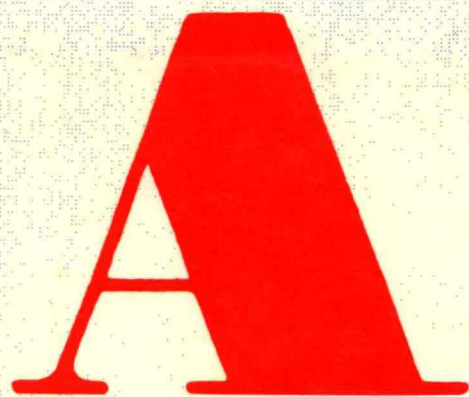


GRAPHIC DESIGN IN AMERICA



**VISUAL
LANGUAGE**

HISTORY



**GRAPHIC
DESIGN IN
AMERICA
A VISUAL
LANGUAGE
HISTORY**

This book is published on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition *Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History*, organized by Walker Art Center in collaboration with the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Following its premiere at the Walker Art Center, the exhibition will be shown at the IBM Gallery of Science and Art, New York; the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; and the Design Museum, Butlers Wharf, London.

Graphic Design in America: a visual language history/essays by
Mildred Friedman . . . [et al.]; interviews by
Steven Heller.

p. cm.

Catalog of an exhibition opening at Walker Art Center in Nov. 1989.

Bibliography: p. 256

Includes index

ISBN 0-8109-1036-5 (Abrams). —

ISBN 0-935640-31-2 (pbk.)

1. Commercial art — United States —

Exhibitions. 2. Graphic arts — United States —

Exhibitions. I. Friedman, Mildred S. II. Walker Art Center.

NC998.5.A1G65 1989

741.6'0973'074 — dc19

89-445 CIP

First edition, second printing

Copyright © 1989 Walker Art Center

Published in 1989 by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. All rights reserved. No part of the contents of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publishers.

Printed and bound in the United States

Edited by Mildred Friedman and Phil Freshman

Designed by Glenn Suokko

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth. Except where noted, the works illustrated in this book are offset lithographs.

***Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History* is made possible by a generous grant from Champion International Corporation. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.**

Major support for the Walker Art Center exhibition program is provided by The Bush Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Dayton Hudson Foundation for Dayton's and Target Stores, the First Bank System Foundation, the General Mills Foundation, the Honeywell Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Pillsbury Company Foundation, and the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature.

This book is made possible in part by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in support of Walker Art Center publications.

Contents

16	Saul Bass	6	Foreword Caroline Hightower
20	Aaron Burns	8	Opening a History Mildred Friedman
66	Matthew Carter	24	A Time Line of American Graphic Design, 1829–1989 Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller
70	Ivan Chermayeff	74	Graphic Art for the Public Welfare Neil Harris
96	Muriel Cooper	104	Changing Technology Changes Design Estelle Jussim
100	Milton Glaser	126	Design in the Service of Commerce Maud Lavin
118	Richard and Robert Greenberg	152	Europeans in America Lorraine Wild
122	April Greiman	178	From the Poster of Protest to the Poster of Liberation David Kunzle
144	Tibor Kalman	200	A Zero Degree of Graphics Joseph Giovannini
148	Alexander Liberman		Interviews with Designers Steven Heller
170	Leo Lionni	218	Plates
174	Cipe Pineles	252	Biographies
192	Paul Rand	256	Selected Bibliography
196	Louis Silverstein	257	Lenders to the Exhibition
214	Bradbury Thompson	260	Index

GRAPHIC DESIGN IN AMERICA

**GRAPHIC
DESIGN IN
AMERICA
A VISUAL
LANGUAGE
HISTORY**



Foreword

Caroline Hightower

Introduction

Mildred Friedman

Essays

Joseph Giovannini

Neil Harris

Estelle Jussim

David Kunzle

Maud Lavin

Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller

Lorraine Wild

Interviews

Steven Heller

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York

This book is published on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition *Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History*, organized by Walker Art Center in collaboration with the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Following its premiere at the Walker Art Center, the exhibition will be shown at the IBM Gallery of Science and Art, New York; the Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; and the Design Museum, Butlers Wharf, London.

