is warm and tactile, boldly so, and contrasts with the crisp, clear, unambiguous lettering. The two 'O's of 'good' are like two very wide eyes, convincing the viewer of what they are saying. Again, Bass, use of black, red and white is striking. Having first seen this design reproduced in black and white (Figure 3.7), I was quite shocked at the additional impact of the colour reproduction. The colour brings out the passion of the image, extends the ambiguity, and adds a dash of tension. Bass never lets the obligatory type get in the way of his design. Instead, the rectangular block of type, he uses as a design element. Because of its strong boundaries, it doesn't distract the eye from the main image. The use of upper case letters adds uniformity, and there are no contrasting letter sizes or styles that might distract the eye. Bass uses a slightly heavier type to highlight the first and most important sentence - the least intrusive method of doing so.
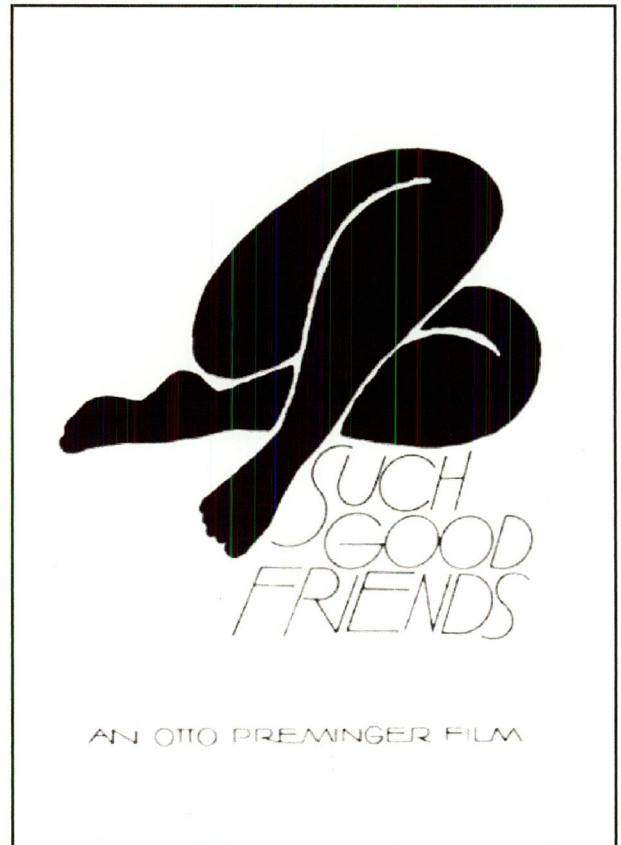
Figure 3.7,' Such Good Friends' in
black and white.

Bass's use of grid structure

The block of type is reminiscent of the blocks of colour Bass uses in 'The Man with The Golden Arm.'In fact the similarities between the two posters runs deeper. Throughout Bass' work, I have noticed his use of one grid structure above all others(Figure 3.8). Examples of the use of this grid are 'Bunny Lake is Missing', 'The Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy' and 'The Man with The Golden Arm'

Logic is an important element of Bass's design equation. He obviously finds this grid a successful one and likes using it. At the same time, he is not unwilling to break it and use it creatively. In 'The Man with the Golden Arm', for example, the grid is used but Bass departs from it selectively. The use of cut paper means that by its nature it doesn't exactly align with the grid. Thus Bass avoids a regimented look and maintains the spontaneity of the piece. Without this discretion, a grid may become a straight jacket and can leave work looking contrived or boring. Instead, Bass uses the grid to house his design elements, without trapping them or limiting the possibility of change.
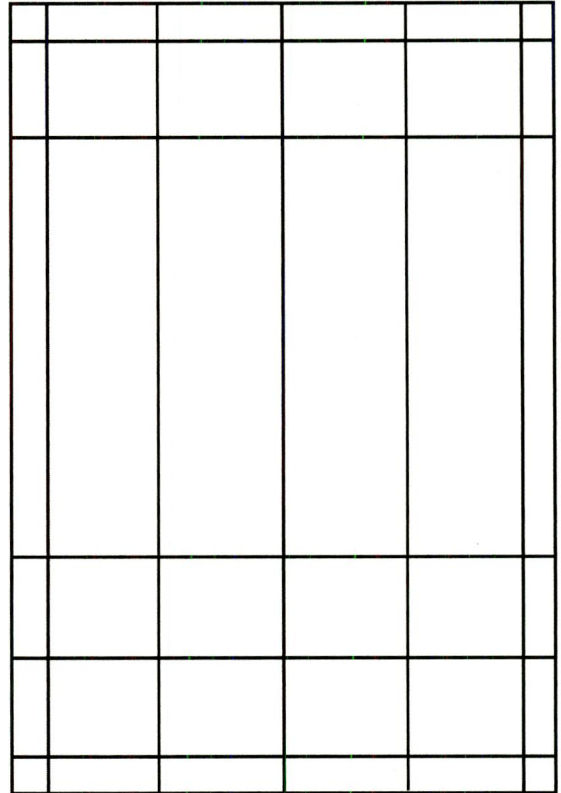
Figure 3.8, The grid used by Bass in many of his designs.

