

**INTERVIEW BY STEVEN HELLER**

*Two decades ago, Milton Glaser designed the I♥NY logo to help the State of New York in its tourism campaign. It was a reasonable problem with a simple enough solution. But neither Glaser nor anyone else anticipated how incredibly popular I♥NY would become. Not only did it quantifiably aid the fundamental campaign, it became an icon first for New York and then for countless other cities and towns throughout the world. But in the wake of the World Trade Center attack on September 11, I♥NY has taken on an entirely new and unexpected relevance: It's become the virtual seal of a determined city and nation. Discerning this, Glaser, within hours of the tragedy, set about augmenting the emotive power of the logo: To I♥NY he added the words "more than ever" and a bruise to one corner of the heart. Although the*

*State of New York, which owns the mark, objected to his alteration, the revision has been reverently posted throughout the city. Here, Glaser talks about how and why this symbol—both old and new versions—has become such an emotional touchstone.*

**HELLER:** Before we talk about recent events, I'd like to know if the instant universality of your original I♥NY logo took you by surprise.

**GLASER:** It certainly did. It's hard to anticipate what part of one's work might enter into public awareness, but the universal acceptance and ongoing reinterpretation of the I♥NY logo continues to astonish me.

**HELLER:** It certainly has been given added dimension in light of the attack on the World Trade Center. I've seen hundreds of people wearing and displaying the logo. And in response to the events, you went a step further. Why did you feel the need to alter your design? Wasn't the original still valid?

**HELLER:** It depends on what you mean by valid. Something happened on September 11 that had to be acknowledged. The first step toward healing is acknowledging that one has been hurt. In the same way that we feel more deeply toward a loved one who has been hurt, all of us suddenly realized how deeply we feel about this city. A confident giant is hard to love; a vulnerable one isn't. The original I♥NY is a pledge of affection that has become banal. The pain has made us

recommit to this now vulnerable but still magnificent place.

**HELLER:** Your bruised heart demonstrably expresses the fact that New York did indeed suffer a terrible blow, but I understand that the State of New York objected to this new iteration. Why?

**GLASER:** They felt that anything that acknowledges the 9/11 event might be interpreted as a sign of weakness.

**HELLER:** I would think just the opposite in this case. Did you decide on your own to make the change or did someone approach you to do it? And how did it become the front and back cover of the the New York *Daily News*?

**GLASER:** Like all of us, I felt the need to respond to this incomprehensible tragedy. I woke up the week after the attack with the words and image completely formed in my mind. I e-mailed it to a good friend, Pete Hamill, who now is a columnist for the *Daily News*, to ask his opinion of the idea. He showed it to the editor, Ed Kosner, who called, telling me he would run it inside the newspaper in two days. The following morning, at 6 a.m., I was awakened by a call from a local radio interviewer asking me why I designed the logo. "How do you" *Continued on page 118*



## Milton Glaser

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know about it?" I asked. "It's hard to avoid, it's on the front and back cover of the *Daily News*," she replied. Evidently, Kosner had decided to use it earlier and more dramatically than I ever could have imagined.

**HELLER:** It does resonate. I can almost hear the words "more than ever" coming from the city's collective heart. But the slogan nonetheless raises a question. Do you feel that I♥NY is designed to be about exclusion or inclusion?

**GLASER:** Alas, the sad fact is that any claim for uniqueness that intends to build community pride—"I love New York," "Black is beautiful," "Jews are the chosen people," "Jesus saves," you name it—has within it the capacity to exclude and alienate others.

**HELLER:** How does commercialism of the symbol enter into the equation?

**GLASER:** I'm not sure what you mean by commercialism. The original I♥NY campaign intended to raise the spirits of our citizens as well as produce an atmosphere that would attract tourists and businesses to New York. It succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. The logo was freely distributed for about 15

years to any enterprise that wished to use it. Later, the state decided to trademark it and control its use. Like it or not, commerce is the engine that propels this country.

**HELLER:** Then how do you feel about your transformed symbol? Should it be sold on T-shirts and buttons to commemorate this terrible event, or should the logo and everything that it is printed on be free to all who want and need it?

**GLASER:** Whatever its application, I would want some part or all of the proceeds to go toward the city's restoration.

**HELLER:** Do you feel that any transformation of the symbol is appropriate or that there is only one right way to revisit it?

**GLASER:** I'm sure there are many ways to revise the symbol. A day hardly passes that I do not get an e-mail from someone suggesting I put an American flag or the two towers within the heart. I know that potent symbols can be made by combining clichés, but they must seem inevitable, not predictable. Ideally, the effect is poetic rather than logical. The phrase "more than ever" is explained and illuminated by the wounded heart. I can only judge its effect by the response of the first two people I sent it to. They both said the same thing: "It made me want to cry."

**HELLER:** How do you feel about the abundance of generic red-white-and-blue and flag imagery that has sprung up since the tragedy? Is using patriotic imagery the most effective way to bind us together, or does it somehow neutralize the experience?

**GLASER:** While driving back to the city from the country last week, I was almost run off the road by a battered yellow Chevy sporting two flags and

the words "Nuke the bastards" written crudely across the trunk. This sort of ardent patriotism always makes me uneasy. On the other hand, at this moment in time we all desperately want to express our solidarity around a powerful symbol, and because a nation's flag is familiar and available, it serves that purpose.

**HELLER:** Do you feel there are any designs that could truly capture our sadness, fears, and hopes?

**GLASER:** I haven't checked the AIGA Web site—not out of indifference, I've just been using my time differently—but given the quality of professional practice in America, I'm sure there are many excellent ideas emerging.

**HELLER:** Is there another symbol that you yourself would like to put forth that further sums up your feelings, and by extension all our feelings, about the tragedy?

**GLASER:** Not so much about the tragedy, but perhaps about what we must do now to recover from it.

**HELLER:** Would that take the form of a symbol, or would action or deed be more effective in terms of recovery?

**GLASER:** Both are needed.