Graphic Design in America: a visual language history/essays by
Mildred Friedman . . . [et al.]; interviews by
Steven Heller.

p. cm.

Catalog of an exhibition opening at Walker Art Center in Nov. 1989.

Bibliography: p. 256

Includes index

ISBN 0-8109-1036-5 (Abrams). —

ISBN 0-935640-31-2 (pbk.)

1. Commercial art — United States —

Exhibitions. 2. Graphic arts — United States —

Exhibitions. I. Friedman, Mildred S. II. Walker Art Center.

NC998.5.A1G65 1989

741.6'0973'074 — dc19

89-445 CIP

First edition, second printing

Copyright © 1989 Walker Art Center

Published in 1989 by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. All rights reserved. No part of the contents of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publishers.

Printed and bound in the United States

Edited by Mildred Friedman and Phil Freshman

Designed by Glenn Suokko

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth. Except where noted, the works illustrated in this book are offset lithographs.

***Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History* is made possible by a generous grant from Champion International Corporation. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.**

Major support for the Walker Art Center exhibition program is provided by The Bush Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Dayton Hudson Foundation for Dayton's and Target Stores, the First Bank System Foundation, the General Mills Foundation, the Honeywell Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Pillsbury Company Foundation, and the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature.

This book is made possible in part by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in support of Walker Art Center publications.

Contents

	6	Foreword Caroline Hightower
	8	Opening a History Mildred Friedman
16		Saul Bass
20		Aaron Burns
66		Matthew Carter
70		Ivan Chermayeff
96		Muriel Cooper
100		Milton Glaser
118		Richard and Robert Greenberg
122		April Greiman
144		Tibor Kalman
148		Alexander Liberman
170		Leo Lionni
174		Cipe Pineles
192		Paul Rand
196		Louis Silverstein
214		Bradbury Thompson
	24	A Time Line of American Graphic Design, 1829–1989 Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller
	74	Graphic Art for the Public Welfare Neil Harris
	104	Changing Technology Changes Design Estelle Jussim
	126	Design in the Service of Commerce Maud Lavin
	152	Europeans in America Lorraine Wild
	178	From the Poster of Protest to the Poster of Liberation David Kunzle
	200	A Zero Degree of Graphics Joseph Giovannini
		Interviews with Designers Steven Heller
	218	Plates
	252	Biographies
	256	Selected Bibliography
	257	Lenders to the Exhibition
	260	Index



Foreword

Graphic design is a ubiquitous presence in our daily lives that can engage and inform us or simply add to the visual morass of contemporary culture. Important and unimportant messages are graphically communicated throughout the day. From the face of the clock that wakes us, the morning newspaper, and the subway or expressway signs on our way to work to the weather map on the evening news and the preparation of dinner, graphics are a constant in the lives of a captive audience unaware that the profession of graphic design exists and that quality can be of consequence.

