After arriving at Cranbrook Academy of Art for my very first visit to these hallowed grounds, my initial reaction was not much different from anybody else's. The Cranbrook campus is imposing. Set in the plush, wooded surroundings of Bloomfield Hills, a suburb just outside of Detroit (and only blocks away from Isiah Thomas' mansion!), the campus easily lives up to its idyllic image.

On the inside, however, the design studios, are a different story altogether. After having read the book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*, and seeing the ultra slick, beautifully detailed, perfectly executed two- and three-dimensional designs, I was stunned to see the environment in which these were created. I can't explain exactly what I had expected, but the last thing I had in mind was the image of a hippy commune in Northern Oregon during the early 1970s. But that's about as well as I can describe it. There were dogs running around, babies crying, and not a square inch of unused table space. The place was packed with couches, microwaves, chairs, books, pots and pans, dog bowls, computers, all haphazardly partitioned with makeshift panels and dropcloth curtains. I was impressed.

However, during my stay at Cranbrook, I was informed that it hadn't always been like this. Most students I met at Cranbrook consider the book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse* a testament of times past and the book itself had given rise to a need to move on. As one student explained, the change in environment was somewhat reflective of a different attitude towards design and life in general.

Following is an interview with Katherine McCoy, head of the Graphic Design Department at Cranbrook. The interview was initially meant as a series of questions about the book. Later on, however, some of the students, as well as Cranbrook alumnus Edward Fella, became involved and the interview turned into a discussion about the new direction in which they felt design was headed and other related topics.

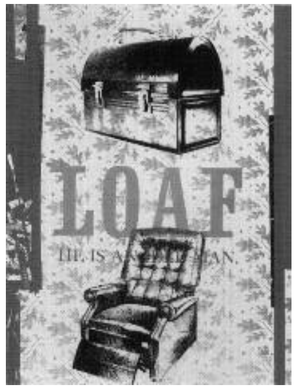
3...days atCran-Brook

Emigre: The Modernist standpoint as expressed by Emil Ruder was very much against the use of idiosyncrasies in design, particularly regarding the use of typefaces. He envisioned the use of a neutral typeface (Univers), aloof from all national considerations. Cranbrook's work is exactly the opposite. It is instilled with American cultural and vernacular references and relies heavily on the English language with wordplay and verbal aerobics. Are you consciously trying to create a more "local" non-universal visual language? **Kathy McCoy:** Mike (McCoy) and I have been very concerned, since the early seventies, since reading Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and *Learning from Las Vegas*, with the need to learn how to be one of a kind, while at the same time speak to the values of our audiences. Whereas with Modernism, it was the opposite. And I know this personally from having merged into graphic design as a Swiss School designer. We were trying to impose a universal language on every client because it was the right thing to do. We had a meta system. We knew better than our clients did, we knew better than our audiences did, and we were going to impose a universal visual language. And then there developed a growing awareness that it just wasn't really reaching people. Although, in fact, it turned out to reach corporate people pretty well. The reason why it wasn't reaching people reflects the growing ethnic awareness in the United States in the late sixties and seventies, when ethnic groups became aware of and took pride in their heritage and their uniqueness. The emphasis up to then had been to more or less become as American as possible, and to be part of the mass society. Lately we've moved into an era of more cultural fragmentation and ethnic celebration. Marketing has changed from mass marketing to targeted marketing, and design should also be tied more to people's specific values. **Emigre:** When your work becomes this personal and when it celebrates local culture and includes its vernacular, how do your students deal with that when, for instance, they go and work in Holland, which they do a lot? How do they deal with these ideas of the vernacular and the intricacies of wordplay in the Dutch language? Does that not present a problem?

