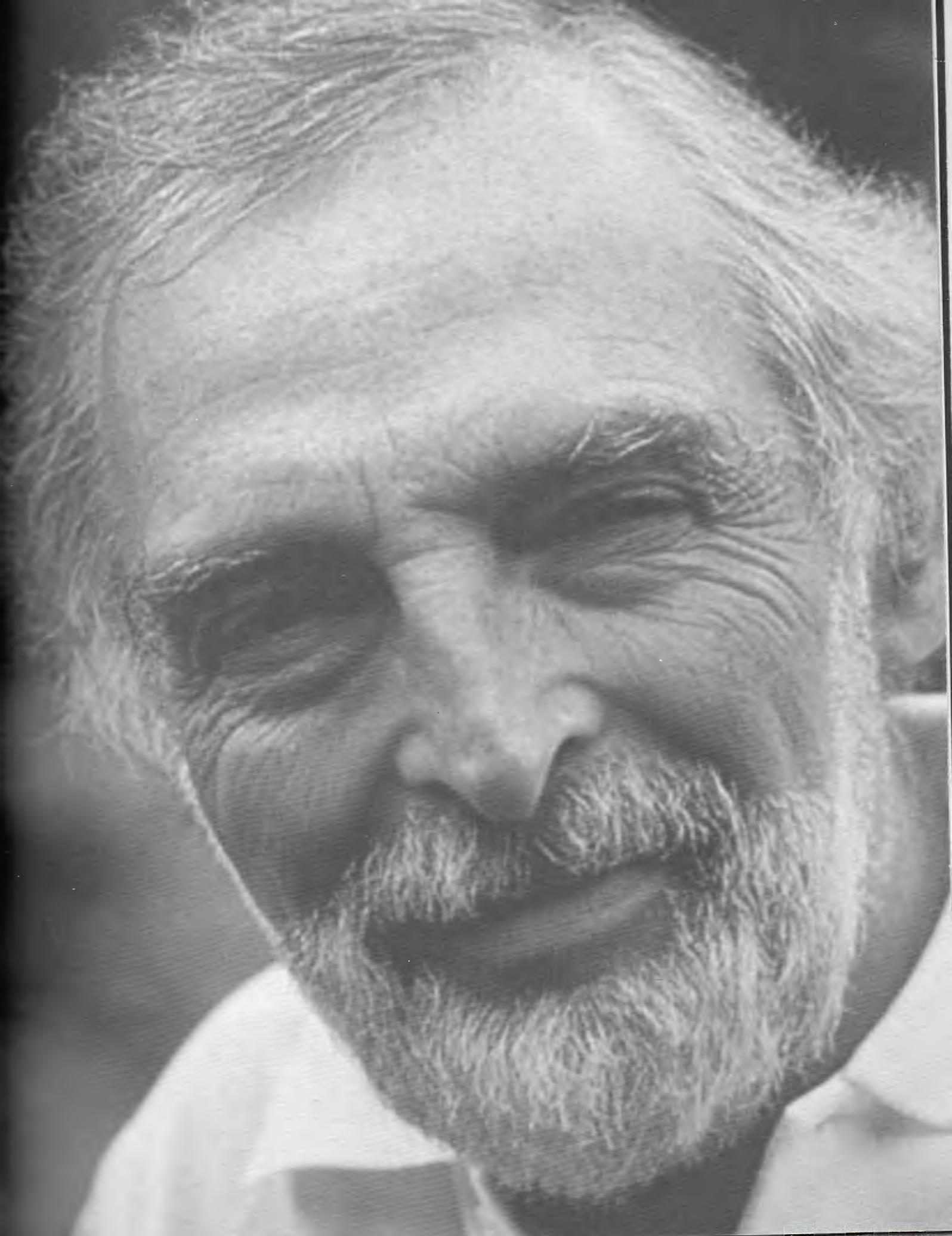




THE MAN WHO TURNED  
THE ALPHABET INTO ART

THE INFLUENCE OF HERB LUBALIN  
ON GRAPHIC DESIGN

BY JOE GIUNTA  
PHOTO BY SAHLAN SIMÓN CHERPITEL  
ARTWORK BY HERB LUBALIN





TALKING ABOUT HIS WORK ON THE MAGAZINE *U&Lc.*, Herb Lubalin said, "Right now, I have what every designer wants and few have the good fortune to achieve. I'm my own client. Nobody tells me what to do."

Indeed, Lubalin was a designer with the good fortune of not only designing *U&Lc.*, but publishing it as well. This made him the final authority on everything that went into that publication and allowed him to express his personal approach to communicating ideas. Unlike most designers, Lubalin's work has a style of its own. He did things with type and white space that brought clarity and sometimes drama, to content.

