

Ellen Lupton, writer
designer
curator
critic

Ellen Lupton is curator of contemporary design at Cooper-Hewitt, National Museum in New York City and director of the Graphic Design MFA program at the Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore. An author of numerous books on design, she is a public-minded critic, frequent lecturer, and AIGA Gold Medalist. [More](#)

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[David Barringer](#)

A conversation with David Barringer, published on [Design Observer](#), 05.28.2009.

EL: You wrote novels and short stories before writing about graphic design. Your voice as a design critic is conversational, and literary. What moved you to take on design as a subject?

DB: The short answer is: my job and Emigre.

Years ago I worked for a small design company in Detroit. We undertook a variety of projects, from bookazines to exhibits and a ride simulator. My main task was to write all the articles for an internal magazine, but as I traveled to auto plants across the Midwest, I took on additional duties. I conducted tours, I photographed people on the line. I sketched layouts for the magazine. My boss typically handled the design as I grew more confident, and our prepress department grew busier with other projects, I took over just about everything for this quarterly magazine.

The graphic designers showed me how to use PageMaker and, later, InDesign, but I had to learn a good deal on my own. I subscribed to design magazines and bought graphic-design books. I never felt I was entering a new field. I was driven by the narrow need to complete specific projects. I had to lay out the next issue quickly and did not know enough to call what I was doing art direction. I never took a seminar. Designing the magazine was urgent and fun, a nice break from writing the articles.

In 2003 I read Emigre 65 and, later, Emigre 66, and everything changed. I had never read graphic-design magazines that were this groping and personal, this broad and emotional. (Who knew people argued about graphic design? I learned from a guy who lived near Cranbrook Academy during the Nineties; I had no idea.) Some essays were rants, and some were case studies that depended on jargon. That's when I felt graphic design was not just in the realm of the small, urgent, discrete task into the world of thinking, creating, writing, and living. I was a writer first and a designer second, but those Emigre essays allowed me to see that I could best contribute to the field by writing about design. Basically, I saw a white rabbit pop into a hole, and I followed. I also realized that as design and technology evolved, design would evolve with it, so there would always be something to write about.

EL: Your book includes an argument between a design professional and a self-taught designer. As someone who has done a lot of informal training, do you ever feel that you are poaching on the territory of others or passing off less than professional clients?

DB: No on both counts. I don't sit on the bleachers and let other guys dance with my girl just because I'm not in the classes at Arthur Murray. The pressure on professional graphic designers to increase the value of their work is real.

is not coming from a few undegreed designers making flyers for their uncle's car wash or painting their cousin's dirt bike. It is coming from free, massively distributed, user-friendly software templates that empower consumers to be their own designers. Consumers know a heckuva lot more than they used to, they have the tools, and they're not afraid to use them to save a few bucks. Most creative types have enough self-doubt in their own value. I think what designers need most today are business partners who know how to sell the designer's work in the marketplace.

EL: How about writing? People don't assume that writers go to "writing school" to learn their craft (all writers do). Do you consider yourself a self-taught writer? Are professional writers under threat from software or bootleg copies of *The Elements of Style*?

DB: I get paid less now for my writing than I did in 1992. Forget about education (which is still very important for writers who want to be teachers, academics, and journalists). My experience and track record, my credentials, they count for nothing. Every day I start from scratch, like I was just born with an ergonomic keyboard. We're under threat from every direction, and in many senses it's a war on labor, even creative labor. I was just at a literary festival in Chicago this past week, and the topic on everyone's mind was how to get paid for writing in a world of failing magazines, failing newspapers, and failing publishers. No one knows quite how to get paid, and no one knows quite how to get paid. It is possible today to envision a future in which 99% of writers are freelancers at all. They will have to find other jobs, seek out advertising or other support for their online ventures, or work as charity work to be performed in service of a niche community, or work in some model yet to be developed. One model in which, say, a magazine needs a team to collaborate on its next issue. They need a designer and a writer for one or several articles. No one is on staff. They are all freelancers. Using an online freelance database, a team coordinator could assemble a team in Dallas, a team in Detroit, and a team in Dubai. Each team meets to research, photograph, and even design the print/web pages, submits the work, gets paid, and then disbands. Each freelancer then awaits the next call from a new team leader, who also may be a freelancer. This is flexible, temporary labor leveraged by computer technology, and it can be used for editorial, business, or other purposes, for outlets, for magazines, books, newspapers, online ventures, whatever.

EL: Is that a dystopian vision of the future, where everyone is a freelancer? Do you see any kind of alternative in self-publishing? Designers are often in awe of writers, but it seems that writers are in even worse shape than designers are.

DB: It's one possible model, clearly not the only one, and it's not new so much as it is an extension of a trend in which the direction the freelance model is already headed. And it's not dystopian; it's inevitable. I have plenty of evidence from friends in other industries, including banking and the law, that this freelance or flex-time model is growing. Larger companies are realizing the benefits of flex-time arrangements. A working parent with a college degree and relevant experience can work from home, be with the kids, and not have to be paid benefits or health insurance. This is what freelance writers and designers have been doing for decades. A writer recently told me he feels pretty strong in this new economic environment, because he never had it good in the first place. It's always tough. It's just everyone else who is finally struggling the way he always has.

Writers and designers will obviously continue to work in a variety of ways in a variety of models. It's a transitionary time, and the market never sleeps. Writers and designers will have to be entrepreneurs or partner with entrepreneurs, creating new ways of working using collaborative software, networking sites, and all the tools of the transitional time, no doubt about it. It's a good time to try something new.

Self-publishing today depends on the development of faster, cheaper digital presses. I've thought about the dynamics of this a lot, namely how the lines are blurring among bookstores, publishers, and authors who are technologically able to produce, market, and sell their own books and magazines. One day the digital press will make a book will fit on a table in my office. My future grandkids will probably turn in homework in bed at home, with a digital page in the back that plays video.

Now imagine the equivalent of the cheap digital press arising in other sectors, like, say, a factory-in-a-box that can crank out affordable, quality products in limited runs. You upload the files from home, the iFactory prints a chair, lamp or soap dish, and a box of ten arrives on your doorstep. Suddenly, everyone is an entrepreneur, publisher, a self-manufacturer, a creator and consumer both. Digital presses allow me to write and publish books. But imagine future product designers who create, design, produce, package, and sell their own products using cheap iFactories. I think that future is what is most fascinating to consider.

EL: One of your books is available on the Kindle—*We Were So Ugly We Made Beautiful Things* (2003) for \$1.99 and read it on Amtrak. As someone drawn to the physical fact of print, how do you feel about the digital promise or a threat for writers? How about for designers?

DB: Eduardo Recife of misprintedtype.com illustrated that book and designed the cover, so hopefully he's been treated to his work as well. I have no ill will whatsoever for ebooks or Kindle or whatever comes next. I'm used to watching TV on Hulu.com or music videos on an iPod or images on a View Finder. Flexibility and portability are the things.

I do think that ebooks are a step backwards, however. It's like the fax. It's not flexible or useful enough. Computers should have greater power, and the Kindle instead has less. You should be able to access dictionaries, and other searchable resources, just like we can on the computer or the iPhone. That's one of the benefits of portable handheld units are. Who cares about downloading *Twilight*? I care about having online libraries of reference works, maps, and encyclopedias.

I was also caught for days in a blackout in New York back in 2003. It's amazing how much goes out of the power goes out. I learned a lesson about the value of books, as well as the ethereality of ATMs.

Some people argue that books are becoming more like art objects, released from the pressure to conform and liberated into the world of wacky dimensionality. Sure, it would be fun to attach half a beach ball to the front cover, the other half on the back cover, and inflate them both for the ultimate beach book. But I've seen my friends who are avid readers turn toward their shelves of books and regard them as they would a part of their own lives. We take the contents of books into our imaginations, and our personalities are influenced. Looking at the books on my shelves, I feel memories bloom, my own life come back to me. Books are about remembering where we have been, and who we are. A book is like a body part, and when you die and the connection to the book is broken, the book dies a little, too.

[Lupton, Ellen \(2007\)](#)

Interview by Nicole Bearman and Gabrielle Eade for [Design Hub](#), a design news and portal created by the Powerhouse Museum in Australia.

Design communicator, and communication designer extraordinaire Ellen Lupton talks to Design Hub about her role in the National Design Triennial at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, and her personal quest to reach the broadest possible audience.

What are you working on at the moment?

