

STEVEN HELLER IS THE ART DIRECTOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW. HE WRITES FREQUENTLY ON GRAPHIC ARTS AND ILLUSTRATION FOR *I.D.*, *U&I*, *PRINT* AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS. HIS BOOKS INCLUDE *MAN BITES MAN: TWO DECADES OF SATIRIC ART, 1960-80*; *JULES FEIFFER'S*

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN THE BUSINESS AND WHY?

In 1968, just out of high school, I took my portfolio—mostly cartoons—to a number of mainstream publications in New York City. My work was kind of primitive, and so it was either rejected without explanation, or I was told that it was too quirky. At that time, the underground press was in full tilt, so it seemed like a logical place to hawk my art. The editor of a small weekly, *The New York Free Press*, liked my drawings (was there something wrong with this guy? I thought) and hired me as the assistant to the art director. I had no idea what the title meant or what the job entailed. Three weeks later the art director quit and I was given a battlefield promotion. I had to learn everything from the ground up, so I went to printers, learned stripping, typesetting and basic mechanical production. Design came later. But I caught the virus and it stuck with me.

my interest was in designing—playing with type and images to create a page. In fact, I conceived of each page or spread as a work of art. Well, in the most pretentious sense it was a work of art, in realistic terms I wanted to communicate another's message in the quirkiest way. The magazines I worked for (mostly alternative culture) allowed me that freedom. My method was to design a rigid envelope for the front and back of the book and then go crazy in the editorial middle. I was influenced by magazines like *Esquire*, *Playboy*, *Avant Garde* and the *National Lampoon*.

However, in 1974 I came to the *New York Times* as Op-Ed Page art director. I was thrown into a very rigid format, and since the newspaper was printed letterpress using hot metal type, very strict production procedures were adhered to. I actually stopped designing, per se, and became more of an art editor. I'm still concerned with design, even though I'm doing very little of it myself. Now I'm more interested in the study and documentation of design history as well as the histories of political art and illustration. These are subjects about which I have written and edited numerous books.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN?

The illustrations I use can be considered art, if you agree that art is a representation of an individual's inner spirit. A lot of the drawings done for the *Book*

West. In developing alphabets that radically veered away from the venerable scripts, the Italian designers, for example, filled a need for clear, elegant and standardized letterforms. There are always people who will wed technology and art to need and produce new form.

SPEAKING OF NEW TECHNOLOGY, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING?

This summer I spent a few days at Adobe's Illustrators Workshop working with their programs. My thought was not "what will this lead to in the future" but "how will these new tools make my life easier today?" The answer: Simple procedures that once took an hour, now take 15 minutes. Which gives me more time to read a book, watch a video or develop more ideas. The down side is that since some time-consuming tasks are reduced to minutes, I'm given more work to tighten the slack.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE ADOBE TYPE LIBRARY?

At the *Times* my type use is limited to Bookman and a little Franklin Gothic. Of course, I'd rather have a good cut of Bookman than a craggy one. Moreover, despite my limitations I do have voracious type appetites and Adobe's expanding menu is quite impressive.

Digital type is, as everyone says, a revolution. And I believe that history will record the development of photo-typog-

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Review do not literally illustrate a story; they employ metaphor, allegory and symbolism to complement a text. Much of the symbolism is personal rather than universal, which contributes to a form of illustration that at its very best is, in my opinion, art and at its worst is poor communication.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF "FASHIONABLE" DESIGN?

With any art form there will always be an avant garde. Once accepted, that avant garde usually becomes fashionable and after its turn on the fashion wheel, it becomes mainstream. I appreciate some avant garde attempts and dismiss others. I like some fashions and not others.

For example, I have a fondness for art nouveau and art deco. These were significant, fashionable styles of art and design. I enjoy some aspects of what is called Post-modern veneer. I see many pleasing forms and soothing colors that don't tax my brain, but simply look nice. Perhaps they won't be so pleasing in five years and maybe they will become popular again in fifteen. There is nothing inherently wrong with fashionable design as long as there isn't the pretense that it's anything else.

DOES TYPOGRAPHY FOLLOW TRENDS OR INVENT THEM?

Typographers do both. Go back to the beginnings of "modern" type design, when literacy was on the increase in the

raphy as merely a bridge between hot metal and digital. But I will say this. Having worked with hot metal I don't have the same romantic recollections as do many of my colleagues. I remember smashed and broken type. I remember the one time that a chase of type I had worked on for hours was incorrectly locked up and, when moved, thunderously fell to the composing room floor. I preferred the simplicity of phototype. The only problem was the distortions that are endemic to phototypesetting and the bad redesigns of many phototypes.

I'd love to see a terrific Garamond designed for screen use. (Editor's note: See Page 4). And I'd like to have some of W.A. Dwiggins' typefaces, especially Metro, adapted for the digital library. In general I think Adobe is doing a remarkable job making these tools available to designers.

ARE YOU WORKING ON ANY SPECIAL PROJECTS?

I've co-authored a new book, *Designing With Illustration* (Van Nostrand Reinhold), coming out this winter. It addresses the relationship of drawing, specifically illustration, to the design process. And I am currently writing an encyclopedia of graphic design for Harry N. Abrams, Inc., which will, I hope, be an exhaustive survey of twentieth century milestones, if it doesn't kill me first.

DID YOU HAVE ART SCHOOL TRAINING?

I went to New York University for two years but dropped out to devote full time to working on the paper. When the draft called I enrolled at The School of Visual Arts (where I now teach in the MFA/Illustration program). However, I was working full time, could not attend classes and was eventually expelled, with regrets from the administration. Hence, I never really had any academic training, which I now regret. I learned how to get a tabloid out regularly, I even became intuitively proficient as a designer, but I never learned the canon of good design. In one respect that was just fine, because I didn't want to be a conformist or an ideologue. On the other hand, it's good to have the basics offered in a formal course of study. Later in life I had to teach myself those basics. And I'm still not as knowledgeable as I'd like to be.

HOW HAS YOUR WORK CHANGED SINCE THEN?

I've always preferred publication design to other forms. In the beginning,

AMERICA; THE ART OF SATIRE; SEYMOUR CHWAST, THE LEFT-HANDED DESIGNER (EDITOR); GRAPHIC STYLE: FROM VICTORIAN TO POST-MODERN AND INNOVATORS OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION. HIS NEW BOOK, DESIGNING WITH ILLUSTRATION, WILL BE AVAILABLE THIS WINTER.