

EVOLUTION BY STEVEN HELLER



ON TARGET

FOR FUNCTION AND utility, the classic bull's-eye is one of the most perfectly designed of all graphic forms. No wonder it has been the point-blank logo for so many businesses, causes, and nations. Nothing is more economical than the concentric circles surrounding the center mark. Even though the target dates back to antiquity, its pure geometric format is quintessentially modern.

In days of yore, the *targe*, as it was called, was a light circular shield protecting the soldier from enemy spears (1). The earliest shooting target, based on that shield, was a bundle of wood formed into and painted with circles. A bull's-eye has always referred to the center of a target used

for archery (2).

The Royal Air Force's "roundel," the marking that distinguishes British military airplanes from others, is a target by any other name. Bull's-eyes have also been a recurring motifs in posters and illustrations (3). In the 1920s, the target was used as an eye-catching device in Russian Constructivist advertisements and posters (4). In the 1930s, *Advertising Arts* referred to "scoring a bull's-eye" with bold graphics, and used the target's center mark and concentric circles to illuminate the point. Because targets are such aggressive mnemonics, mainstream consumables such as Odol, Tide, and, most famously, Lucky Strike cigarettes have used them on their

packaging (5-6). The practice of targeting the consumer with bull's-eyes continued well into the 1950s. Later, Jasper Johns transformed the target into a Pop Art icon (7). But it was brought back to everyday usage in the '90s, when Target appropriated the red icon as its logo (8). But the same motif was employed—by the liqueur Anisetta Meltti, among others—long before Target discovered it.

It's partly the tension between the bull's-eye's hypnotic, economical form and its association with lethal weapons that makes it so intriguing. For a marksman it is an efficient tool for staying on target, but in the mind of a designer it is a powerful glyph that captures the eye (9).