My big interest right now is the opening up of the design discourse to the broader public. We are seeing everywhere. The rise of the Internet has given people access to more tools and more information. Over the years, blogging and other “social media” have become especially powerful. At the same time, people are more engaged with physical making — craft, knitting, D.I.Y. technologies. I published a book with my students in 2004, called *D.I.Y.: Design It Yourself*, and I’m really excited about this line of discourse: the public as designers. My next book is *D.I.Y. Kids*, featuring design work by children.

You define yourself as a writer, curator and graphic designer. What really excites you in your work and your ultimate goals?

I am excited about bringing people — all kinds of people — into design. I’ve become a bit of a zealot, a church lady, but my church is the discourse of design, which has become an increasingly public, open discourse. I love to teach, and I’m teaching professional designers at the graduate and undergraduate levels at the Maryland Institute College of Art, where I am director of the graduate program in graphic design. I also do workshops and lectures for everyday people, which is a different kind of teaching.

How has your career path evolved?

I studied design and art in the early 1980s at The Cooper Union in New York City. When I graduated, I started to run a small design gallery inside the school. I did that for seven years. I was a do-it-yourself curator, organizing shows, keeping the windows clean, trimming the labels. At the same time, I was publishing a lot, building my reputation as a writer and critic. In 1992, I was offered a ‘real job’ at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York City. Now, I had the opportunity to create much larger exhibitions for a bigger public. Each exhibition has been accompanied by a sturdy exhibition catalogue and ambitious public programming. I’ve also had the chance to work with amazing colleagues — great design thinkers. In 1997, I was invited to run the graphic design program at the Maryland Institute College of Art, in Baltimore, a big, tough city that is two hours by train from New York City, but my hometown, and a fun place to live. Cooper-Hewitt has allowed me to live in Baltimore for the past few years and to continue as a part-time curator. It’s a hectic, sometimes scattered lifestyle that allows me to do all the things I want to do (and more!).

What attributes do you think you possess that have helped you succeed in this field?

I love to get things done. I love to get up early and start working. I love to see a project come into completion. I think that my fundamental enjoyment of doing, making, and writing has allowed me to be a highly effective communicator. I find genuine pleasure in communicating ideas in a way that people will understand. Whereas some scholars are primarily interested in addressing their peers, I want to be understood by as many people as possible. I’m interested in communication, and I love to communicate.

Your website appears to be a testing ground for ideas and a place for discussion. Does this forum work for you? My main web site, designwritingresearch.org, is primarily a way for me to communicate outward to the world. It has an archive of my writing, and it’s a tool I use in all my teaching and workshops. I also have a blog that I co-write with my sister, Julia Lupton, design-your-life.org. Our blog is an open medium. Anyone can contribute a post about design and living, and we have a small but avid following. People write about fashion, celebration, housekeeping, parenting, rearing, politics, and media. We also have a blog about design for kids, d-i-y-kids.blogspot.com.

Can you explain your curatorial approach to the 2006 National Design Triennial and the theme you chose? The 2006 National Design Triennial was organized by a team of curators: Barbara Bloemink, Barbara Kruger, Peter McQuaid, Brooke Hodge, and myself. The exhibition is open through July 2007. We all brought our s

and expertise to the curatorial table. I was especially interested in the rise of social media and do-it-yourself movements during the past three years — again, the opening up of the design discourse to more voices. For example, the Triennial features Processing, a free, open-source computer language created for visual programming. Processing is not so much a finished design artifact as a tool that anyone can use. The Triennial website is at peoplesdesignaward.org/designlifeflow.

What have been the key trends in American design since your last Triennial in 2003?

The last Triennial reflected a post-9/11 atmosphere. Called Inside Design Now, it focused on the inward turn of design toward handcraft, pattern, texture, and making. Craft continues to be a big part of design today, but what's new is the movement outward. Design is becoming less inwardly directed and more socially directed. Magazine *ReadyMade* and *Make*, both featured in the Triennial, invite people to engage in design activities. I see a trend toward working in collaborative teams. They are creating furniture, textiles, and spaces that encourage collaboration.

In your opinion, what characteristics define contemporary American design? And how does it fit in a global economy?

American design is a huge and diverse phenomenon, and the Triennial doesn't try to pin it down so much as paint a picture of a big, messy, mixed affair, which ranges from high-tech military equipment and space-age design to a toy made of PlayDough and a hand-beaded purse. A product like the iPod is designed in California but manufactured in China.

What inspired you to initiate the free font manifesto? Were you surprised by the response you received to the concept of free fonts?

Given my interest in 'open' design, I wanted to find out if there was an open-source movement in the design community, which is a particular subculture within the broader graphic design world. Typeface designers have always been protective of their intellectual property, because fonts are so easy to steal and the problem with piracy. I had been invited to address typeface designers and typographers at an international conference, so I decided to explore the topic of 'free fonts'. I created a blog to accompany my talk — an experiment for me. Given the controversial nature of the topic, I wanted to get feedback from my audience during the usual Q&A session after the talk. And feedback I certainly got! News of the blog spread like wildfire and a heated debate ensued on-line. I learned a lot, not only about the passions and worries of the font design community but also about the nature of online communication.

Where do you hope the flourishing D.I.Y. revolution will lead us?

I'd like to see design education become part of general education, from kindergarten up through graduate school. Learning to communicate online and in print are basic life skills that empower citizens and connect them to their communities, global and local. Gutenberg's revolution opened up reading to a bigger public, and the idea of 'universal literacy' was born. Today, to be literate involves not only reading/receiving, but also making/producing in a range of media. It's not enough to be in the audience any more.

What are the big challenges facing designers in the 21st century?

As the design discourse opens up, professional designers will shape the discourse by creating better products and environments for public communication. (I am speaking here primarily of graphic design.) The challenge facing all the design fields is the global environment. How can we create objects, systems, and spaces that will help reverse the degradation of the world? This challenge, too, demands that the public be engaged. The problem can't be solved by designers alone, but requires changes in how people live.

What is your philosophy, in life and design?

These are a few principles borrowed from my blog, design-your-life.org. I like these principles because use them, not just professional designers.

ORDER – Use design to organize and improve your environment at home, at work, and in the world.

OPPORTUNITY – Use design to expand your expressive, economic, and social horizons.

PRODUCE MORE, CONSUME LESS – Design it yourself using digital tools and craft skills.

How do you relax and play?

I love to cook, and I love to hang out with my gorgeous kids and husband. But work is play for me, to me more than being involved in a great book or web project. Authorship gets me going.

[Lupton, Ellen \(2006\)](#)

Interview, Lawrie Hunter, “Critical Form as Everyday Practice, An Interview with Ellen Lupton.” *Public Information Design Journal* 14, 2 (2006): 130-137.

Curator, graphic designer and author Ellen Lupton is director of the M.F.A. in the graphic design program at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore. She is also curator of contemporary design at the National Design Museum in New York City, where she has organized numerous exhibitions, each accompanied by a major publication, including the National Design Triennial series (2000 and 2003), *Skin: Surface, Structure* (2002), *Graphic Design in the Mechanical Age* (1999), *Mixing Messages* (1996), and *Mechanical Bridges: Machines from Home to Office*. She has received numerous awards, including the Chrysler Design Award and the 1996 New York Magazine Award.

In 1996, Ms. Lupton and J. Abbott Miller published *Design/Writing/Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, a collection of essays about design theory and history. Lupton has written numerous books on contemporary and twentieth-century design. Her critical guide, *Thinking with Type*, was published in 2004; her latest book, *Design It Yourself*, co-authored with her graduate students at Maryland Institute College of Art (Jan

LH: Please tell us about Design Writing Research.

EL: Abbott Miller and I founded Design Writing Research in 1985 as an “after-school program” where we collaborate on experimental projects that merge theory and practice, writing and designing. By 1989, Design Writing Research had become a self-sustaining enterprise with a full-time staff and office space in New York City.

In 1997, we moved to Baltimore to teach at Maryland Institute College of Art. Soon after, Abbott joined the office of Pentagram and Design Writing Research became dormant. It remained an idea, but was not in active practice.

I launched the Web site DesignWritingResearch.org in January 2003 in order to revive the studio in the same curricular, quasi-underground spirit with which it was founded. The site is an archive of writing and communications tool for my work as a curator and teacher. Having this site has put me in contact with designers around the world. A group of graduate students in Israel was reading the material on design and deconstruction, for example, and I constantly get questions and requests from students working on design projects. I now have two other Web sites, ThinkingWithType.com, a resource for teachers, students, and designers, and design-your-life.org, a blog about applying design thinking to everyday situations. The most important thing for me about all of these sites is how they put readers and writers into direct contact with each other. The Web is the medium.

