CARL REGEHR

It was a temptation to begin Carl Regehr's story with the familiar *Reader's Digest* "Most interesting person" title. This was not to imply that I have found other designers of stature "uninteresting" or necessarily "less interesting." Only that Carl typifies so well what I have found to be characteristic of today's top designers.

Carl is an interesting *person* as well as a capable designer.

He has a seemingly unlimited source of energy, a quality that may be as much God-given as *talent*, but still an apparently essential ingredient to success in the design field.

He has a well-developed sense of humor.

He has the maturity to recognize what his work is and why he does it; to approach a project with intensity, but still maintain the objectivity to analyze and evaluate it realistically.

He has an insatiable curiosity. He reads prolifically, and he reads rapidly.

These "typical characteristics" may seem to have little relationship to the physical act of "designing." Unfortunately, they have even less relationship to the formal education of the designer; but they may offer additional insight to what design really is and how it functions.

This was among the many subjects I discussed with Carl Regehr in one of the most interesting interviews I have ever had. Successful designers are always *busy*, and their time must be carefully protected. In this instance, however, advance planning did permit us the better part of two days. We talked, and taped, and sent out for more coffee and recording tapes. Carl gave unstintingly of his time, thoughts and observations and laughed as he chalked up the time and effort to "useful design therapy for me."

We have excerpted from the tapes and selected and shown some of Carl's work. Though any number of pages could be filled with samples of his successful commercial projects, many of them familiar through exhibitions and reproduction in graphic publications, we have placed an accent (with Carl's permission) on the experimental and exploratory side of his activities.

Several times, when I pinned Carl down to making a statement on something or clarifying a point, he would refer to a black, case-bound book, about 8½ x 11 and blank on the face and spine. I asked him to tell about it.

The book was suggested by a friend. He gave it to me for Christmas and said, "Why don't you put down some thoughts for 1963?"

I responded with a burst of enthusiasm and immediately put in a title page and a couple of sketches. Then I thought, "What should I do about a studio? What is the minimum working space that I need for all of the furniture?" I put down some other thoughts about living space. You get this train of thought going—what do you call it? —stream of consciousness. Ideas start to pyramid.

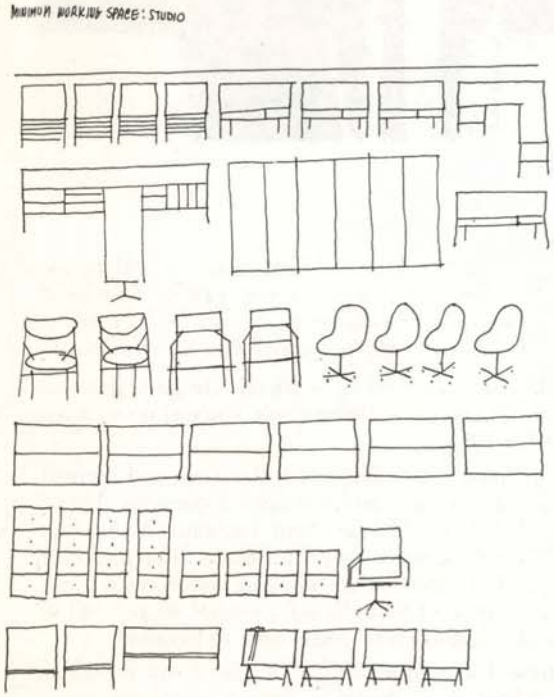
In time, I started making all kinds of entries like an idea for folded sheet, hanging three-dimensional model for a Champion Paper sales meeting; a painting that I

PEACE
IS
A
COOL
SCENE

1963

title page

I was sitting out there one Saturday morning waiting for the mail and I made a sketch of this plant. I don't know what it means because I haven't drawn for such a long time; but, all of a sudden, I have found an interest in drawing again.



inventory

might do; a welded wire mural for the new studio; a book that I've thought about; several film ideas. Sometimes I just write down the questions that I've got to answer, or decisions that I have to make, or some rather philosophical thoughts.