Kathy: That should really be answered by someone who has worked abroad but unfortunately no one here has. Isn't it a little strange to see Robert Nakata's postage stamp for the Dutch Railroad? It's in Dutch. So is he a cultural chameleon? In a way, isn't that an aspect of what a designer should be? You have to be a chameleon to shape your message to the audience so that you can resonate with that audience. **Emigre:** Where does Cranbrook's interest in Dutch design stem from? **Kathy:** I discovered Dutch design for myself around 1982. We went to Holland and saw some of the work and we recognized there were concerns and enthusiasms similar to ours'. Even if you can't read the words, there is a very visual character in their work that is uniquely Dutch. There's a lot of humor and irreverence, and poking holes in pretension. What I really admired about Dutch design and why I brought some back to show the students that first trip (and then I brought a whole bunch back after my sabbatical and it turned into an exhibition), was how Dutch it was. It was authentic. There was a straight line progression between early Modernism, De Stijl and Piet Zwart. You can trace the lineage all the way through the decades, and Piet Zwart was still lecturing at GVN (Dutch Graphic Designers Association) meetings in the middle seventies, telling them about what they were doing wrong, and what design should be. The designers we met, we noticed, were looking to their history and were including early modern forms and references out of a direct cultural memory. And I felt that a lot of this late Modern or Post-Modern work was somewhat analogous to what was happening in the US with New Wave. But the Dutch were doing it for authentic cultural reasons, whereas we were doing it as if we were mining history. We'd say "Isn't that vernacular nifty," a banquet of stuff ready to be appropriated. That's why I was interested in Dutch design. Maybe we could look at it as a role model. Maybe we could see what operations they were carrying on, and we could find what might be the equivalent for us that would achieve the same authenticity. I could ask myself, I'm from Detroit, now how do I reflect my culture here in Detroit? How do I reflect my history? What is my history? Not to imitate Dutch design, but to find a parallel.

> "There are social as well as political questions inherent in the new Cranbrook projects. In the supposedly classless United States, what are these designers doing raiding the manual worker's vernacular. When Paul Montgomery designs a portable microwave oven that resembles and even serves as an analogue to the workman's lunchbox, or when Lisa Krohn designs a personal computer that looks and unpacks like a tool kit, they are trying to link the labor cul-ture of the manual era to that of the electronic. There is a social awareness, a certain with, and utility here, but there are also risks in adopting vernacular motifs. It runs the risk of patronizing workers in old patterns of labor; and it might also patronize the more sensitive users of the new equipment, plucking at their guilty consciences. After all, theirs, in a roundabout way, are the jobs that have supplanted the old manual ones."
> Hugh Aldersey-Williams, *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse.*

Emigre: What do you think about Hugh Aldersey's concerns regarding the use of vernacular elements when he raises the question "what are these designers doing raiding the manual worker's vernacular?" He mentions that there is a social and political risk involved, that it might patronize the manual laborer. **Kathy:** The piece that Hugh was referring to specifically was Paul Montgomery's portable microwave oven. The design makes a reference to a working man's lunch box. I don't agree with Hugh's point. Many of us had lunchboxes like these. I don't really see that it's not part of our culture. Hugh is from a more class-conscious society, and may not realize that America is much more a mass society where all of us share the working man tradition. Although Hugh wasn't really talking about graphic design, he could have very well been talking about Scott Zukowski's "Loaf" poster too, because he used similar working man's images. Scott's poster is about breadwinning and the working man. It is a theme that runs through his work a lot. That's his family background, so he wasn't superimposing an ethic; it's his ethic. **Emigre:** But the audience doesn't know that about Scott Zukowski... **Scott Makela:** Well, then you should ask yourself, who is more important, the designer or the audience? Sometimes it is fun to give yourself more pleasure and let the audience take what it can. Why should they crowd me in my experience? **Kathy:** Also, a lot of the appropriated images that are used are



Scott Zukowski. Poster, 1990.