LH: Now you are a designer, a writer about design, and a curator. Is that like living in three different

EL: To me, writing, design, and curating all fit together. It's one house with a variety of functions, just as a site for cooking, cleaning, sleeping, entertaining. Design gives a physical form to the ideas generated by writing and curating. An exhibition, for example, uses lighting, materials, sequence, and the juxtaposition of images and text to tell a story. A book presents texts and images to readers in a way that either attests to the order of reading or provides a variety of ways to enter and exit a body of information. The way text is laid out on a page affects how people read and understand it. Design enables the publishing of ideas, whether in a magazine, or a Web site, and each of these media affects how readers approach the content. Designers can create new ideas, although in my work, I would say the writing is the bricks and mortar.

LH: By the time you graduated from the Cooper Union School of Art, you were already writing about graphic design and typography, particularly within a post-structuralist frame. What took you into critical writing so early in your career?

EL: I come from a family of English teachers. My twin sister studied critical theory at Hopkins and Yale, and was a professor of literary studies at University of California, Irvine. As a young person, my intellectual adventures were closely tied to hers, and she led me through many discoveries that ended up connecting with my own work as a designer. The insights of post-structuralist theory amazed me, because they were about recognizing the opacity of writing as a physical and intellectual medium. For me, the discovery of Saussure, Barthes, and Foucault was life-changing, and those thinkers continue to inform my work today, even though my work (and my mission) has become more transparent and populist. These writers showed that language is embedded in culture and society; that representation takes an active role in shaping content; that much of what appears to be neutral in fact, a cultural product, and so on. Typography and architecture are not neutral containers for the programs they are thought to neatly accommodate. These are fundamental insights of modern and postmodern thinking.

LH: In *Thinking with Type* you identify the 'grid' as a major expressive tool. Rick Poynor, in *No More Pictures* you use the grid in a Saussurean way as a form of language, "...just as language is a grid which breaks down experience into repeatable signs..." How do you perceive the grid as a tool?

EL: Grids exist in the background of nearly all printed communication. Even the Microsoft Word document in which this interview is being conducted has a grid, consisting of the default margin settings of the page. As designers, we try to avoid defaults and use the grid in an active, deliberate way, sometimes rendering it invisible. For example, the grid is a way to attack the oppressive linearity of discourse, allowing us to present multiple parallel texts, and so forth. Designers use grids to disperse a linear document across space.

LH: Your recent (stimulating and enjoyable) book, *Thinking with Type*, has three sections: Letter, Text, and Image. Each section begins with a discourse on culture and theory issues that touch all media, and follows with practical demonstrations of the hows and whys of typography's nature and behavior. Please talk a little about *Thinking with Type*.

EL: As a young art student back in the early 1980s, discovering typography was discovering how to write. I had always been interested in art, and I had always been interested in writing, and typography was the medium that brought these two things together. For me, typography has always been a tool for thinking. You really don't know what something means until you put it down on paper. All writers want to start editing their

minute it moves from a generic “manuscript” (such as this Microsoft Word document) into a typography because words read differently once they are rendered typographically. In my Typography I course student, ideally, reaches a moment in the course when they are “thinking typographically,” when they are beginning to express ideas through the medium of type. (This is not about fonts, but about alignment, scale, grids, and so on.) To think with type is to be in a partnership with the medium—with its history and its systematic nature as a common cultural artifact.

LH: What do you regard as your set of essential design tools?

EL: What’s essential to me is having access to the means of publishing. As a very young writer/curator at the Cooper Union, where I worked from 1985 to 1992, I had access to a digital typesetting system, a massive set of output devices that generated columns of text on photographic paper. By today’s standards, that was a very expensive system, but unlike most designers in the mid-1980s, I had direct access to typesetting, which gave me the ability to publish, and to write directly in the medium of typography. Now, of course, the Web is the most exciting medium for publishing, and it’s changing our relationship to print. My “essential design tools” are the tools of print, but the tools keep changing, and it’s important to me to continue having access to them. When I went to art school in the early 1980s, the tools were stat cameras, hot wax machines, acetate, and ruby lith film. By the early 1990s, they had become Quark and Photoshop. Today, they include html, Flash, and database languages—as well as the most basic tool of all, the Sharpie marker!

LH: Typography has always been a main theme for you. Rick Poynor points out that in a number of your books, and Abbott Miller have used Martin Majoor’s Scala typeface. In his introduction to your *Design Writing*, he writes, “...Scala is becoming a Design/Writing/Research house style, an appropriation that may be a precedent in critical writing.” What led to your adoption of Scala?

EL: I first used Scala in 1991, when Robin Kinross sent it to me in New York City on a floppy disk. Robin wrote an essay for an exhibition catalogue, *Graphic Design in the Netherlands: A View of Recent Work*, published by the Cooper Union and Princeton Architectural Press. Robin’s essay was about Dutch typeface design. I used Scala for typesetting that catalogue, and I have been using it ever since. Scala is a magnificent blend of modernist and literary/humanist traditions. Its forms reflect the origins of type in handwriting, as seen in the beautiful lowercase a, but Scala is also exquisitely abstract, as seen in its severe, simplified serifs. Scala is coordinated with Scala Sans, making it a full-service typographic system. This has become a new standard in type design.

LH: In a recent DD+IDJ interview, Paul Mijksenaar said about his wayfinding design work, “Any discussion of typefaces lasting more than 5 minutes is a waste.” Of course Mr. Mijksenaar knows his fonts, and uses his knowledge wisely. How do you think subtle, sophisticated variations in font affect the consumer-user experience?

EL: Most users don’t think about fonts or notice them at all, but of course they affect our experience. The more knowledgeable the user, the more affected they are by choices of good or bad typefaces, just as a more informed moviegoer will have a more critical experience of a film. Some of us go just for the plot; others go for the way in how the thing is put together.

LH: Concluding his examination of current reading models in *The Science of Word Recognition*, Kevin T. Spivey writes, “Word shape is no longer a viable model of word recognition. The bulk of scientific evidence says that we first perceive the word’s component letters, then use that visual information to recognize a word. In addition to perceiving the visual information, we also use contextual information to help recognize words during ordinary reading, but the evidence is bearing on the word shape versus parallel letter recognition debate. It is hopefully clear that the rea-

legibility of a typeface should not be evaluated on its ability to generate a good bouma shape.” Do you think the graphic design community pays substantial attention to information design/document design research issues in communication?

EL: No. And I have not found the scientific research on legibility/readability to be of much practical value (including the passage you have quoted above. Cumulatively, what all this research seems to confirm is the power of alphabetic literacy to take hold of the mind and impose itself on us, even under poor conditions (poor typefaces, bad screen displays, and so forth). For better or for worse, most designers are not so interested in scientific standards for readability or legibility, and I’m not sure that’s a bad thing. The attempt to impose scientific standards works best could end up stifling invention and change. The fact is, human beings are able to endure a vast range of typographic environments. In the Web design field, some people want to freeze the field into standards, such as always putting nav bars in a certain place, or only having seven categories in a menu. In a medium this young, it could be more harmful than helpful to lock it down so soon.

LH: In *The ABCs of [circle square triangle]: The Bauhaus and Design Theory*, you and J. Abbott Miller argue for a new critical relationship between writing and design: “...the graphic designer could be a language-worker equipped to actively initiate projects — either by literally authoring texts or by elastically directing or disrupting their meaning. The graphic designer ‘writes’ verbal|visual documents by arranging and framing and editing images and texts.” That evolution has happened to some extent. What is the status of the graphic designer regarding the writing process?

EL: Some designers are directly involved in writing, such as Armin Vit and his people at *Speak Up*, or Rick Poynor, Bill Drenttel, and Michael Bierut of *DesignObserver.com*, or writers like Dave Eggers who are writing for a general, rather than design specialist, audience. But I like to think of “authorship” as being both verbal and also visual. What Abbott Miller is doing with exhibition design and book design falls into this category. The curator shapes the curatorial content of a project without literally writing it. The work of 2x4 and Bruce Mau is also an example of authorship as well. And then there is Martha Stewart, who I believe to be one of the most influential designers of the 1990s; her impact is way greater, for example, than David Carson. I prefer the term “producer” to “author” because it encompasses the larger conceptual process, as well as suggesting the hands-on, blue-collar work of making things happen.