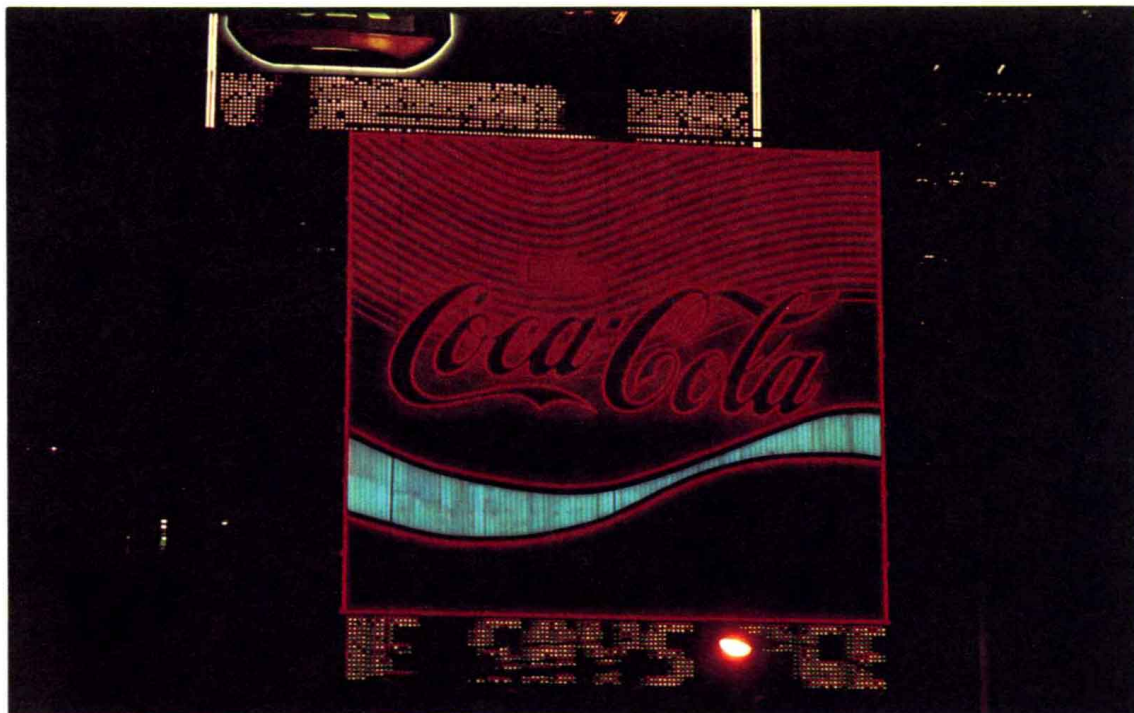
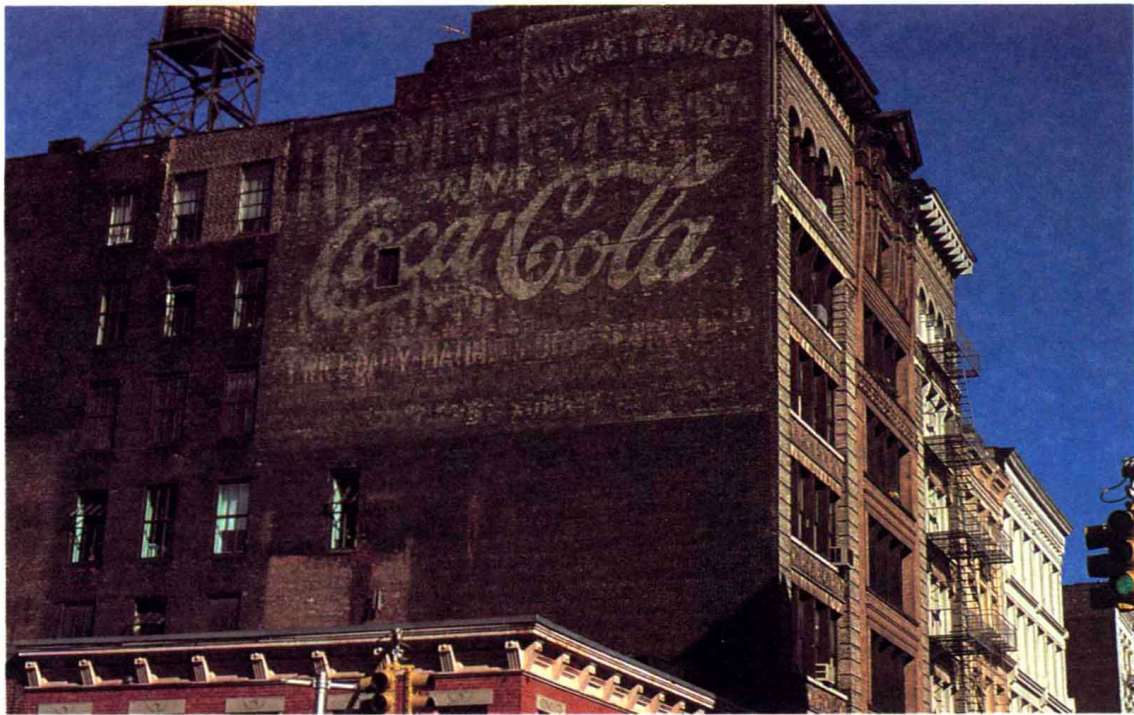
Founded in 1914, the American Institute of Graphic Arts has provided an ongoing forum on graphic design in America through exhibitions, publications, seminars, and projects in the public interest — primarily aimed at an audience of practitioners. We were therefore especially pleased to cooperate with the Walker Art Center in the development of the exhibition *Graphic Design in America: A Visual Language History*, which presents graphic design from the nineteenth century to the present in a cultural context. This book, which complements the exhibition, investigates and challenges a field that has only recently become the subject of critical analysis.