One example is his 1964 cover for the controversial magazine *Fact* where he used simple bold typography with no illustrations to convey the feature story about the 1964 Republican nominee for president, Barry Goldwater. The article asserted that Goldwater was psychologically unfit to be president. Lubalin grabbed a single item from the story and typeset it as a bold headline under the magazine's nameplate. The result was a cover that generated enough attention to justify a lawsuit by Goldwater who successfully sued the publisher, Ralph Ginsburg, for \$90,000. It put the magazine out of business.

Lubalin's association with Ginsburg did not end with *Fact*, however. He also worked on two other magazines for him: *Eros* and *Avant Garde*.

*Eros* quickly closed after the U.S. Postal Service brought an obscenity charge and *Avant Garde* folded when the magazine featured an alphabet made up of nude models. Eventually, Ginsburg went to prison, but Lubalin created one of the most popular typefaces in the mid-twentieth century—*Avant Garde*.

While Lublin's association with Ginsburg failed to produce a commercially successful magazine, it did give him an opportunity to work with someone who respected his approach to design. "Herb brought a graphic impact," said Ginsburg, "I never tried to overrule him, and almost never disagreed with him." That impact, however, was not limited to edgy magazines that were left of center.

Unlike some designers, Lubalin was able to work on either side of society's middle-of-the-road. He was as competent for *The Saturday Evening Post*, Deutsch & Shea Advertising, Fairchild Publications, and Reiss Advertising, as he was for *Eros* and *Avant Garde*.

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HERB  
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MARRIAGE

MOTHER

Families

## THE LUBALIN LEGACY

Although Herb Lubalin has been gone for nearly 30 years, his work continues to influence designers and teachers. One of them is designer/teacher Andrea Kohl. She is assistant professor of graphic design at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York. She recently answered my questions about how she uses Lubalin's work to teach design in her classroom.

### 1. WHEN DID YOU DISCOVER HERB LUBALIN?

My colleague Kristine Herrick is a big fan of him and introduced me to his work.

### 2. WHY DO YOU LIKE HIS WORK?

The beginning of all successful communication is the attraction of attention. Lubalin is able to attract the attention of the reader through his unique and playful concepts expressed through figurative letterforms. The abstracted shapes allow the reader to actively participate in the communication of the message by completing it.

The "Mother & Child" typogram is by far my favorite work of Herb Lubalin. Through skillful manipulation of the "&" he was able to convey the message of the unborn baby in the mother's womb, while retaining legibility.

### 3. HOW DO THE YOUNG DESIGNERS IN YOUR CLASS RESPOND TO LUBALIN?

Herb Lubalin is an inspiring role model to graphic design students since he had to overcome plenty of obstacles before he managed to succeed as a graphic designer.

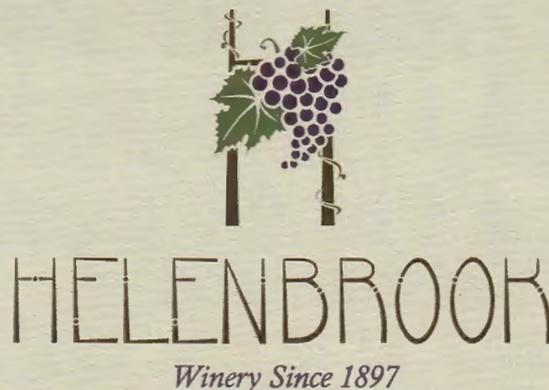
Initially he wasn't the best design student pursuing his design degree at Cooper Union School of Art and Architecture. Additionally, he struggled with his color blindness. Students often share similar experiences and therefore relate well to Lubalin.

My students are impressed by his sophisticated, witty and original concepts. Lubalin, who was questioning the modernist traditions to type design in favor of playful and eclectic typography encourages students to experiment likewise.

### 4. WHAT DO YOU TEACH YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT HERB LUBALIN?

I believe that Herb Lubalin's attention to detail in letterform design sets a meaningful example for design students. Developing the ability to see, examine, create, and manipulate non-representational shapes like letterforms is crucial in the education of the graphic designer. In order to foster the sophomore level students' sensitivity to letterforms I have offered an assignment called "Letterform Analogy" in the past. Students discover figurative shapes in letterforms and its counters. The more advanced "Logotype Design" assignment challenges students to create their own letterform designs including the design of a symbol inspired by the shape of their letterforms.