clichés, and are almost authorless. By repeatedly appropriating things that are out in the environment, without any identifiable source, they become part of a universal popular culture. They speak very clearly to the audience. Everybody knows what they mean, and the context that the designer puts them in will give them a certain slant. The "Loaf" poster is a good example. It says: "He is an idle man." and you have to decide whether you agree with that or not. When is he idle? Sitting in his lounger? Or is he an idle man who is working very hard physically, but not mentally? What does that mean? What do you think? What's your bias?...**Edward Fella:** Or is he out of work? That was part of the discussion. The word "Loaf" has a double meaning. It is also a verb as in "Gee, all these people are loafing," when the truth might be that they're unemployed because there is no work, that masses of people are idle for other reasons than the fact that they themselves are somehow responsible. There might be no demand for their physical labor. Those were the questions that Scott Zukowski was raising with that particular poster. Also, it is important to know that that poster was a critical exercise. It was not meant to convey a particular message, the way Paul Montgomery's lunchbox was meant as a product. So the two, even though they use the same imagery, were done in a totally different context. However, in Montgomery's case too, it was hardly condescending. It was the idea of celebrating the working man or the idea of work, that this was not something that should be ignored or marginalized or somehow made invisible. **Kathy:** Hugh also touched on a related discussion about the use of French Post-Structuralism and literary theory. He assumes that because there is a Marxist element in the literary theory, it is strange for largely upper middle-class graduate students in the Midwest to be applying these ideas. He was questioning the appropriateness. I think probably a lot of those ideas are fairly workable without that particular brand of late 20th century European intellectuals' Marxism. I think these ideas bend fairly well to an American social democratic populace. It can be anti-authoritarian, but in an American popular ethic, or better yet, a frontier individualist ethic, as opposed to the European late Marxist ethic. Hugh might contend that you can't separate it from the Marxism, but we feel you can.

! Loud dog bark !
! Loud dog bark !
! Loud dog bark !
! Loud dog bark !
! Loud dog bark !
! Loud dog bark !

Emigre: When I was in Switzerland, I met with many young Swiss designers who, each in their own way, were revolting against the legacy of designers such as Emil Ruder and Armin Hofmann. They kept mentioning that Swiss Design "oversimplified" things, they mentioned that it "reduced the truth." My comments on some of the Cranbrook work would be that it often overstates the contents. Sometimes you can't see the trees for the forest. Is it possible to overstate the designs by using too much personal or cryptic or ambiguous meaning? **Scott:** Of course you can overstate messages. You try to draw a line, but there's a lot of work produced at Cranbrook that goes way over that line. But those are the things that shape you, and you can always pull back. If you don't go out far enough, you will never know what's possible. **Ed:** You know that adage about science taking very complex ideas and trying to simplify them, whereas philosophy takes fairly simple ideas and complicates them? Those are attitudes that exist within design, too. Sometimes, when there are

Katherine McCoy, P. Scott Makela and Mary Lou Kroh.
Page from the book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*, 1991.

Book Format Design Concept.

The intention of this book format is to raise some questions about normal syntactic expectations in our readers. These ideas began in the essay "The New Discourse," published in *I.D.* (March/April 1988). The basic page proportion is based on a classical or traditional text block centered horizontally with generous margins on all sides. The Bodoni Book (by Bitstream) body copy face is generously leaded and justified, both also traditional book approaches. A centered axis runs through the copy block like a 'fault line' that offsets the right half of the text from the left a fraction of a horizontal line space. In the essay, word pairs are interwoven through the copy block organized on the centered axis. (This idea comes from the 1989 Design Department Poster.) The word pairs are dualities that describe to the range of possibilities in design: material/immaterial, geometric/poetic, critical/lyrical, etc. The tension point created by this central fault line refers to the creative tension found in design in the resolution of seemingly oppositional values, philosophies and forces such as art and science or the visual and verbal. This visual theme suggests the multivalent, ambiguous and continuously changing nature of design.
This centered axis is referenced in the other essays as a thin vertical space (like a "lazy line" on a Navaho blanket) that runs vertically through each centered copy block. The line should be almost subliminal, almost not noticed. On the other hand, it almost seems to indicate that the page's text is divided into two columns, so the reader must see if reading sense comes from reading the full line across the lazy line. The page numbers are reversed out of a small block that has also been fractured on the fault line of each page. Since the essays are all together at the beginning of the book, the centered text block of Bodoni is a constant in all the essays to unify the section.
The book's title logotype continues the idea of the fault line. Although each word itself remains in horizontal alignment, the frames that carry the words are fractured slightly as they cross the central axis of the type unit. The head and subhead are deliberately intermixed to encourage alternate readings, including "The New Cranbrook Design" and "The Cranbrook Design Discourse."
A Victorian-era face called Egyptian (by Bitstream) is used in some of the heads, subheads and as part of the caption text. It has a 19th century book text look to it. It is frequently mixed with an early Modern face called Geometric (by Bitstream), a close relative of Futura.
The text, quotes, captions and photos are positioned to just meet at their left or right edges, suggesting patches of type or photos "pasted" onto the page. This sort of magnetic attraction between elements is also a departure from layout "norms." The images are generally centered in white space with generous margins, a traditional convention. The caption text faces are Geometric Bold, Bodoni Book and Egyptian; the various faces differentiate the various elements of the captions.
The intention is a conservative format rooted in classical book design, but with subtle interventions to break the rules of normalcy. Hopefully, on a quick scan, the pages appear traditional, but when read will reveal subtle aberrations that make the reader conscious of the syntax or grammar of book text.