The three posters for Preminger's 'Exodus' show Bass's continuity of design throughout a design series. The first, Figure 3.9a, has all three elements; the five hands, raised in defiance - symbolic of the struggle to create the land of Israel; the flame, representing the eternal flame of freedom; and the text, in white. Figure 3.9b is an announcement of the completion of filming, incorporating the image central to the design, the hands, as well as the text, this time in black. Although only a fraction of the complete poster, this symbol is still very strong and doesn't lose its visual impact on a smaller scale. Nor does it distract from the visual 'joke' that is central to the poster, 'All Wrapped Up.' This is a great poster, witty and simple, and not likely to be forgotten by those who saw it. Figure 3.9c is a variation of Figure 3.9a, using the grid to fit the mandatory type into the design without distracting from the main image, which Bass has altered slightly and elongated to take up more space on a standard format.
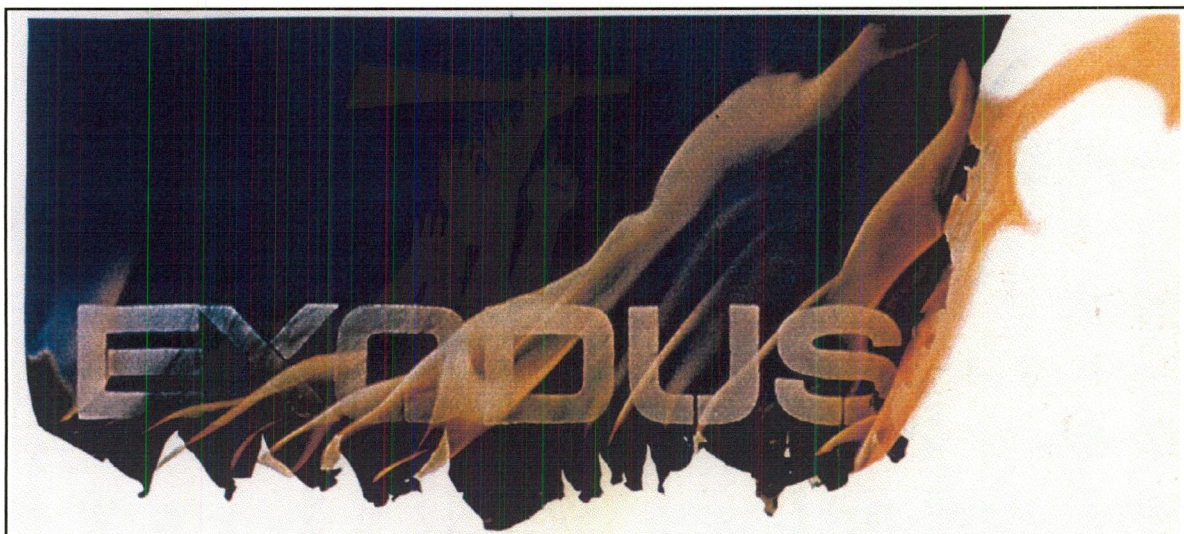
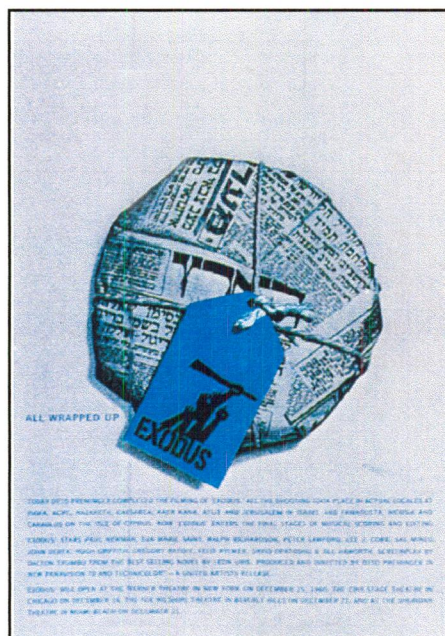Figure 3.9a, Exodus, Saul Bass