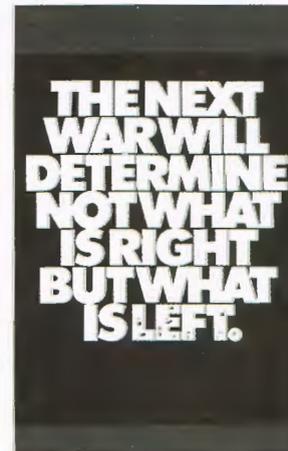
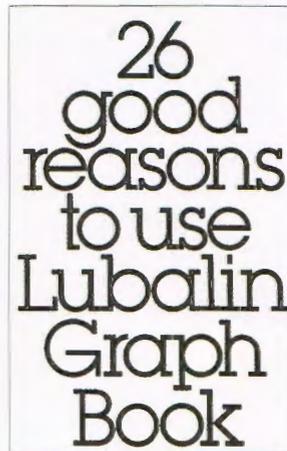
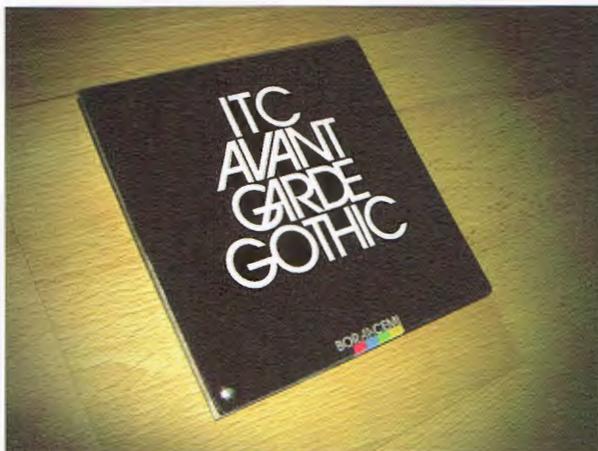
◀ *Experimenting with type design, classwork done by some of Andrea Kohl's students at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York.*



*Clockwise: Taj Mahal logotype design by Nebu Anthrayose; Helenbrook logotype design by Paris Osgerchian; G letterform analogy by Brendan Dalton; Letterform analogy by Carolyn Edgecomb; Explofore logotype design by Cassandra Lyons.*

> *The Avant Garde Gothic Typeface Booklet* which Bora Acemi produced as a student (contains information on Herbert Lubalin, the establishment of the ITC, type-classification, font-weights, and ligatures).

Center and far right: Samples of Herb Lubalin's work.



Over the years, he developed a simple and direct approach to design that used letterforms with innovation and distinction.

#### A TYPOGRAPHIC ARTIST

In 1981, the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) awarded the 62nd AIGA medal to Lubalin. In their presentation, AIGA identified his work as “typographics” because he experimented with letter combinations, which eventually became typographic illustrations. His famous *Mother & Child* magazine nameplate for a magazine that never saw print is an excellent example.

AIGA called Lubalin the “typographic impresario of our time” and art director Lou Dorfsman said Lubalin is a man who “profoundly influenced and changed our vision and perception of letter forms, words and language.”

#### EARLY STRUGGLES AND A FAST TRACK TO THE TOP

Lubalin was born in New York City 1918 and graduated from the Cooper Union School of Art and Architecture in 1939. This alone was a major accomplishment because Lubalin showed no signs of being a design success. In his entrance exam, he earned the very minimum acceptable score—64. Additionally, he was colorblind.

Nevertheless, his talent and drive must have been obvious to many of his early employers because he became an art director by 1941, only two years after graduation. By 1945, he became vice-president of Sudler & Hennessey, Inc.

In 1964, Lubalin became an entrepreneur by founding Herb Lubalin, Inc. which eventually became Lubalin, Smith & Carnase, Inc. In 1970, he founded the International Typeface Corporation (ITC) with Aaron Burns.

Although a busy and successful designer, Lubalin began teaching at Cornell University in 1972 and later taught at the Cooper Union from 1976 to 1981. In addition to that, he started publishing *U&lc* in 1973.

Throughout his career, Lubalin won more than 500 prizes and participated in numerous exhibitions. When he died in 1981, he was an icon of graphic design and his work continues to be a model of innovative design and typography.

#### THE HERB LUBALIN STUDY CENTER

For those too young to remember Lubalin's work, there is a place to see it first-hand. In 1985, the Cooper Union founded the Herb Lubalin Study Center (HLSC). The Center displays a collection of graphic design work from many of the most influential designers of the twentieth century.

Anyone who would like to see copies of *Eros*, *Avant Garde*, and *U&lc* will have an opportunity to view them along with ITC type specimens and numerous drawings and sketches.