Our hope is that this major undertaking will bring a relatively new profession under public scrutiny, where it can be evaluated by an audience increasingly aware of that profession's contributions. The time has come for the capacity of graphic designers to enhance our lives to be recognized as a source of pleasure, not simply through exhibitions of work collected as an art form but as a continuing contemporary presence that, at its best, is worthy of informed appreciation.

Caroline Hightower

Director, American Institute of Graphic Arts

"Information" is a pictogram from *Symbol Signs Repro Art* (1974–1979), a publication by the American Institute of Graphic Arts for the United States Department of Transportation. This study by a committee of designers, chaired by Thomas Geismar and including Seymour Chwast, Rudolph de Harak, John Lees, and Massimo Vignelli, was an effort to bring order to the use of graphic symbols in the public realm by providing the international community with a series of visual symbols that could be universally adopted, understood, and replicated in a diversity of materials and in various dimensions.



The function of the designer is to increase the legibility of the world.

— Abraham Moles

Opening a History

Mildred Friedman

In July 1988 *The New York Times* ran an editorial bemoaning the current corporate practice of converting familiar logotypes into characterless abstractions — or, as the editorial writer put it, “lifeless blobs.”¹ Understanding the desire of ever larger conglomerates to create universal, nonspecific identities, *The Times*, nevertheless, makes a convincing case for a return to the old Prudential rock and for the continuing use of such long-standing trademarks as the fat and friendly Pillsbury Doughboy. The editorial, both witty and profound, recognizes the power of the words and images that constitute America’s most pervasive, least understood public art form, an art form that depends for its efficacy on the degree to which those words and images communicate a coherent message.

The gradual shift in the United States from production to consumption in the early part of the twentieth century stimulated the development of a graphic design (né commercial art) profession, a discipline initially geared to maintaining the essential advertising revenues of the growing number of North American newspapers and magazines. By the late 1920s American graphics had, to a large extent, moved out of the print shop into the studio. While the printer had used typography in a perfunctory way to convey a message directly, the designer sought more complex relationships among text, typography, and image, creating ever more expressive means of communication. In the 1930s a depressed market led American business to the drawing board, not to celebrate its prosperity but to rejuvenate a lagging economy: industrial and graphic designers were given that charge by the resting industrial giants.

Since that time, graphic design has played a key role in the appearance of almost all print, film, and electronic media, as well as architectural and

The Coca-Cola trademark has changed very little since its earliest appearances in the 1880s. Fading from one New York City wall, it is reasserted in vivid night lights on another.

1. *The New York Times* (20 July 1988): 26.

urban signage. Today it literally dominates our visual environment. Yet even as the century draws to a close, there is only nominal acknowledgment of the significance of this least recognized visual art form. Why this is so has more to do with cultural mores and economics than with art, for a variety of reasons. First, the taint of commerce has relegated graphic design to the status of “second class” discipline in the academic realm, where it has historically been viewed as unworthy alongside the traditions of painting and sculpture. Second, graphic design is a collaborative, interpretive form. As a musician interprets musical composition, a designer interprets verbal and visual information; consequently, the designer has a less heroic image than that of the composer’s opposite number, the painter. Third, graphic design is an art of unlimited reproduction, and so its mass-produced images are seen as less “valuable” than the unique ones of the “hand-made” arts. Today graphic design faces a new conundrum. The production of many print materials has moved from the design studio back into the office or shop, where it is no longer in the hands of trained designers but with non-designers empowered by the computer. A graphic cottage industry is emerging that returns graphics to the printer (now the office worker), one that has already impinged on the designer’s territory. Despite these provisos, it is fair to say that this omnipresent art form, and those who create it, are worthy of critical attention.