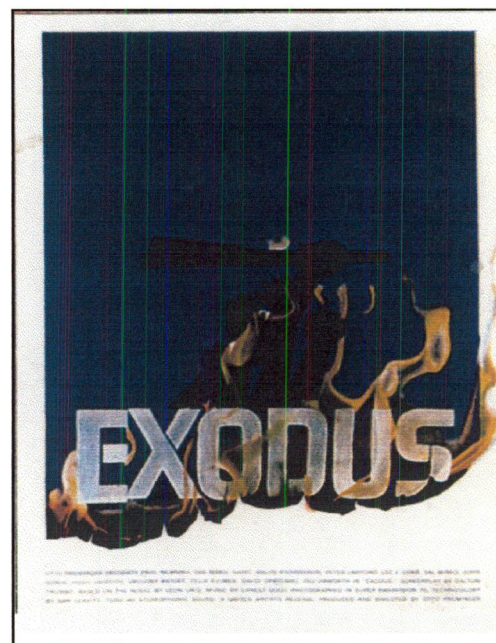Figure 3.9b, All Wrapped Up,
Saul Bass

Figure 3.9c, Exodus, using grid,
Saul Bass

Bass and Hitchcock

Bass worked with Alfred Hitchcock on 'Psycho,' 'North By Northwest" and 'Vertigo'. His poster for 'Vertigo,' (Figure 3.10), uses Bass's favourite combination of colours, black, red and white. The type looks as if it has been etched on to the page. All in upper case, it has a quality of urgency about it. Martin Scorsese, who adored Bass's 'very patient jewellers eye,' considers Bass' work for 'Vertigo' to 'perfectly capture
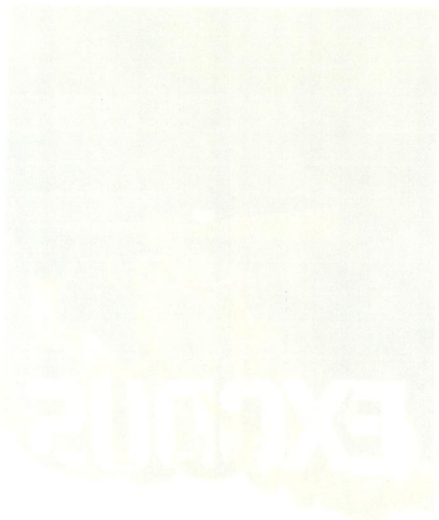
Figure 3.10, Vertigo, Saul Bass

the dangerous tone of the romantic obsession and the eternal return that the film so uniquely constructed.'(Kirkham, 1997, p. 18) Bass commits to a point of view, and says 'this is the essence of what the picture is.' The figures central to the design possess a kinetic energy. The man is poised, as if anticipating attack, and the female figure appears to be about to swirl uncontrollably into the vortex in front of her. They interact beautifully, creating the frenzied dance that is the essence of the image. The film title appears to be sucked towards the centre of the image also. A very subtle shift of the baseline upwards towards the central image adds a further hint of tension. The sharp letters, especially the 'o' of 'Vertigo,' contrasts superbly with the great swirling glyph.

Bass and Hitchcock had a working relationship similar to that of Bass and Preminger. Hitchcock trusted this new talent's capabilities, and allowed him have a fairly free hand. Bass remembers: 'Hitchcock was wonderful to me...He seemed to like having me around so I hung around the set and went to all the dailies.'(Frolick, 1991, p. 95) This is an indication of just how much the status of the designer had changed since the '30s and '40s, which were described earlier in the chapter. People like Bass were instrumental in this change. This I put down to Bass's pro-fessionalism and multiplicity of talents. Directors such as Preminger and Hitchcock

couldn't help but notice and be impressed by his talent and determination, and so they grew in respect, both for Bass, and for the work he did. Hitchcock even allowed Bass to design and storyboard one of the fulcrum scenes in Psycho, the now famous shower scene.