LH: In a recent *designobserver.com* posting about the notion of designers taking on editorial aspects of design projects, Rick Poynor wrote, “...the designer-as-editor demand has never convinced me as a rallying cry because designers have a level of ability, skill and talent that an untrained person is unlikely to be able to match with editing.” He singles out you and Robin Kinross as designers who are highly competent editors. When should a designer be an editor?

EL: I think designers can be fantastic editors, as long as they have a rigorous understanding of the work of editing. Editing, like typography, is a labor of love. It’s about the details, and it’s ultimately about letting someone else’s voice speak in its own voice. Anyone who sets out to edit a project needs to be prepared for the anonymous, often thankless —the many, many hours of invisible labor.

LH: You have written a number of times about Lev Manovich’s depiction of “the conflict between narrative and database that structures modern media.” Manovich sees the narrative-database conflict as a parallel relationship between syntagm and paradigm. He argues that there is an ongoing shift from narrative

database synchronicity in our lives today. What implications does that shift have for the designer?

EL: Increasingly, the projects we design consist of bundles of assets and non-linear forms. This may have more implications for writers than for designers. A blog, for example, is a database, and as such it provides a different kind of reading experience; naturally it demands a different kind of writing as well.

LH: In 1988 you wrote, “A powerful metaphor has informed post-war education in graphic design: the ‘language of vision.’ This abstract ‘language’ of line, shape, and color has been theorized as a system of communication analogous to but separate from verbal language, a distinct code grounded not in culture but in universal faculties of perception.” Things have changed recently in terms of designer empowerment. Are we closer now to having that language of vision?

EL: During the 1990s, many design educators turned away from formal analysis towards a more culturally referential approach to pedagogy. It was the age of multiculturalism, niche marketing, the “audience” as a marketing tool. Meanwhile, the designers of software programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, Flash, and Final Cut Pro systematically organized image-processing into menus of properties, parameters, filters, and so on, bringing the Bauhaus theory of visual language—once a distant ideal—into comprehensive visual tools. So we do have that language of vision now, but it was created by corporate software developers. There are movements towards open-source tools, such as Processing.org and John Maeda’s Treehouse Studio. I think we are at a moment where the idea of universal tools and languages is becoming interesting again.

LH: Originally text was linear, given the bound book’s fixed sequence of things. Various devices were used to support navigation: page numbers, footnotes, and the like; these led text in a less linear direction. You wrote, “Whereas talking flows in a single direction, writing occupies space as well as time. Tapping that space and thus liberating readers from the bonds of linearity—is among typography’s most urgent tasks.” How do you see liberating from linearity?

EL: If you are reading a novel (or watching a film), linearity is what you expect and value. However, our everyday experiences of reading in our day-to-day existence are non-linear, such as reading the New York Times through a Google search. If one were forced to read the entire front section of the New York Times in the Op Ed page, few of us would ever get there.

LH: The materials which you have brought from elsewhere into your web site are simple, spare. What is behind that reduction?

EL: I have kept the Web site really simple, mostly for my own sanity, but also because I like the idea of being disembodied, that it could be captured and repurposed by other people. The idea of separating content from form is driving a lot of work on the Internet right now. Whereas the great modernist pioneers of the 1920s created uniquely constructed pages that fused form and content, today there is a need to create text that withstands technological change and be readable on different output devices, from the printed page to a cell phone screen.

LH: In “Deconstruction and graphic design,” you and Abbott Miller wrote, “Post-structuralism’s emphasis on the openness of meaning has been incorporated by many designers into a romantic theory of self-expression. The argument goes, because signification is not fixed in material forms, designers and readers share in the creation of meaning.” Deconstruction as a style, or shall we say as an attitude, has been labeled historicist. How do we still find post-structuralist design in action?

EL: Sure. The novels of Jonathan Safran Foer, for example. The architecture of Peter Eisenman. But the

arguing is that post-structuralism and deconstruction are ways of looking at the world or ways of describing typography in an universal way, not in terms of a specific example of practice. The central principle is to look at a basic cultural assumption—such as the separation of mind and body—and to understand elements that appear to be opposites inhabit and infect one another. This way of thinking will never

LH: In “Critical Wayfinding,” you wrote, “Such icons [as Mona Lisa images serving to remind us that Louvre] participate in a broader phenomenon in the cultural landscape: the emergence of a hieroglyphic communication, which overlays the contemporary experience of cities, buildings, products, and media. Repeatable, reduced icons, compacted chunks of information which collapse a verbal message into a visual form. The expanding domain of this hieroglyphic speech poses subtle problems for designers in the next decade: can we create cross-cultural communication without flattening difference beneath the homogenizing force of a single dialect?” Twelve years later, are answers to that question emerging?

EL: The issue of the day is globalism, which is viewed by many designers primarily in terms of its negative impact on society and the environment. But there is a positive side to globalism as well, especially with regard to the growth of global communication and broader access to information. Today, knowledge is the key to health, wealth, and opportunity, so creating information that lots of people can use can have a huge benefit. This means creating a language that many people can understand, and technologies that many people have access to. That is not always at the expense of local traditions and customs. For example, I created a Web site to support and complement my book *Thinking with Type*. I get e-mail from people from all over the world who are using the Web site and who necessarily have access to the book.

LH: In 2000 you joined 32 other prominent visual communicators in signing *First Things First 2000*. It was a voice voiced in *First Things First* (1964) for a change of priorities in design work, for a “reversal of priorities from the useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication – a mindshift away from product marketing to the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning.” Do you see signs of such a reversal?

EL: No. Most design activity remains in the corporate realm. This is where most opportunities for design exist. What we need to do is find socially useful ways to operate within the stream of commerce.

LH: Curating such a defining institution as the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, how do you work to provide a viewpoint for the visitor/user?

EL: My exhibitions need to communicate to both the general public and the expert/insider audience. It's a real challenge. It's much easier to communicate to just one of those publics! Being forced to speak and write for both has been a huge discipline for me, and, frankly, it's harder to make design meaningful to the general public than to the viewer whose life is wrapped up in design practice.

LH: Exhibitions like *Mixing Messages* and *Skin* at the National Design Museum actually work to revise our understandings and generate new perspectives. What is an exhibition?

EL: An exhibition is a physical place where objects, images, and texts communicate ideas. The goal is to use texts as little as possible (but as much as necessary), and let the visual materials dominate.

LH: In “The Macrame of Resistance,” Lorraine Wild identified technology as a generator of identity for designers: “Designers involved in new media projects often find themselves caught in team production, the entertainment industry paradigm, where authorship is granted to the director, the producers, not the screenwriters, but typically not the people who create the visual nature of the product.” Five years later

out that those same digital tools that threatened the trained designer's existence also put the designer at the means of production, enabling the designer to become a producer. What is the situation today? How many numbers of designers also producers?

EL: Yes, I believe that more and more designers are becoming producers. Likewise, you could say that producers are becoming designers: that is, the tools of publishing are increasingly available to everyone, even those trained in the specialty of design. Design is truly a subject of universal interest and importance.

LH: Your recent book, *Thinking with Type*, is such an accessible work; though the concepts are explored in great depth, the initial framing of each assumes relatively little background knowledge. Now you have another coming to press, *D.I.Y.: Design it Yourself*. Who is the target audience? Are you planning to Napsterize design?

EL: *D.I.Y.: Design It Yourself* is a design book for the rest of the world. Increasingly, what I am interested in is the power of design with "non-designers." (Although it may be that there are no "non-designers.") We are living in a cultural moment when more people than ever are interested in design, have knowledge about design, and have access to the tools of design. Oddly enough, this fact has taken place in spite of our profession's best efforts to explain itself as an exclusive professional discourse.

LH: Document designers and information designers in search of perspective and depth about the world of design and typography would do well to read you. What other sources would provide such an empowering structuring of that world?

EL: Of course, everyone should read the books of Edward Tufte. Jef Raskin's writings on interface design are important, and Robert Bringhurst's *Manual of Typographic Style* is the classic work on typography, with many insights. The best book I have read in recent years is Steven Johnson's *Emergence*, about how cities and contemporary computer programs are all organized as self-organizing swarms of primitive elements that combine together into something powerful and information-rich. The future of information lies in systems that are broadly distributed across a community of users, not focused in one place.

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[Lupton, Ellen \(1998\)](#)

Steve Heller interviews Ellen Lupton, 1998, for his book Becoming a Designer

Why did you become a graphic designer?