Katherine McCoy

fairly simple messages to convey, the philosophical approach, complicating them, makes them more interesting. Another approach to design when you have very complex messages to convey is to synthesize and simplify them. **Kathy:** Every project is different and requires a different kind of treatment. Once you leave Cranbrook, you have to be capable of doing the range of design approaches ...**Ed:** Right! And nobody is advocating this "overstating" approach for a manual for, let's say, brain surgery. This "overstated" approach frequently is done for things that are cultural messages that would include a time, place, date and name, and where there isn't really anything in the information that's very complicated. But the culture that surrounds it, the context, is very complex, and that is what's put into these pieces.

! Baby cries !
!! Baby cries !!

Emigre: Part of the work produced at Cranbrook is explained as a reaction against Modernist ideas. In the book *(Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse)*, it is stated that there are "serious doubts about the function of the International Style as a means of visual communication," and that students have "challenged the sterility of this 'universal design'." But most of the work that you do here, in a reaction to Modernist ideas, is work that is played out in very ideological projects. It is not played out, for instance, in corporate identities, which is really where, in your eyes, Modernism has failed. The Cranbrook book shows posters for the most part; there is not one corporate identity shown. **Kathy:** In the alumni part of the book there are several logotypes. But yes, we really chose to publish the more polemical work. People come to Cranbrook after doing very systematic, program-driven work as professional designers. The idea is that during the two years at Cranbrook, you can involve yourself in more personal, more culturally oriented work. One thing that might not show up, but is certainly embedded in my own personal process, and I think it probably comes out in a lot of the critiques I give of work, was in an ongoing project called the "Vernacular Message Sequence." This project was more or less the foundation of our approach to graphic design, although we didn't show too many examples of this in the book. This project's sequence goes from the extremely analytical, reductivist approach, where you are working on a message analysis and coming up with hierarchies and structure as the entry point, before proceeding to the more creative expressive personal phases of the project. The project covers the full range, from the highly objective to the highly subjective. I believe that today, everybody learns this in undergraduate school, or has learned it on the job, before they come to Cranbrook, so we don't spend too much time doing that anymore. It's embedded in their thinking. It might not be visible in the final manifestation, but hopefully, as you approach the content, as you are reading it, you will get an intuitive sense of that structure. Nobody is following grids much, currently, but that thinking is embedded in our student's methodologies.