Bass's work with other directors

Bass worked with many other directors throughout his career. One of my favourite posters is for 'The Magnificent Seven,' a film by John Sturges (Figure 3.11). Graphic symbolism and simplicity are the essence of this piece. How different this is from the usual fare of 'throw everything in' of the movie posters I mentioned earlier. The stark raw energy of this image must have shocked quite a few when it was released. The blood red colour, the coarse lines and the many connotations associated with this image add up to an intense in-depth solution. Louis Dorfsman describes it as:

> 'the inclusion of common sense and uncommon insights...relevance and appropriateness... infusing the whole through a vision, both literary and visual, with results that surpass one's expectations for innovative and imaginative solutions'. (Dorfsman, 1997, p. 14)

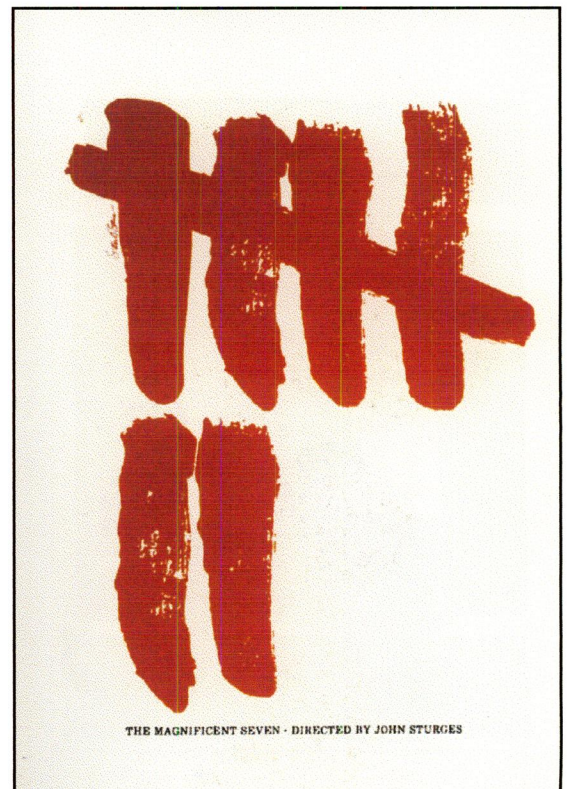THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN · DIRECTED BY JOHN STURGES

Figure 3.11, The Magnificent Seven, Saul Bass

The solution for 'Very Happy Alexander' (Figure 3.12), a film by Yves Roberts, despite its light hearted tone, is no less worthy of such acclaim. This quirky solution has the ability to make me smile every time I see it. Roughly drawn black shapes combined with delicate illustration, humour and an understanding of the human condition create this timeless image, full of warmth and personality. The image is brilliantly balanced and has great presence at any size. The position of the text prevents the large areas of black from overwhelming the detail of the grain of straw. Bass cleverly creates tiny bridges between these large black areas, to prevent the negative space creating rivers of white through the image. On the face, conversely, Bass uses bridges of white on each side of the nose to 'free' the negative space that is the face. The result of this is that there is no area of white, except for the text, that is completely enclosed in black. This is a difficult thing to achieve when illustrating in black and white, and serves to add emphasis to the type.

Bass has a particular genius when dealing with negative space. He can control it to suit his needs in any solution, as I pointed out with the last illustration. In 'The Two of Us' (Figure 3.13), Bass creates brilliant interplay between black and white. There is balance as well as a sense of movement and flow. Both figures rely on the other for balance, and this creates the unity that is 'the two of us.' The text, again, is drawn to compliment the illustration. Like both figures it appears to hold out its arm. The slightly smaller 'of' and the 'fingers' of the 'f' reflect the hands above and below. The illusion is made complete by the height of the word - exactly halfway between that of the hand of the man above and of the man below.

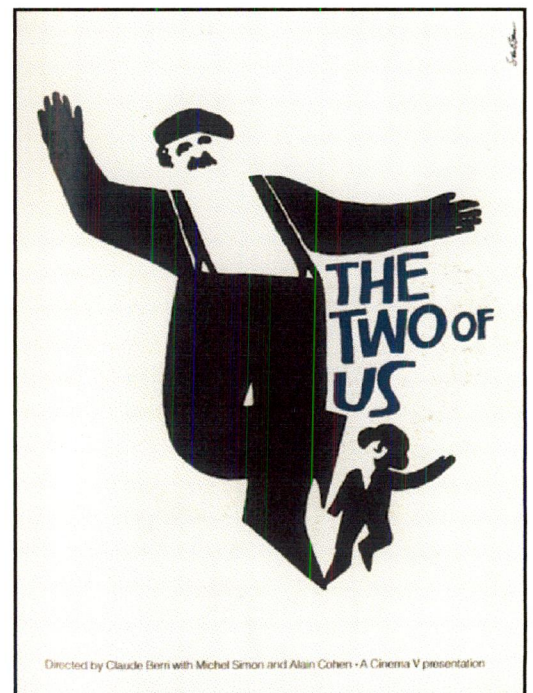Figure 3.12, Very Happy
Alexander, Saul Bass