Like many young art students, I began school at The Cooper Union in New York with only the vague
"commercial art" as a possible career direction for a visual artist. I was inspired by George Sadek, wh
design department at the time, to engage design as an art form that was both visual and literary. I w

the art world of the early 1980s, when artists like Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Hans Haacke wove text and social commentary into their work. As someone who had always been fascinated with the way design was an ideal forum in which to develop text and image.

Why did you expand your interest and practice to include curatorial and authorial work? Was this strictly an accident?

I became a curator by accident—when I graduated from The Cooper Union in 1985, I was invited to help found the Herb Lubalin Study Center for Design and Typography. It was a shoestring operation, occupying small rooms and hallways of The Cooper Union. But it was a great opportunity to put together exhibits and publications about design history and theory. I got hooked, and I was able to build a career as a critic.

Is this cross-disciplinary activity really viable in the market today, or simply a fortuitous niche that you carved out for yourself?

My position as a museum curator is a rare one—there are only a handful of design curators around the world in institutions including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. However, there are more and more opportunities for designers to develop and use their skills as writers/editors/publishers, and for literary people to engage the processes of design. This is a broad development with relevance beyond my own particular experience.

As an educator as well, do you encourage students to follow their path? If so, how?

I don't expect my undergraduate students to become professional writers or historians. Rather, I hope their work becomes infused with design literacy, with a sense of awareness of the history and future of the field. I have found from teaching both academic "history" courses and studio-based courses that those students who work in the studio as designers also do extremely well in their history courses—they write well about design and care about what they are doing. The students who show passion in their visual work also feel passionate about the history of design. They get excited by looking at other people's work.

I tell my students to think more, design less. They need to focus on ideas and concepts. There is a temptation to use empty design gestures—from endless Photoshop layers to fancy fonts and tricky type effects—because form and content are missing. Students with a strong sense of history and an awareness of what's going on in the world have a much easier time confronting content. They can use visual language to develop a point of view.

Would you say that your interdisciplinary practice has given your firm, Design Writing Research, an edge in a competitive design market? And, how do you account for your success?

As partners in Design/Writing/Research, Abbott Miller and I have done a series of key projects that challenge the ideal of combining research and writing with visual work. These are not always the most lucrative projects, and the studio does many projects that are executed along a more traditional "design services" model. I am primarily Abbott's undertaking—I am primarily employed by Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, and recently, Maryland Institute, College of Art. Abbott is doing a marvelous job at the studio developing a design/research continuum while still making a living for himself and his staff.

[Lupton Twins/D.I.Y. Kids](#)

Originally published on the blog [Babble.com](#), October 2007.

Ellen and Julia Lupton are designers, professors, mothers and identical twins who grew up finishing sentences. They've put their collaboration to work in *D.I.Y. Kids*, a sequel to Ellen's 2006 book *D.I.Y. Yourself*, to which Julia contributed. In this latest joint project, the Luptons teach design to kids through projects using the stuff of daily life: paper, cereal boxes, pencils, pens, everyday clothing. More than *D.I.Y. Kids* teaches kids to design their own fun and to work art into their lives. The authors spoke to the D.I.Y. movement, kids' innate creativity, and getting your children to make their own toys. — Cecilia Atkinson

In your authors' note, you talk about how design is art that people can use. And you refer to raising kids as the ultimate D.I.Y. activity."

We want kids and their parents to learn about design from the inside, by doing it. Design is a horizon for the future, and it's a set of skills for living. Raising kids requires every resource that you have: time and money, of course, but also ingenuity, patience and a sense of fun. For us, raising kids has meant getting out there and rediscovering scissors and learning to sew. Parenting can really connect you to what was most liberating in your childhood. You get to reopen creative drawers you thought were shut for good.

While the book is practical and playful — offering hints about the relative ease and messiness of projects — the larger message here about doing without mass media, teams or name-brands.

When we were writing the book, we'd walk down the aisle of the supermarket with the kids, or go to a store or check out someone's outfit, and then ask, "Is it D.I.Y., or is it corporate?" They'd roll their eyes, but they were experts at distinguishing the pre-packaged parts of their environment from the moments fashioned by hand. Design is not just about making stuff. It's about making stuff happen. People like them. It's a divide, of course: digital media allow kids to participate in the bigger culture, while also making them feel like they don't want this book to help them do both, better.

Your book encourages kids and parents to use what they have and make their own artistic mark. How do you cope up with the many ideas in the book?

We art-directed a lot of the projects pretty heavily. We also got some creative friends involved, especially for the sewing projects. But sometimes the kids came up with ideas by themselves. At the park one day, they took their socks with sand and then drawing faces on them. Presto: sock bean bags. It was always exciting when a kid took a bag of supplies and ran with it, pushing a project in directions that we hadn't imagined.

Your kids are featured here. How are they and their friends central to this project?

Most art books for kids rely on examples made by adults. The look is slicker, but it can be frustrating for young readers. Our book displays work made by kids. We wanted to capture the quirks and quests of emerging artists. Grown-ups couldn't make up the lettering games explored by kids, or the special way they splatter ink on T-shirts, or their sense of a page layout for a zine or a photo album. Design is not just about making stuff happen. It's about making stuff happen.

What's next?

We're working on *Design Your Life: Creating An Original Life in a Mass-Produced World*. Parenting is a big part of the book is also about floor plans, meal plans and the joys of self-publishing. Building on ideas developed in our blog, design-your-life.org, we want to show how design is a form of creative thinking that can be used

challenges of everyday life.

Scher, Paula

Interview, August 10, 1995. Paul Scher with Ellen Lupton, August 10, 1995. An edited version of this appears in the book *Mixing Messages: Graphic Design in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Princeton Press, 1996

What makes your typographic work distinct? What are its origins?

It's ironic that I'm known for typography. I'm self-taught, really. At Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia I was taught the Swiss International Style of typography: Helvetica on a grid. I have very bad neatness skills and my approach didn't work for me. I felt I was being forced to clean up my room. So I became an illustrator. I didn't really draw well. When I came to New York to look for work, I found that I couldn't draw but that I was good. My teacher (Polish designer Stanislaw Zagorski) told me to try illustrating with type. So I learned the relation to image.

At CBS Records, I would follow the content by echoing it with typography. The idea was to copy a typeface and turn it into a record cover. This was not atypical at the time. In the late 70s there was an economic recession and an art director I could no longer afford to put all of our money into imagery. So the type came forward. The period influenced—the 30s, Art Nouveau, Constructivism. I was stuck in a “New Wave” show because I was quoting constructivism. I was put in a show with April Greiman! Really, it was American wood type. [The accompanying album series identity] I developed a style of decorative typography combined with illustration.

I was at CBS Records for 10 years, with 2 years in between at Atlantic Records—1974-5. A lot of things were done out of pure naivete.

My biggest influence was Seymour [Chwast]. I met him in 1970 with my portfolio. We've been married twice when I was 25, then again when I was 40. We had a very messy divorce. Now that we're both older, we're married again. I responded to Push Pin when I was in school. They were my heroes. They combined illustration with typography, and they used letterforms from historical periods that I identified with. It was related to my work in art school from 1966 to 1970. I liked what was cool at the time, like any art student. Victor Moscoso posters. I loved Victorian graphics and wood type. I still do.

Has there been a change in your work between now and the CBS era?

I have become less interested in rich, illustrative imagery. 90 percent of what I do is just type. Sometimes in the 80s. Clients started to interfere with the process—you would show them an illustration, and they would want to change it, and I found that embarrassing. Also, the illustrator always got the credit for the work. I found it embarrassing to be the author if the project is just type. I'm more in control.

There are situations, of course, where I still commission illustration. We're doing an identity for the American Museum of Natural History, and we need scientific drawings of animals. We have to have illustrations.

But 90 percent of what I do is creating visual personalities for institutions, corporations—museums, theaters. Most of what I do is identity-related. Or what I call “defining personality.” That's what we do. I am interested in projects where you establish an idea and then extend it to a variety of settings and applications. I used to be interested in doing one-shot images, but now I'd rather do a pro-bono poster than a book cover or album cover. That's more exciting.

I enjoy the premise of extending an image—establishing an idea and seeing where it goes.

Tell me about the identity program you designed for the Public Theater.

George Wolf [the director] had clear, specific goals. The organization was intricately linked to Joseph Papp, so for the people, it was the Joseph Papp Theater. The problem was, Joseph Papp is dead. So people thought the theater was dead, too. That's a big image problem. Paul Davis's posters were part of the old image. Also, his work was on people's minds with Masterpiece Theater. His posters were amazing, but we needed to start over to establish a new image of the Public Theater. It was a tall order, because Paul Davis was loved so well. I felt I couldn't go in that direction at all. Going in a totally opposite direction, and focusing on type, was better, because no one would compare it to work with Paul Davis.