Because graphic design is a verbal-visual expression, the designer’s ideas must be accessible on several levels. In *Objects of Desire* (1986), the English critic Adrian Forty wrote of industrial design, “No design works unless it embodies ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is intended.” Similarly, the visual language employed by the graphic designer must, to be effective, have a recognizable formal vocabulary, as frame of reference is all in communications.

The preeminent American designer Paul Rand has characterized the history of the typographic arts in America as “the history of a struggle between the craftsman and the creative artist, between common sense and sentimentality.” These two strains continue to vie for attention on the American scene, for graphic design reflects the realities of contemporary life, and those realities include everything from the blatant imagery of McDonald’s golden arches to the controlled sophistication of the Borzoi Books of Alfred A. Knopf.

Many questions arise in exploring the totality of American graphic design: What have been its derivations and influences? How have the communication arts contributed to American cultural life? How have technological innovations affected design? How have social and political changes emerged in graphic design? And what is inherently American about American graphic design?

As the breadth and depth of graphic material is daunting, the contributors to this book attempt to address these questions by concentrating on

exemplary works, while at the same time providing a comprehensive view of the field. Those areas in which the graphic designer has made positive contributions to the ways in which we see and understand the world are examined; but deficiencies are also recognized, and the authors attempt to indicate where design might play a more significant, broader role.

In order to find a way into the extraordinary number and variety of designs of which we should be aware, a time line, using the terms of American Presidents as a framework, has been developed for this volume by Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller. In each four-year segment, from 1829 to 1989, the coauthors have elected to include for discussion a single development in graphic design, always pointing out the ways in which the developments relate to their social, political, and cultural environments, and thus providing a historical context for the material that follows.

One area that has had little attention in design discourse is that of graphic art for the public good — or design as a social force. Neil Harris concentrates his discussion of this little-known genre in the so-called Progressive Era, the period from about 1900 to the end of World War I, during which the recognition of poverty and health problems in the United States came under serious scrutiny by such institutions as New York's Charity Organization Society and its sister association in Washington, D.C., Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago, and the Russell Sage Foundation in New York, which provided support for a remarkable series of studies of urban life. Harris also discusses the innumerable American city plans that were beautifully described in maps and diagrams between 1900 and 1920, and he touches on the public concerns expressed in a number of publications of American companies such as New York Edison and Metropolitan Life Insurance. He points out that in the ensuing decades the American graphic designer has played an active, visible role in the education of a broad public in health, welfare, planning, and ecological concerns through such governmental bodies as the Works Progress Administration, the Smithsonian museums, and through privately funded efforts by health organizations, hospitals, and social agencies.

Related to design for public cause is the genre called "information graphics," which includes travel guides, maps, charts, and diagrams. Although the genre is not new, the proliferation of data in this information age has generated a wide spectrum of work, and an awareness of this diverse, fascinating area is essential to an understanding of contemporary graphic design.

While the impetus for design comes from many directions, the metamorphosis of the design process can be directly traced through the evolution of its tools and technologies. Changing technologies and the affect of those changes on design are the subjects of Estelle Jussim's essay; she places the practice of design within the larger frame of reference of the typographic, printing, and motion-graphics industries.

While she emphasizes the fact that technological progress does not ipso facto make design better, she points out that certain inventions have had enormous impact on graphic design, opening up new ways of seeing, producing, and combining images. Photography, film, television, and the computer have all radically altered the way graphics are conceived and the way they appear when realized.

Advertising design has been the most visible of the graphic arts. Maud Lavin approaches advertising in a radical manner. She examines the paternalistic image of the American corporation and illustrates how that characterization is abetted by design. In her essay she traces the ways in which advertisers promote products, target audiences, and control the structure of commercial communications. She raises a number of knotty questions about the designer's role vis-à-vis the client and the message the client wants to convey. She points out that the power of commercial design lies not in its formal resolutions but in the fact that it consists of images that are recycled many, many times and shared by a broadly based public. Lavin also demonstrates that designers can co-opt the methods of advertising, becoming the instigators and producers of projects that deal with serious societal needs, addressing these in much the same way that advertising addresses commerce. These are issue-oriented rather than client-oriented works; some recent examples of this innovative genre are described.