Figure 3.13, The Two of Us,
Saul Bass

'The Shining' by Stanley Kubrick (Figure 3.14) is another film poster designed by Bass. Black, red and white combined with the use of the grid, and the single centred image based on one theme or idea is, once again, Bass's formula. This time the image is contained within the text. Quite simply, Bass uses the scariest of images he can, and moulds the text around it. The resulting image has a certain presence, and is very well worked to create balance. However, I think that this image is lacking the psychological edge of Bass' other work. Perhaps from the viewpoint of the 1990s it appears stereotyped in the horror genre - perhaps it is accountable for the birth of this genre; it certainly has all the hallmarks of a classic horror poster. However,I don't think it has the impact of 'Anatomy of a Murder' or the subtlety of 'Such Good Friends.'

Figure 3.14, The Shining, Saul Bass

'Fantastic Voyage' (Figure 3.15) is in my opinion, an example of the work of an artist who could recognise the genius in such posters as 'Vertigo,' and 'Such Good Friends,' but couldn't apply the same principals to his or her own work (the designer is not credited). All the elements of a successful Bass design are present, the grid, black and red colour scheme, use of a block of type at the bottom and the use of a single glyph central to the design - the designer is obviously trying to emulate Bass' work. However, nothing is quite balanced, and the level of finish and
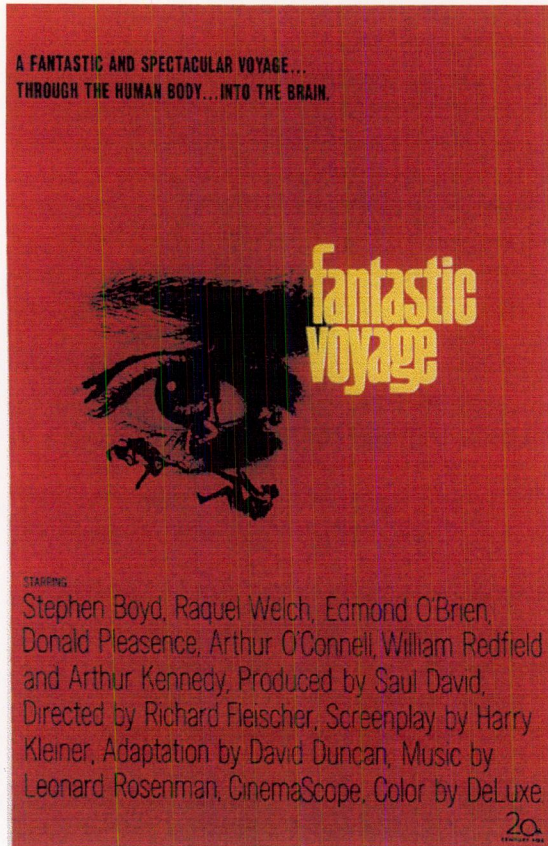
Figure 3.15, Fantastic Voyage, Unknown artist

Figure 3.16, Bullitt, Unknown artist

professionalism of the work is nothing like that of Bass. The type at the bottom of the page is very large and distracting, exactly what Bass tries to avoid by using upper case letters. Because the type isn't justified, it has a jagged right edge which further distracts the eye and makes the type look messy. The text at the top of the page is heavier and in upper case, which again distracts the eye, and fights for attention. The central image suffers from too much attention to detail in all the wrong places. We can see quite clearly each eyebrow hair, but have difficulty working out what's going on with the figures under the eye. the essential part of the image. The film title in bright yellow meanwhile draws us away from this before we even find out. This poster is an example of what Bass' work would look like if he got it wrong, and it serves to illustrate just how easy this would be.