I did three logos—George Wolf picked the boldest one. Then there was the problem that the New York City Music Festival was better known than the Public Theater as a total organization. We made "PUBLIC" big so that everyone would know they were going to the Public. The theaters within the organization had to be subbranded with a circular round "stamp" for each theater that goes with the word "PUBLIC."

Does the Public Theater identity draw on any historical or vernacular references?

There are a number of influences. A little bit of Dada—the different scale relationships coupled with the work of the Apollo Theater posters are another source. They were done in wood type on silkscreened grounds of color. Instead of letterspacing to make everything fit, they changed the size of the letters. It was the language of the street. They were the ones doing it. What they wouldn't do, though, is change the axis of some of the words. That's not in the Public Theater work.

I've always been what you would call a Pop designer. I wanted to make things that the public could understand, while raising expectations about what the "mainstream" can be. My goal is not to be so avant-garde that the audience that they can't reach it. If I'm doing a cover for a record, I want to sell the record. If I'm trying to get someone interested in some content, I want to bring them in. I would rather be the Beatles than Philip Glass.

What do you think about the current divide in the design community between a more formal, experimental approach and your more popular approach?

It's all valid. What I don't understand about the design community is the level of distrust and animosity between people who are not all that dissimilar. There's the young/old split and the academic/professional split. These splits are counterproductive to both sides. In the academic/professional split, there's a disdain for the fact that you can make money doing design. It has to do with a misunderstanding about what graphic design is: it's commercial. It's art for industry.

If we had a grand debate right now, here's what some of the fights would be about: – difference in how they make their income. – the old battle of formalism versus idea-based approaches. Scott Makela is a formalist. He has a specific aesthetic that is specific to himself. Michael Bierut doesn't have a specific signature. He's a cosmic pop designer.

The formalist versus eclecticist split is very real. Massimo should really be on the Cranbrook side. That's the formalist side. 40 years. I'd put Drenttel Doyle Partners on the popular side. Stephen [Doyle] is a Pop designer. Alexey Brodovitch, Tibor Kalman is a Pop designer. April [Greiman] is a formalist.

David Carson is a great Pop designer. He's doing youth culture magazines in the language of his time. Victor Moscoso of his time. What he does is appropriate to the subject matter. Beach Culture didn't come out of the formalist side.

read. He made it too legible.

I'm a pluralist. The most important issue facing designers is that there's a plurality in the way you can design. What's dangerous is when designers use a language that people can't understand.

An example is when Time magazine ran a cover with a photograph of Bill Clinton in negative during the Clinton administration. It is worse than what you would do to Hitler. No one ever did that to Hitler. The cover emphasized Bill Clinton as a bad guy more than the magazine ever intended. This cover really confused a lot of people, who were seeing photographs of politicians printed in reverse. He looked like Hitler. He looked really scary.

There are examples of design that get praised for their content. Wired magazine is not designed as well as it is, but the content is very interesting.

Looking at this great divide in the design field, I think that it's not so much what things look like as the way they are used. A lot of the formalistic Swiss stuff, and I've used it where it's been appropriate to solve specific problems. The style to serve an idea. The thing doesn't look like what it does in a vacuum.

The ageism thing: the older guys dismiss the younger guys. Milton [Glaser] and Massimo [Vignelli] are friends with each other than with the younger people, even though they're working from opposite sides.

And there's an arrogance with youth. Michael Rock doesn't know who Dick Hess is. And why should he? Milton knows who Michael Rock is. And Seymour had never seen Emigre. And then he saw it, and he realized it has a lot in common with The Push Pin Graphic: they're using medieval typography and lozenges.

[Rock, Michael](#)

Interview, Ellen Lupton and Michael Rock, August 7, 1994. Unpublished.

Tell me how theory functions at RISD, where you were a graduate student and then an instructor for many years.

In Visible Language 8, there is an article by Tom Ockerse and Hans van Dijk on semiotics and graphic design. Tom Ockerse lays the foundation for the RISD approach. Hans is not always credited as fully as Tom for bringing semiotics to RISD. Hans did his graduate thesis at Ohio State or somewhere on semiotics; article in Visible Language 8 is his thesis.

I studied English literature before going to RISD. I have always been a little worried about graduate school in graphic design. It's "lite" academics—desperately trying to be real scholarship. I'm trying to get away from it as much as possible.

Tom's essay on semiotics explicitly excludes "semiology," the French variant of semiotics, which I think is the problem. The main idea he takes from semiotics is the classification of icon/index/symbol. Also, the "interpretant," which is really mystified by the people at RISD, to the point that it's not useful. The point of it, about it, the goal was to use semiotics to legitimize design by giving it its own metalanguage. It was more about professionalism than a strategy of criticism. Theory ends up narrowing the perspective rather than opening it up because it becomes an end in itself.

Deconstruction can never really determine the way work looks. It can reform the profession, but it can't determine the way things look. It can change the way we think about absolutes and the goals of the profession. We use theory to determine the way things look. People expect too much when they think that visual work must be determined by theory.

The use of semiotics at RISD came out of the 60s idea of design process and problem-solving. Sharon did a course on problem-solving using a matrix.... Tom has an "interpretant" matrix—a way to jog you getting ideas. I think that theory got sort of stuck there. Tom didn't really know what was happening in the 70s and 80s. He wasn't up on post-structuralism, or even structuralism. No one was writing new Peircian semiotics. And yet so much was being written in the 70s and 80s in the tradition of semiology relevant to design. But he had written off that tradition.

I taught at RISD for seven years. I did an undergraduate theory course called "Visible Language," which was a design class but focused on coming up with ideas. This was a required course. I did another course, "Methods," which was taught by a team of four instructors. This course dealt with larger problems, like how was sometimes required—that was on and off.

At first I taught the course kind of like Tom, and then I kept reducing the amount of theoretical language completely colloquial. Also, I kept introducing more popular culture. So the course got progressively more colloquial. I'm now questioning the idea of graduate school in graphic design. I'm wondering what people should do with it.

How is theory taught at Yale?

Theory at Yale is two-fold. First, we try not to teach theory ourselves. We try to get people to do it in the setting of the university—women's studies, media studies, film, etc. We have expertise in matters of theory.

We're thinking about breaking up the program into two different tracks—a more academic track and a more practical track. Rather than having one overall definition of what a graphic design graduate student should know, we need to specialize more. There's no universal formula for what people should know.

I teach a seminar class—one for 1st year students, one for 2nd year—which tries to bridge the gap between academic courses and their studio work. We read about 15 articles during the semester; students come to class for discussions, and they are asked to bring in visual examples to talk about. They write short seminar papers that are analyses of an object—which they have to read to the class.

Some of the things we read during the 1st year seminar include Roland Barthes, his essay "Response to a Drawing" which is analysis of newspaper photographs. Along with this, some pieces from *Mythologies*, introducing the idea of criticism. Short essay from Eco on reading Steve Canyon comic strips. A thing by Camille Iwanowicz. Next, Marxist interpretations of advertising by Judith Williams and Raymond Williams.

All this stuff is about mass produced visual objects. In their other classes they're looking at objects of art history. Here, they're looking at objects more like what they'll produce themselves.

People get very involved in the politics of images—stereotyping and so forth. I'm starting to get bored with it. Next year I want to get people away from being political, and more involved with design itself. For example, a class about class description—the letterpress look is about class identity. I want them to look at meaning out of the forms of design itself, not just out of pictures.

Sheila is the major influence at Yale. I think people want to do work that is Relevant with a big R. We don't want work that will be judged as superficial. Don and Marlene were very influential, too, for the first three years of the program. They're not coming back next year, partly because they're less interested in politics as well.

activism situation has changed a lot in the U. S. since the late 80s. People feel less compelled to go to Broadway and put up political posters. For Don and Marlene, they want to move back into design again in making form. This also parallels the growth of their business—working for Clinique doesn't mesh with political posters.

We want to move back from the extreme of being political and get back more into design itself.

In a way, that sounds like a return to Yale's traditional program—to look at “design itself.” But you want to do it with a difference.

Yes, it's going back to a more formal approach, but with a difference. It had gotten so centered for so long that it became a cavern. The biggest difference will be trying to get people to work within the vehicles of design rather than too much into sculpture and filmmaking and so on. We want them to concentrate on the design itself and try to find more useful, public venues for using their thesis work.