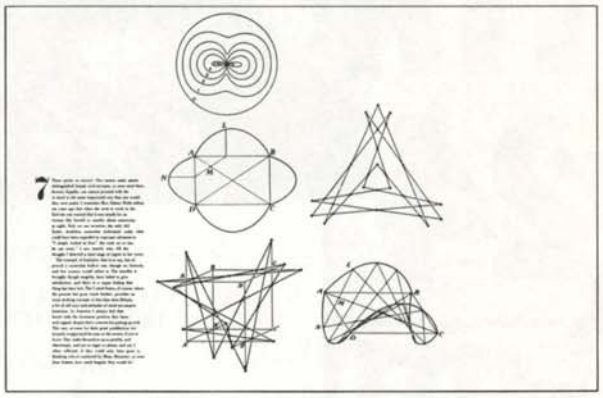
By getting these in writing, you can reread them and get new insights. The book becomes a personal diary-workbook to keep you on the ball. I've lost so many ideas by just thinking about them instead of writing them down.

I think that a problem for most of us, at least for me, is not being very well organized. I've always felt that being intuitive was the most important thing; and, by being intuitive, you could afford to forget what the other problems are . . . out here on the fringe areas of your life. I guess that I even resented organization for myself because I had a feeling that if I was organized I couldn't be creative. I've learned that that's wrong. By being organized, you can be creative more.

What is your background; how did you get into design?

I was raised in a Mennonite community on the eastern plains of Colorado. Immediately after my graduation from high school, I decided to leave home. I had no idea what I wanted to do, so I just bought a bus ticket to Sterling, Colorado. There, I was lucky enough to find a job as a stockroom boy in Woolworths.

They didn't pay me very much, but this was the early post-depression years and the value of a dollar was high. Room and board only cost me $4 a week. I guess I saved practically everything that I earned above that. After 18



3 spreads from a dummy developing an idea for a quarterly publication for the creative community; stimulation from the roots of the creative process. Suggestions included statement of philosophy about Marini, Guatemalan cut-out folk art, Muybridge and the jumping figure, sculpture, logic, mathematics for structure and form for new statements in the graphic arts, beat poetry as study for new cadence and form, etc.

months, I figured that I had enough for a couple of years of school and I left for Woodbury College in Los Angeles.

I don't really remember how I got the impulse to go into art. I had no direction from anyone and I answered an ad—something simple like "learn to draw." We corresponded and then I went out there.

The one instructor that I do remember was Si Vanderlaan. He taught life drawing and I recall that he was kind of a hero to me because he also was great with an airbrush and he did lots of posters. He was pretty good, but I haven't seen any of his work since the war.

I didn't have much fun, though I suppose mine isn't an unusual story. Many people had to do the same thing. I went to school and I worked for my room and board. In the summers, most of my time was taken up working —to exist and to earn more money for school. The first summer I worked as a plasterer's helper; the next as a carpenter's helper; the third as a welder's helper on steel construction.

On that job, I broke my leg. I was in the Santa Fe Industrial Hospital in Los Angeles for months.

Because I wasn't going to school then, I got caught in the first draft. I was sent to Fort Ord in December, 1940, and I was in the service for almost 5 years. It wasn't all in the infantry, though. They made me an aviation cadet and ultimately I became a bombardier-navigator and flew in the bombers over Germany. I was discharged in 1945.

I went to Denver University for a couple of quarters. Then I got a job in an offset house, Kistler's, the fine printers in Denver. They started me on the stripping tables until they had room in the art department and I learned something about production. Later, in the art department, I started in working without knowing what I did, meeting the demands of the printing salesmen.

After three years of this, I knew I was going nowhere. I became pretty frustrated, and then I moved to a job with Hoflund-Schmidt Typographic Service. They had just started a new concept in Denver. I think it was new around the country at that time; a combination design and typography studio. This was good experience. I learned how to run a press. I learned to set type and to design around type; and all of the very tough discipline that is needed in a type shop where you don't make mistakes.

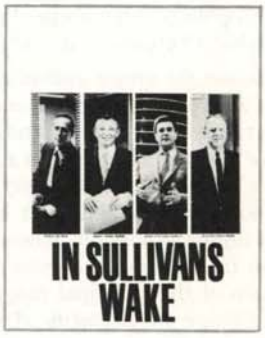
I was becoming more interested in design. I spent a lot of time looking at books, looking for an environment which I thought non-existent. Still, I felt that I should look. I became a non-resident member of the STA and corresponded with some of the Chicago people.