Scott: Are you saying that it might be interesting to see some work produced here that would challenge a more systematic approach? **Emigre:** Yes, I would find it interesting to see the experimental work that is done here be applied to, let's say, a huge corporate identity, instead of posters only. **Scott:** I think it is possible. It's one of many things possible, but it doesn't necessarily have to be studied here. Many of us have come to Cranbrook to more or less de-professionalize, and that means also ceasing to work on systematic projects for a while, to give our brain cells a little bit of a break and to look into other directions. **Kathy:** Scott Santoro has taken the experiments of his student work and is beginning to apply them to his professional work. Of course it is not quite as radical, but that is because he is working with different parameters, with strict program criteria.
Emigre: But most of the work done by Cranbrook graduates is still for art institutions or culturally oriented projects. **Kathy:** Not all of it is, but yes, you will see that an awful lot of the work in the book is for somewhat culturally connected clients. One thing we talk about a lot here is the message, and how it is the designer's duty to take somebody else's message and give form to it, and how your design is only as interesting as the message. So one thing that people do when they leave here is look for the interesting clients who have something worth saying, as opposed to, for instance, discount shoe stores. **If it's banal going in, it's going to be banal coming out, no matter how fine a designer you are.** So on the one hand it's a process of natural selection. The work of the people that leave here is more appropriate for culturally connected things, but they're also very consciously seeking out interesting, worthy clients.

Emigre: To me, what seems to be the most ambitious idea behind Cranbrook is your wish to provide a place for individuals to develop a personal and individual approach to design. Is it not inevitable that a sameness will surface as a direct result from working so closely together? Doesn't it make sense to think that the only way to develop an individual approach is by working by yourself, maybe even somewhat secluded from outside influences? **Scott: Something we all try not to do is work like each other, although we don't work that way very consciously. I believe that in some ways, the more interchange there is, the more our work tends to change in a direction opposite from our classmates.**

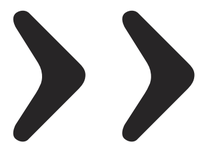
Emigre: But I do see a certain sameness in the work coming out of Cranbrook. There are characteristics in a lot of Cranbrook work that I can recognize as being Cranbrook work; for instance, Mark's poster for the Pet Lamp. I think this is a beautiful poster, but to me it is a particularly Cranbrook poster. The obscure photograph, the highly personal, abstract graphic elements, the typographic treatments, the various layers of messages both informative and more personal or ambiguous, the absence of a traditional typographic hierarchy. It is very reminiscent of Alan Hori's work, who I feel pushed that particular approach to its limits. And people have used this approach in a variety of ways. I also don't think this is bad, but I do see it as a recurring visual approach. Often people refer to it as a style, which you dislike, but still I see it being created. And to me it seems inevitable that this would happen, because you work so closely together.

Mark D. Sylvester. Poster, 1990. (Pet Lamp design by John Davison.)

Kathy: **First of all, style, as an art historian understands style, is the visible manifestation of shared values, cultural values, sociological values. We're really not aware of it as a style so much as a shared set of concerns that we all talk about. So yes, I guess there's going to be some continuity because there is this conversation going on at any given time.** Gordon Salchow from the University of Cincinnati wrote a piece for *Print* magazine a few years ago about that. The article was in response to an accusation that his school has a school style, and Philadelphia College of Art has a school style, etc. He wrote that it's quite natural to have a style, and that if a school does not have a school style it doesn't have a developed philosophy or value system. So you should have some continuity or it means there is no structure. The question then is how do you balance individuality with shared influence? You can't help but influence each other.

Scott: The first thing that happens when you come to Cranbrook is that you find yourself in a vacuum. You're in the middle of Bloomfield Hills, you can't find any places to eat, or any of the other distractions that you used to have that would offer some "air." There is a kind of fasting period that you go through when you first come to Cranbrook. And then also, at least for me, I found myself surrounded by this Midwestern "normalness." Michigan is "hyper" normal in a way. It has really affected my work a lot. And everyone is affected differently. Everyone is in shock the first couple of semesters. **Kathy:** But when you get here, don't you immediately set about to make your own rules and statements? When we looked at the show ("Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse") in the museum right after it opened, there was a strong sense that everybody was looking at it as history, not as something connected with what the current students were doing. **Ed:** People have asked me what will happen at Cranbrook because of this book, whether it is going to solidify Cranbrook. Even though Cranbrook always had a reputation, the current students are the first generation that has to deal with the effect that a book like this will have. Let's face it, this book now gives it a kind of certification or legitimacy. Will people be intimidated by that, or will they feel that they have to work this way, or what? **Kathy:** I am surprised that people look at the book as if it were some sort of monolithic body of work, while in fact it represents the work of many different groups, little clusters of people, who each were adamantly different than the people preceding them, who are also in this book. **Ed:** Yes, that was precisely my personal experience at Cranbrook. The group that I was with felt very strongly about not being a continuation of what went before, and the group after me felt just as strongly about us. And I don't foresee this changing because of the