'Fantastic Voyage' is not, however, representative of film posters in general in the 1960s. 'Bullitt' (Figure 3.16) is a more typical example of a US film poster at the time. "Bullitt' relies heavily on audience knowledge of Mc Queen. His name is equal in weight to the film title and appears before the title on the poster. The colours and
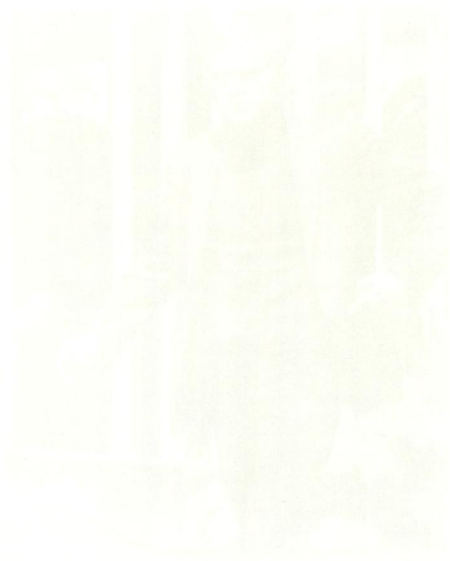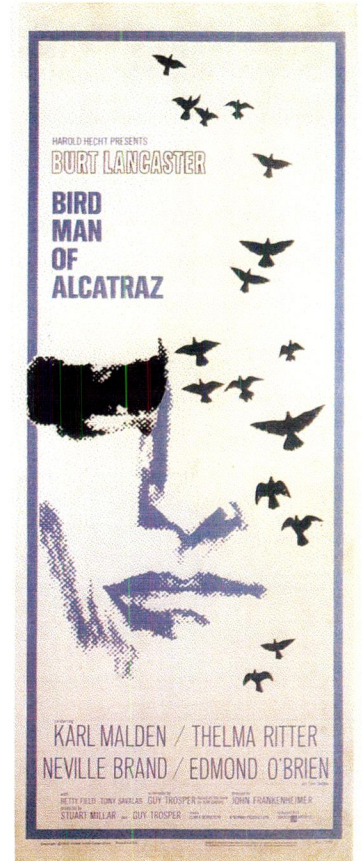
Figure 3.17, Birdman of Alcatraz, Saul Bass

typeface used are very fashionable, and so have a very short shelf-life, and rely on the viewer to be aware of this fashion. The poster has no staying power. It is visually completely unrelated to the theme of the film, and relies on the viewer reading the copy to know what to expect. This is the 1960s version of 'Sullivan's Travels,' relying solely on the pulling power of one star, and the use of fashionable colour and type, but lacking visual appeal, depth and psychological edge.

Bass, in 'Birdman of Alcatraz' (Figure 3.17), six years earlier produced a poster that was quite the opposite of Bullitt, in response to a brief that was quite similar. This time Burt Lancaster is the leading man. Bass uses Lancaster's image in the poster without relying on it to make the design. The face is so simplified and stark that it could be anyone. The identity of this man is secondary to the character and presence that Bass gives him. The colours are chosen to give a clinical, stark look to the poster, not simply because they are fashionable. The image relates directly to the title and plot of the film. The man is linked with the birds through visual metaphor. His eye, the window to his soul, mirrors the birds that fly away free. His demeanour is heavy and pensive. Bass doesn't need a hundred words of copy to convey the theme of the film. He communicates visually. This is why a Bass poster can still illicit a response today. It is timeless in its ability to communicate.

Conclusion

Saul Bass's influence on contemporary graphic design cannot be underestimated. He revolutionised film advertising and promotion by designing bold, symbolic graphics that expressed the essence of a film's story. He pioneered the key visual phrase in his posters and advertising. His ability to arrive at an uncomplicated and immediate expression of the essence of a subject is inspiring to designers the world over. Bass was a key player in the birth of a unique style of American graphic design. Perhaps more importantly, Bass played a vital role in the professionalisation of graphic design. He brought his insight and understanding of design to an industry that routinely undermined the role of the designer. Bass's knowledge of corporate design, his interest and enthusiasm for film and animated graphics and his love of perfection in every aspect of his work ensured his success. His unique working relationships with Otto Preminger and Alfred Hitchcock over many years resulted in work that, in today's cut - throat world of big business film advertising, would not be possible. It was the golden era of Hollywood film production, and for a time, Bass was the golden boy. This was all a part of the unique set of circumstances that brought about the legend that is Saul Bass.

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