In 1952, the first design conference was held in Aspen. This seemed like a real break, for I was beginning to get frustrated again. I wanted to meet the Chicago people, and I did. I carried my portfolio in my hot hands and had them look at my samples. Everybody said, "Come to Chicago."

I couldn't afford to come to Chicago. So I spent the winter of 1952 making all kinds of comprehensive samples. And then I took a gamble. I came to Chicago the following Spring—on a Monday. And I went to work the next Monday for Burt Ray Studios. I was with him for seven years, the last four as design director.

In 1960, I went into business for myself.


COMMITTEE
FOR
ECONOMIC & CULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT
OF
CHICAGO



The Mayor's Committee . . . . .

I'm design consultant and a member of the Cultural Committee, one of the two groups in the Mayor's Committee for Economic and Cultural Development of Chicago. They wanted a simple mark for strong identity. Actually, the structural rationale is very simple. The dot is the central source or the City of Chicago or the Mayor. There are two committees, unified in one effort. You can build all kinds of rationale into any mark. In this case, it would be best to have a less clear symbolization and the mark can suggest a great many things: the future in space, scientific, etcetera, etcetera, or just an emotional "ever upward" sort of thing.

Chicago Magazine is a proposal we have made, to be published under the supervision of the Committee. This project is under the direction of Jack Whittle, Special Assistant to David M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Board of Continental Bank and the leader of the Mayor's Committee. The purpose of the magazine is to dispel the old image of Chicago, tell of its dynamics. You probably read the *Time* portrait of Chicago and Mayor Daley. They call it "a man's town with guts." The magazine will tell of the heritage of its creative people in all walks of life, its activities and its promise for the future.

The first dummy of a large format magazine is being used to set up budgets and editorial direction and to get the support of Chicago businessmen. The articles and materials in it are hypothetical and the art and photography are only to establish the visual of the dummy, not for our publication which would be a copyright infringement. The cover is the city flag of Chicago.

The Cummins Diesel International Division wished to establish their name in foreign markets. These ads, with a strong, abstract design approach, were slanted to those markets. The copy was repeated in six languages. The International Advertising Federation of London has given them a special award for the best institutional advertising.

Carl reads about a hundred books a year and a multitude of magazine articles. Though he has considered it, he has not taken a speed-reading course; probably because he does read rapidly, estimating his speed at about two hours for the average book unless it is highly technical subject matter. What about content?

I've never thought too much about whether I maintained a balanced reading diet. I sort of go in spurts by subject matter. I've read what I'd guess you could call the full psychological series and the social reference series. For the last two years, I have been particularly interested in zoology and anthropology. Of course, I'm interested in politics, too, and what's happening in the world around us.

I would think, for the aware individual, that the only thing you have is time and you have to use it wisely. This doesn't mean that you have to be a drudge, or lose your sense of humor, or become a bookworm and avoid having any fun. But, you know, it's the *curiosity of the individual* that's so important in design. You have to be influenced by as many things as possible. Knowledge is coming at us so fast from the sciences that you can hardly keep up. That's why two of the principal magazines I like to read on the broad scope are *Scientific American* and the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.*

A number of designers seem to be growing restless, looking for something, diverting a great deal of their attention into areas such as film. Do you have some explanation of this?

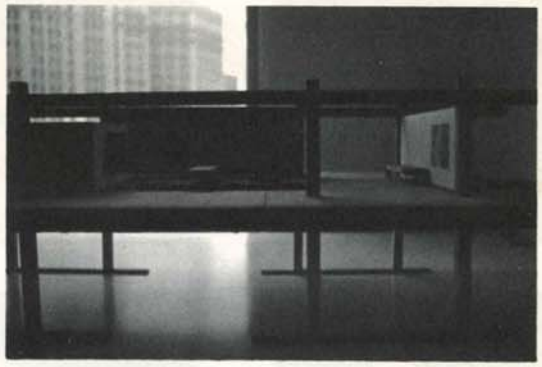
I think the dilemma for many designers is that they reach a proficiency and professional stature with the ability to solve the kind of problems we are given and it no longer has any glamour connected with it. You get a little ego-scratching in when you solve something, but somehow you feel that you need something more.