"When I was at Cranbrook there never were any dogs or food. We only had Martinis. No food, no animals at all, no babies...not even a fax!" —Edward Fella



book. And as a reaction to *Emigre*'s comment that there is a sameness in the Cranbrook work, I have to say that there is a sameness when everything is individual. That in itself is a particular style. Just like order and chaos. All chaos looks like chaos, but all the individual elements of chaos might be very different, just as the individual elements of order are sometimes very different. And we are just as guilty of looking at the kind of glossy professional work that you see all around you and just writing it off as all being the same. We say it's all slick, it's all sterile, whereas if you really look at it closely, it has a lot of differences. So it happens on both ends. **Emigre:** I think you are exaggerating about the differences that exist in Cranbrook work ...**Ed:** But there are differences. The students themselves are very different from each other, different backgrounds, interests, different types ...**Laurie Haycock:** *Except they are all still the type that would go to Cranbrook. And that's a very particular type. Among all the kinds of graphic designers in the country, there's a particular type that are somehow disappointed with the profession and want time out to start over. Many of us came to Cranbrook because we saw what was going on here and we admired those who were doing it, but we also feel a need to react against that. I don't know anyone who comes to Cranbrook saying I want to be like this or that. They'd be stupid to say that. A lot of us have reacted very strongly against the making of these very complex messages. I think what we may be seeing in the next wave is this really flatfooted, very direct, really empty space, almost back to Modernism type of work, only more quirky. There is definitely something going on that is a direct reaction against what this book* (Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse) *contains. And in my mind this book coincides perfectly with graphic design reaching the limit of complexity. This approach was taken to the most gorgeous extent, the most hyper, decadent, baroque means of expression. And many of us have said yes, it's beautiful, but it's enough, let's move on.* **Emigre:** Isn't that the history of design in a nutshell? This going back and forward between objective and subjective, from rational to emotional, from simple to complex? Are we ever going to head into an entirely different direction? Or is that possible at all?

Laurie: *I think what will be different is two things: the kinds of subjects that you start seeing design being wrapped around and also the technology that is now involved which allows anyone to do it.*

Kathy: I don't think it can possibly return to late sixties minimalism. We know too much, there is too much pluralism.