Although the field of view in this book is focused on the evolution of graphic design in America, European influences on American design are examined, particularly effects of the immigration to the United States in the late 1930s of a number of brilliant designers, many of whom came here to escape political repression. Now for the most part gone, that renowned generation (which included Herbert Bayer, Will Burtin, Ladislav Sutnar, and Herbert Matter) brought with it the modernist tradition that was the product of the visual, social, and scientific revolution of the early part of the century. Steeped in the intellectual traditions of Cubism, De Stijl, the Bauhaus, Dada, and the political movements that arose between the world wars, those émigrés looked to this country for the political and artistic freedom they had lost. They were, for the most part, experienced designers, known to American publishing and academic circles. So most of them found rewarding work quite rapidly after their arrival. (A few, like Mehmed Fehmy Agha, recruited in 1929 by Condé Nast, the American publisher of *Vanity Fair* who was familiar with European art and design, simply came to greener pastures.) There is little doubt that much of what we term American in American design today is actually an interpretation, or transformation, of those ideas that were in the remarkably fruitful minds of that group of transplanted Europeans. Lorraine Wild takes us through this history, pointing out the ways in which the aesthetics and the ideology of Modernism merged with an American vernacular. Wild believes that it was in the realm of advertising design that the separation of modernist ideas from pragmatism occurred. The two major

American design movements emerged, and parted ways, at that juncture — advertising design going in one direction and graphic design in the other. The personal expression that becomes a primary element in postwar American design moves, for the most part, out of commerce into the institutional and cultural arenas that include most of the design genres outside advertising.

The influence of European painting on American graphic design has been apparent since the turn of the century in such works as Will Bradley's posters for the little magazine *The Chap-Book*, in which the flat two-dimensionality of his overlapping figures is reminiscent of the Postimpressionist works of Toulouse-Lautrec and Vuillard. The influence from painting persists well into the century in, for example, Paul Rand's 1955 book jacket for Alan Harrington's novel *The Revelations of Dr. Modesto*, which reflects the designer's admiration of works by the artists Joan Miró and Jean Arp. Many of today's designers have looked even farther afield, and the arts of revolutionary Russia and postwar Japan have had an impact comparable to that felt earlier from Western Europe. Yet, as designers have become more self-assured, and new printing and photographic technologies have opened the door to prodigious design invention, the formal and expressive means of the designer have been less dependent on outside influences. The interaction between painting and design in America has become, to a degree, reciprocal. In commenting on popular culture, Roy Lichtenstein's comics, Andy Warhol's soup cans, James Rosenquist's billboards, Claes Oldenburg's hamburgers, Jasper Johns's flags, and Jenny Holzer's prose have used graphic design to take "high art" in new directions.

One of the directions taken by the graphic artist has been into the political arena. David Kunzle traces the course of that genre in the 1980s, comparing the protest works of the Vietnam era with the recent flurry of imagery that comes, for the most part, out of the continuing crisis in Central America and concerns that stem from the South African situation. Current domestic issues that have elicited graphic responses are associated with women's rights, gay rights, poverty and the lack of adequate affordable housing, and the scourge of AIDS. These posters of the so-called radical left are often spontaneous and "undesigned." But there is a growing category of professional work, dubbed the "poster of liberation" by Kunzle, which deals with current societal questions. Just as the Vietnam protest was slow to become a meaningful issue for the majority of Americans, many of today's painfully difficult problems, unacknowledged by many, may become central issues tomorrow, in part through the influence of the graphic image.

The attitudes analyzed in Kunzle's essay are at the far end of the design spectrum from those essentially formal and aesthetic issues addressed by Joseph Giovannini. Alarmed at what he calls the hyperactive appearance of many current periodicals and books, in which illustrations and typographic design often overwhelm the