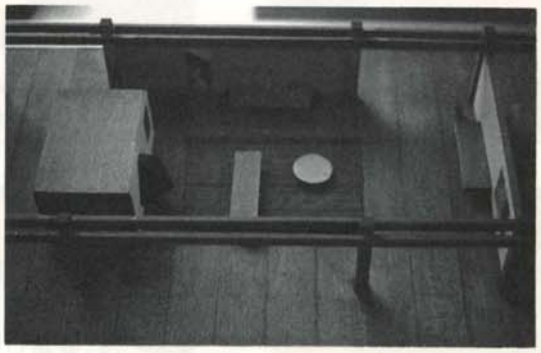
You have this long period of training and develop the insight to sort the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, to get down to where you know what the problem is. It's something close to a scientific method of our own. You search out and weigh all of the factors associated with the problem and you place these into the best relationship you can that will lead to the desired end result. Sometimes you can't help feeling that you're in the wrong business, that you could and should relate this method and the tools that you have to something bigger than what you are doing.

Somewhere, there are new environments for the designer who is "aware," who is constantly trying to grow. One of the most logical areas is undoubtedly the scientific progress we are living with. The designer will have to communicate the scientific revolution. It's made to order for our system, to take highly complex information and distill it into simple language and elements so you can communicate these complex things to the layman.

I like the scientific problem; there is more logic involved than with the consumer product.

We will face some really challenging problems of communication as we continue to find more scientific discoveries affecting our lives . . . and more automation. The public will be increasingly surrounded with things they can't understand and can't relate.





Last year, I had an interesting experience in this area. It was a conference sponsored by the National Science Foundation. There were thirty of us who met for a week at the Aspen Institute, discussing these problems of communicating the scientific revolution to the American public. The group included 20 top scientists, some college presidents, psychologists from the Rand Corporation, a theologian, and a couple of businessmen. I represented the design community.

Some of the thoughts that this stimulated for me concerned all of the areas of communications and the problems, inefficiencies and the criticisms that exist today.

The scientist is like many other creative individuals who retire to a laboratory, get involved with a problem, and solve it. Having solved it, he frequently is appalled by what technology does with his discoveries. He is naive, even as the artist is often naive, if he doesn't understand that, as a creator, he may also have a responsibility for the end result.

In his defense, he is working in a highly complex system that is really a socialistic environment, with the government backing most of his efforts. He really doesn't have a chance to communicate. But the scientist is becoming aware that he must have a voice. However, Oppenheimer tried it; they were frightened and they withdrew for awhile.

There is a parallel between this and what Marx and Engels wrote about the worker and how he was becoming disassociated, through the machine age, with the end product. This must be increasingly more so today.

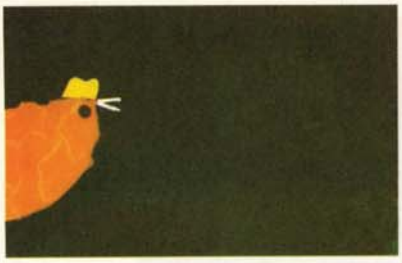
The businessman is also in a complex environment. He hires experts to handle every phase of development, production and distribution. He can no longer speak for his product. What individual really speaks for himself? Then who speaks for whom? Where is the voice and the clear, understandable communication to come from?

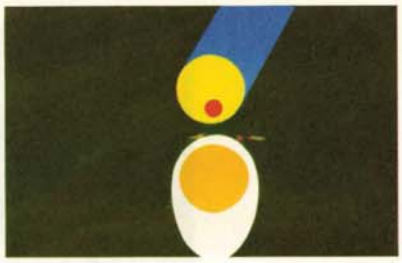
What is the house model?

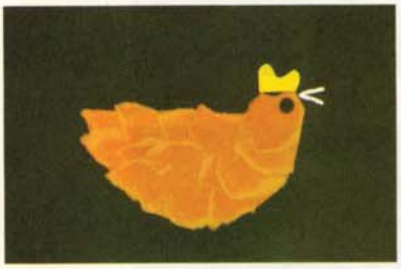
I have about two acres at the Indiana Dunes and I'd like to have a very simple place to go in the summertime. One night I stayed up until five putting together this model of what I felt was a minimum material house that could be put up inexpensively. This is based on the construction of many Japanese houses.