From the start, we want people to think about writing material that could be published. Cathy Richardson [on the representation of black women] was written as five short “articles.” Now she'll try to place them in art magazines. Writing needs to be appropriate to the project. So we want to focus on the visual aspects of the work rather than having them struggle with writing. They need to think about the venue and audience for their writing.

Once the mantle of 60s scientism has been left behind, people are really questioning what they are left with. Only science-based program left.

And even they are talking about moving towards a more “human-centered” approach.

When you move to a more “human” approach, it gets very fuzzy, like a creative writing program. When you get into it, everyone's trying to defend their area. Deconstruction has driven a stake into people's certainty about what they're doing. No one can escape this crisis of meaning that has hit the university.

What do you think about Cranbrook?

I've always been very interested in Cranbrook and how something so close to Detroit could escape the city so much. There seems to be an escape from urbanism there.

I think that's encouraged by the campus. It's a utopia.

The effects of Cranbrook's program have been very strong. But the effects are felt more through education than through the profession. It's like what happened with Basel: the style was too strong to be accepted by the profession so people went into teaching. Now you see the effects of this on undergraduate portfolios. They've imitated the Armin Hofmann projects.

I don't think the Cranbrook program has much to do with French theory. It has to do with defiance of the grid. That defiance had a snowball effect, from Weingart's destruction of the grid to Fuse #10, where the formal letterforms anymore, they're completely deteriorated.

The idea of individual creativity is a totally modernist idea. Cranbrook has been an extension of this. The fascination with the alphabet right now is a fascination with the originless thing, since the alphabet has no origin. The need to individualize the alphabet invokes the conflict between originality and repetition. Krauss talks about in her work on the avant garde. Her essay on grids is great, too.

All of this Cranbrook work is about needing to be the artist. There are two different levels of modern international modernism of the 50s and 60s and the earlier avant garde. There's this misunderstanding of modernist promotion of clean typefaces as being about hygienics. Idea was that these generic typefaces belong to someone else. They didn't conflict with the designer's own originality.

I don't know how "deconstruction" got applied to Cranbrook. I think the name had a lot to do with it about taking things apart. The idea of "fragments"....

[Kunz, Willi](#)

Ellen Lupton interviews Alex Isley, June 23, 1994. Unpublished.

Where do you see your work fitting into the history of design?

I've always just wanted to do work that people who don't know anything about design will think is cool. My brother would pick up and like.

I've been labeled as one the "humorous designers" because of my work for Spy magazine. I often do that work to new clients, because it creates certain very limited expectations about my work.

Who has influenced your work?

Not the "designer designers." I'm very word-oriented. When I start a project, I start by writing down notes, not drawing up a grid. That's how I work.

Being word-oriented is evident in my type-heavy approach. I like to pack a lot of information into stuff. I want to learn something from it. I'm not interested in doing "big bold posters."

Did Cooper Union have any effect on you?

I went to NC State for two years before going to Cooper. There, you literally learn to pour concrete before you know anything about "graphic design," because you don't specialize until later. "Design" could mean architectural design, environmental design, graphic design, any field. It was terrific, but they had only 2 faculty members and there was enough.

I only went to Cooper Union because it was free. There wasn't an underlying philosophy there, except for [Sadek] and William [Bevington]'s courses on typography and the Art of the Book. Yeah, those were the best courses.

It seems that something important was happening in the mid-80s: M&Company, Stephen Doyle, you know. How do you think that came about?

It happened because Tibor was smart enough to hire me and Stephen Doyle.

I met Stephen during my last semester at Cooper, when he taught there very briefly, filling in for someone else. Stephen suggested that I go work with them at M&Co. It was a very interesting place to work. Tibor was against slick "design" at that time, which was an exciting position. I didn't just want to go work in a design firm. M&Co was a good place for young designers.

What work inspires you?

I mostly read a lot of newspapers. I'm not that interested in looking at graphic design, and I don't spend

in museums or libraries.

What's going on in design right now?

Everyone I know wants to get out of New York.

Right now, the big split in design is generational: old versus young, Vignelli versus David Carson. What about David Carson? It's cool. It's important that people are doing experimental work.

I don't know if anything really exciting is happening right now in graphic design, though.

Goldberg, Carin

Profile by Ellen Lupton, published in *Graphis* magazine, 2001.

Armored with a nimble sense of humor and a knack for the beautiful, Carin Goldberg survived the conservatism of the 1980s and fearlessly navigated the techno-hyped 90s. What's next for this master of design? The reinvention of Carin Goldberg reflects one woman's ability to tap into her cultural moment and create a series of designs that functioned in the brutal arena of retail sales while also engaging—head-on—the cultural debates in the design profession. Known primarily for her book covers and jackets, Goldberg helped reinvent this profession and successfully navigated its second renaissance in the early 90s. Today, she is heading into new waters behind an area of design practice that has become increasingly corporate and codified.

Goldberg's work has always been tied to the cultural sector, but not to the elitist sphere of museum and academic publishing. A *New Yorker* to the core, she entered the profession by way of mass media. After graduating from The Cooper Union in 1975, she learned the trade from art director Lou Dorfsman at CBS Television City, working on ads for TV Guide in an all-male, old-school, cut-and-paste bullpen. She soon became an art director on ads for CBS Records. But her passion was for design, not art direction, and her inspiration came from Paula Scher and Henrietta Condak, who were producing witty, visually sophisticated album covers for CBS. Working in the classical music division at CBS, Goldberg created designs that combined type and illustration in a decorative manner, as seen in her cover for Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*.

Goldberg left CBS Records in the early 80s to start her own business, working independently for the design firm Pentagram and then, around 1984, for book publishers. Post-modernism had become the battle cry in art and design, and modernist ideologies of functionalism, truth to materials, and purity of form were under attack, as new ideas of decoration, pastiche, and eclecticism bubbled to the surface. Like her contemporary Louise Fili, Goldberg brought these ideas to the field of book cover design, then a stale medium trapped in convention. In Goldberg's design for Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, she borrowed from the graphic style of the Vienna Secession, with its densely ornamental lettering locked together within a heavy linear framework. Her design is directly inspired by Josef Hoffmann's 1903 identity for the Wiener Werkstatte.

Post-modernism was not a singular movement, and its attack against modernist orthodoxy yielded a variety of positions that divided—and energized—graphic design in the 80s. Tibor Kalman, who did more than any other in that decade interesting, attacked the work of Goldberg—and many others—at the AIGA's national conference in San Antonio, Texas, in 1989. Kalman lambasted her Rilke cover for "pillaging history." A few years later, he used the phrase "jive modernism" in reference to visually-based references to early twentieth-century art. At that time, he claimed, ignored the utopian, revolutionary basis of the avant-garde while producing empty, decoration-driven decoration.

While some designers were embittered by Kalman's polemics, Goldberg responded to the uproar with humor. Her work had been pushed into a fray that was dividing the design world, and it was more a part of the fight than to be left out at the margins. "It didn't kill me," she recalls. "I was surprised by the intensity of the discussion."

While I was busy pillaging history, Tibor was busy pillaging the vernacular. We were all pillagers."

Goldberg's use of history is part of its own historical continuum, that of New York pop design. She employs imagery sporadically, not programmatically, referring to past styles not to as a matter of principle, but to a sense of appropriateness. In fact, modernist quotations are few and far between in Goldberg's work, just as they are in the work of Paula Scher, who outraged many Swiss-educated designers for parodying Herbert Matter in her design for Swatch in the late 80s. Goldberg and Scher both came of age under the ascendance of the Push Pin Studios, which forged an indelible American design ethos—at once artistic and commercial—that freely incorporated references to For Milton Glaser and Seymour Chwast, as well as for younger designers like Goldberg and Scher, each just one source of imagery among many—it is no more sacred than the rest of visual culture's rich and varied sources. Goldberg has even quoted herself quoting Josef Hoffmann—in her design for *Women on War*, she reworked a compositional device with sharper, more angular forms.

Goldberg's historical sources have ranged from Victorian ephemera to everyday icons. For the cover of *The English*, she combined diverse fonts in a densely knit composition recalling letterpress posters. A repeating block repeats across the bottom of the cover, invoking a make-ready sheet retrieved from the printer's tray. A design for *Unravelling* consists of a small typographic label—reminiscent of nineteenth-century page numbers—punctuates a pale, soft photograph of eggs cradled in a woman's hands. [figure 5] One of Goldberg's most recent pieces, her jacket for John Fowles's *Wormholes*, is an homage to the great modernist designer Alvin Lustig. In a quotation of any single work, *Wormholes* employs simple strips of color to depict books stored on a shelf. Like Lustig's color palette and his simple, cut-paper forms, the cover successfully invokes a mid-century modern aesthetic and avoids the clichéd image of old leather books.