Scott: But what is your impression of Cranbrook? You mentioned that you were somewhat intimidated, especially after reading the book. **Emigre:** Yes, I was intimidated. After reading the book, I was expecting to meet a group of intellectuals who would have lengthy discussions about design theory and quote from Derrida and Foucault. I seriously considered reading up on my French Philosophy before flying down. But most of the discussions I've had here weren't much different from the ones I have with most designers. What has happened with all the reading in Post-Structuralist French literary theory and Post-Modern art criticism? **Kathy:** It's been more or less digested and internalized. **Scott:** I don't think it is arguable anymore. **Kathy:** It is still there. Scott and Laurie's *Sex Goddess* poster demonstrated a continued interest in multiple readings. But we don't spend a lot of time arguing theory because everybody already knows it. **Emigre:** But I was so disappointed to find out that, for instance, Allen Hori never talked about his work. And here's a designer that you would really like to hear talk about his work because maybe there will be new levels of meaning surfacing that will allow you to enjoy his work even more. **Kathy:** In crits, after a lengthy discussion, we would get to a point where you just felt like asking him, "But Alan what does that mean?" It all means something to him, but it couldn't be put into words. **Ed:** He just couldn't express it. **Kathy:** Some of the meaning was subverbal. But much of his content was about verbal communications theories - for instance the text in his *TooLips* or *Sutral* posters. Although Allen read and drew on these ideas, they did not come up in his discussions much. Perhaps that is because there is a lot of the intuitive artist in his working method. **Laurie:** *With all these dogs running around and babies crying, visitors to Cranbrook will go home thinking hmmm, ... not much theory going on there at Cranbrook, but a very interesting family life. And we laugh about it, but I think that it's not just a comical coincidence. There is a kind of shift taking place from the heavily theoretical in life, to an interest in more ordinary values. We're looking at phenomenology again, and talking about "real" experience. There will always be a theoretical thread going through all our work. But what has happened is that a lot of people felt exhausted by what theory got them or didn't get them. And in fact, ordinary experiences, things like having a baby or keeping dogs, in a way, are part of the theory continuum, because they are very distinct reactions against theory or a reaction after theory.* **Scott:** Last year, people started reading Kerouac and Bukowski again. It's interesting to see how someone else lives. We almost forgot how rich those "real" experiences are. Sometimes work that is formed from theory can be very ...**Kathy:** One thing about Post-Structural theory was that it was all about words. It was about verbal language, and it was about seeing visual language as an analogy to the verbal process. Brad Collins used to go around the studios saying that language precedes thought. As if you can't think until you know language, as opposed to thought preceding language. I think people got an overdose of verbal theory. Also, in hindsight, it strikes me that the highly cerebral verbal character of Post-Structural ideas is particularly male in its concerns. I think we are now balancing that discourse with a more subjective, less verbal, experiential inquiry that could be considered a more female sensibility. Both seem very valuable to design. **Ed:** Yes, and theories such as Post-Structuralism, for instance, lead to a narrow kind of endpoint that finally say that everything is interpreted and nothing really exists, which becomes laughable after a while. Post-Modernism was also about the notion that there was no more real experience, everything was jaded, and a lot of people ended up saying that this is a lot of crackpot stuff. **Emigre:** So did this particular approach fail just as Modernism did?

Ed: I don't think that Modernism failed. In design, when people refer to Modernism, and particularly when they refer to its failures, they usually are referring only to so-called Swiss design, which is only one segment of Modernism. Modernism includes a lot more than this kind of narrow thing that is usually looked at, and particularly when it comes to the failures, if they even were. The biggest problem with Modernism was that it was somehow timeless, that it was somehow outside of and beyond everything. Modernism was the truth and there was nothing else and it would hold for the next two thousand years.

Emigre: People still think like that. Look at Massimo Vignelli's poster. He makes it sound as if anybody would have a hold or grip on how culture develops or should develop. On the other hand, his signage for the NY subway system for instance, or Jan Tschichold's redesign of the Penguin books, were projects where Modernist ideas worked perfectly.

Kathy: Yes, some of these Modernist solutions were the right solutions. But to me you can separate the visual language of Modernism from the conceptual process of Modernism. It is quite an exceptional process. To first analyze and conceptualize a design problem is very useful. And then to move on to the design phases, to the form-giving process. However, the form doesn't always have to be minimal, geometricized, reductivist, abstracted, self-referential form. It can be all kinds of things. I think that is something that people misunderstand sometimes. They look at something that has a different formal vocabulary and assume it doesn't have anything to do with Modernism. I don't think that Modernism failed and was rejected. I think it got internalized into the mix of pluralisms. And now there is an interest in preverbal or subverbal experience. Last year we had a very intense seminar in phenomenology. We had had it up to here with verbalizing, and said now let's see what some of the other dynamics are, and add on to it, not necessarily to reject what came before. There is now an understanding that you don't have to reject history in order to move forward. It's a progression of ideas. And we're not really inventing it at Cranbrook. We seem to be proceeding pretty much parallel to developments in fine art, Post-Modern theory and architecture, both nationally and internationally.