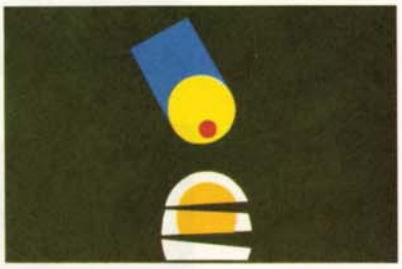
An architect would probably look at this and say, "Why did you do this? You're not an architect." I'm not; but, as a designer, you're interested in all forms of esthetics and there are similar principles involved when you're striving for the essence of things. For me it was the beginning of thought about the problem. Perhaps it was an exciting challenge to see if I could solve it by myself, even though I probably will hire an architect to do it. It's a simple solution of a house with a central core. The core could hold a small gas heater, a shower and some storage space. In back of the core, in the smallest area, would be a kitchen.

It has a deck. The deck dimensions would be repeated in the roof. It would be glass where it isn't wood and it would be screened on four sides so I wouldn't be infested with bugs.

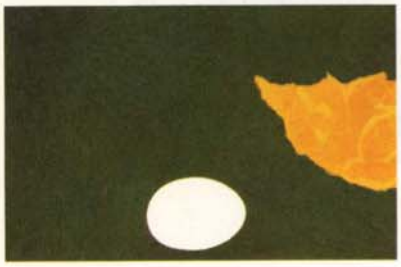


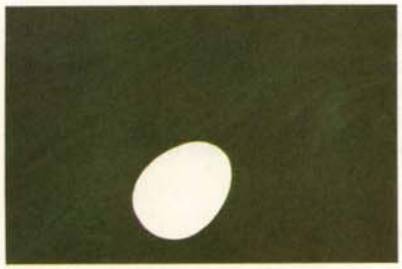


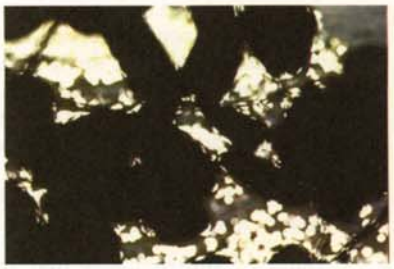


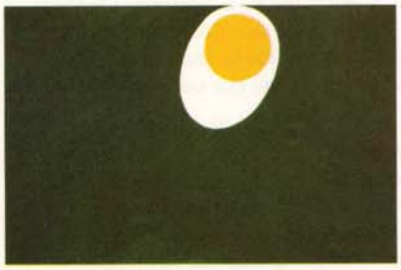


I go to see again
And to feel again
And to know again
The nature of a day

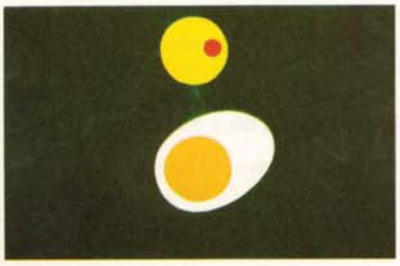


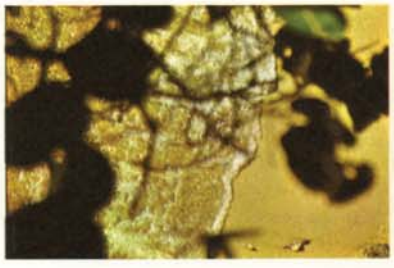






One of six 20-second animated TV commercials produced as an experiment for Tom Gorey, executive art director, Needham, Louis & Brorby.
Regehr produced these in cooperation with Rhodes Patterson, film maker and writer. They frequently work together as a creative team on projects.
These commercials have no narrative or dialogue, the soundtrack is ragtime banjo music.

















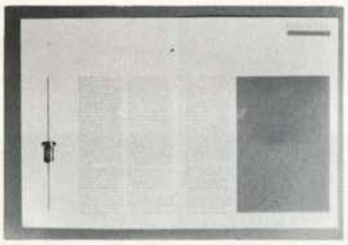



"The Nature of a Day" is a strong statement of Regehr's feelings on the lost art of observation, and learning to see again through a deep involvement with nature. Though this film was shot during a period of a few days in Jamaica, Carl describes it as "a sort of synthesis of all the still shots I have taken over the last ten years." It has just received an award from the Midwest Film Festival at the University of Chicago and the film festival at Foothill College, Los Altos, California. Regehr is currently working on two more, one on birds and another that he is shooting at the Dunes on the theme of "four seasons."

Jordan Sieber Corbett, agency specializing in pharmaceutical advertising. The company now is Sieber, McIntyre, Inc.

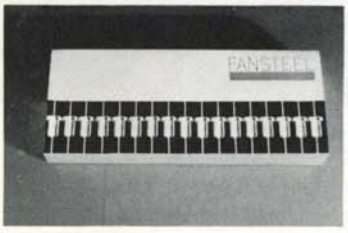
Fansteel Metallurgical Corporation, manufacturer of high temperature metals for space and electronics. The name is a corruption of German engineer's name Pfanstiehl, Americanized during World War I.

ProMedica Research and Development Corporation, Long Island. Promedica means "positive medicine."



catalog

ad



package

letterhead

annual report

On symbols and trademarks . . .

No symbol really means anything until it has had the exposure that can give it meaning. George Nelson once said "the cross would not be a valid symbol unless it had a good selling job connected with it."

There are times when it is extremely difficult to find a business "need" for a mark and I have occasionally recommended against such a project. Still, there is a solid historical precedent for the prestige that a mark, or crest, signifies. This alone may be sufficient justification, providing that misuse or overdependence on the mark does not make it a liability to the company's effort to communicate.

I'd like to go off on a slight tangent and comment on something else—post-design rationale. It is, of course, very easy to do; and a certain amount of it is all right for the PR releases and such, even though it occasionally reads like an emotional interpretation in a Rorschach test. I am really referring to certain practices of the "big" design firms where sometimes it would seem that the biggest thing they do is back up what they have with research. It seems incredible that what has been done in this, sometimes, could be executed with a straight face. You can spend $20,000 building a rationale for a label on a bottle and present your findings in a half-hour slide show telling that "the American housewife likes her salad dressing creamy, she likes it without too much oil, and she likes it tasty." The design, of course, is carefully oriented to these facts.

What has been accomplished is only to reaffirm the intuitive act of any knowledgeable and mature designer. This is expensive to the clients, but this type of selling has been developed to a fine art and perhaps you can't blame them for being impressed.

■

I was called in by the New York offices of Needham, Louis and Brorby when they were asked to prepare a mark for International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. ITT is heavily involved in most of the non U.S. communication systems in the free world, and they are very active in this country in scientific R and D. The symbol would be keyed to the new corporate advertising program in which the agency had evolved a concept of telling a three-fold story. (1) ITT is a scientific company. (2) ITT is an international company. (3) ITT has a corporate philosophy built around its plants, products and people. Here is kind of a thumbnail review of the many explorations that led to a final solution of the mark.

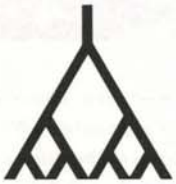
ITT is international, most simply stated as a world symbol. You can sit down and make sketches of world symbols all day long, which we did

ITT is in the communication field. It was suggested that the morse code might be incorporated

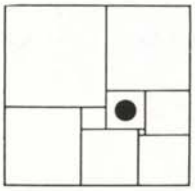
As we explored the science of communication and the related scientific symbols, we considered the vortex pattern

The echo chamber

The binary system

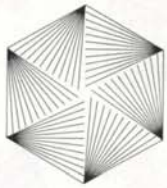


The perfect square



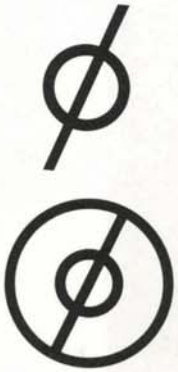
Another very direct way to relate to communication would be the network

or a network vortex



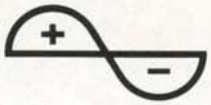
The magnetic flux symbol already says world as well as communication

The electric flux symbol



The evolving scientific symbol, as we got into into it, was the pure tone symbol—a graphic demonstration of the plus and minus above and below the line which symbolizes pure tone

This can be abstracted and simplified



One of the great marks for communications would be the infinity symbol which illustrates the sending and receiving

But that's a universal symbol that would be impossible to claim for the company. It would be necessary to make something unique out of it by attaching or affixing something

From the pure tone symbol and the infinity mark, we evolved a combined shape

Enclosed in the circle

it gave us a mark which contained all of the connotations of the processes we had explored