Whatever her historical references, Goldberg's work always responds to its own cultural moment. Her design carries the unmistakable flavor of the 80s, as seen in the widely spaced geometric letterforms peppered across the cover of *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*, illustrated by her long-time collaborator Gordon Korman. Goldberg used a similar typographic approach in her series design for the novels of Kurt Vonnegut. The optimistic qualities of these pieces reflects the neo-modern formalism that permeated design in the 1980s, not in graphics but in architecture and interiors. Michael Graves's *Portland Building* of 1980 was emblematic of this style with its deliberately flat, ornamental distribution of small geometric elements across its cubic shell.

The 90s took a grittier turn, and in the field of book covers, a new sensibility took shape. At Alfred A. Knopf, director Carol Devine Carson encouraged her team of young designers to experiment with elements of the grotesque and the sinister. Chip Kidd, Barbara de Wilde, and others created book covers at Knopf that used colorful, tangled strands of hair, and oddly cropped photographs to strike an attitude that is mysterious, sometimes disturbing, but always literary. The post-modern 80s had come to a close, and the introspective 90s had begun.

The cultural shift away from happy formalism towards darker, more ambiguous visual narratives is evident in Goldberg's own work in the 90s. Her cover for *The Blindfold* combines out-of-focus letters with a tiny, blurry photograph of a figure; these oddly informal elements conflict with the grid of colored rectangles that forms the background of the cover. On the cover for *Hungry*, a spare, label-like field floats across the belly of a nude female torso, suggesting repressed desire—gustatory or erotic. *Jilted* features a photocollage by Man Ray, in which a female figure is

annotated with flat circles of color that both censor and celebrate her erotic potential. *Mother Said* p
black purse—a vessel of maternal secrets—embraced in quotation marks. *The Plawright's Voice* pai
white curtains with a warm wood floor; *A Visit Home* depicts a domestic interior ominously x-ed out v
Such designs use images of normalcy to project a sense of unease and possibility.

Some of Goldberg's most intriguing work of the late 90s went unpublished. For the cover of *The Hon*
example, Goldberg proposed several beautiful and poetic designs that went unrealized. The same l
Ocean in Iowa and *Black Rubber Dress*. Goldberg became increasingly dissatisfied with the cover a
business, a fact linked not to changes in cultural appetites or prevailing styles but to changes in the
Whereas the 80s and early 90s were vibrant times for freelance cover and jacket designers, the field
became dominated by in-house design departments. Marketing divisions became more involved in
designs, and freelancers, relying on art directors to advocate their work within publishing houses, w
enough to the process to prevail against in-house designers.

Goldberg took this change in climate as an opportunity to shift the direction of her career. She is relc
—architect Jim Biber and their son Julian—from a charming but remote town in upstate New York b:
Manhattan, where she can be part of the day-to-day fray of the design process and pursue more am
scale projects. As a cover designer, Goldberg worked in relative solitude, creating single images with
circumscribed functions. Now, she is working as a magazine consultant and is designing total public
No longer satisfied with just the cover, Goldberg revelled in creating the entire marketing campaig
design for the Type Directors Club's annual competition in 1999. [figure 19] Even more exciting is a
book, *Catalog*, to be published by Stewart Tibori and Chang in 2001. The book transports photograp
mail order catalog into a series of spare pages, where disembodied bras, girdles, and shoes float with
dispassion. These mundane accoutrements of middle-aged womanhood—designed to lift, separati
—are liberated under Goldberg's hand into icons that are at once funny and erotic. The book seems
Goldberg's own transformation as she outfits herself for the next phase of her career. Her sexy sense
surely prevail.

[Friedman, Dan](#)

Ellen Lupton interviews Dan Friedman, June 15, 1994. An edited version of this interview appears in
Messages: Graphic Design in Contemporary Culture. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996

What's important right now in corporate design?

There's a lost generation in graphic design—the people in between the 20s-30s generation and the
guys in their 60s. In between is the people in their 40s and 50s—my generation. The older generatio
the territory of the design profession, setting a standard for the connection between design and bus
generation entered the profession at a time when design was becoming a viable commercial activity
designers went straight into business and didn't engage in teaching and theory—the way Paul Ran
the people who run the corporate design offices—Steff Geissbuhler, Siegel and Gale, Anspach Gross

So the next generation (in their 20s and 30s) is disenchanted with those from the middle generation
generation" hasn't contributed much to the dialogue, the discourse, of graphic design.

In all these years, the guys at Anspach Grossman Portugal have never contributed anything that I c
design dialogue—that whole generation largely has been consumed by business.

Another observation: there appears to be this sort of “V” in the road right now, whereby commercial become either an occupation pursued in a creative, artisan-like way, or the other approach, which is planning.” In corporate design now, you can no longer service multi-national corporations just by p aesthetics. You have to address these companies through their language—marketing, positioning, c

There’s a split—most of those interested in corporate design have become more involved in strateg other extreme is people becoming more and more “artistic.” I have mixed feelings for this developm have a lot of sympathy for it.

Do we really know what’s innovative at the other end of the spectrum, the corporate end?

Larry Keeley—he’s into “strategic planning.” They usually hire other designers to do the visual stuff

I remember judging the I.D. review a couple of years ago. An office had entered their redesign of the sign. It was such a blatant example of sanitization by design. There are so many examples of that.

Design and identity/the identity of design

Is graphic design pervasive throughout society, or is it virtually non-existent? I’ve been asking this q a long time. I don’t know how to answer it. We want people to be aware of what we do, aware of what different and worthwhile, and yet we also want to be inclusive in our definition of “design.”

Even David Carson did a riff on “vernacular” found design at the beginning of his lecture [at confer June 1994]. We are so fascinated by vernacular stuff, maybe because it’s so brilliant and takes so litt aren’t finding in our own work what we admire so much in the vernacular.

Sylvia Woodard’s presentation [at London design conference] began with a history of how blacks ha portrayed in print. And then she talked about how different generations, including her own, have d the U.S. She showed a calendar she did about African culture, done in a European style. Can one fin express cultural identity through form, not just through content?

Sylvia says that women designers are really angry right now. They’re fed up.

Technology

I have mixed feelings about technology. The Macintosh was introduced in 1984 and has been a maj this period. But in my own opinion, the emphasis on technology is somewhat overrated. If you look across the entire twentieth century, you’ll see that there’s a tendency to celebrate all new technolog look at how each new technology has contributed to the deterioration of life.

I had to work very hard in my book *Radical Modernism* to bring myself to optimistic conclusions. I th to be optimistic.

What do you think has been important in typography in the last 15 years?

Type in the 80s was about excess; type in the 90s is about restraint.

Certainly, the more avant-garde designers have done some fairly wild experiments; they are accuse illegible, appealing to a narrow audience, etc. Since I’m familiar with where that work comes from, I l seductive on the one hand, yet also manipulative. It has become an idiom, like anything else. I’m to being seduced and being manipulated. This work tends to have no discernible content apart from t

qualities.

What's the connection between you, April Greiman, and Wolfgang Weingart?

It's a long story, and it happened more than 20 years ago. They're both people I was extremely close to but I haven't spoken with for many years.

In a nutshell: I went to study in Ulm in the late 60s (1967). I had gotten a Fulbright to go to Germany and I really wanted to go to Basle. I became fascinated with the theoretical approach at Ulm. At Basle in 1968 I started the post-graduate program. I wanted to be in the first class. I was one of 2 Americans.

And Weingart had just started teaching there. He was young—about my age. Our relationship was more than as a student/teacher relationship. But it is important to say that I was influenced by him. He was against rational Swiss typography, the work of the previous generation.

The “N” poster that I did [reproduced in *Radical Modernism*] is an example of classical modernism. The letters were set in metal, set into a bed of plaster. Weingart was fascinated by that—bringing this messiness of the tight world of metal type.

Weingart and I had similar interests. I thought he was incredibly talented. But his method of teaching was problematic to me. My biggest contribution at the time was to develop a methodology for teaching about typography.”

Unlike Weingart, I wasn't reacting against Swiss typography, because that rational system didn't really exist except in isolated instances. I started teaching at Yale in 1969. Whereas Wolfgang Weingart was teaching by intuition, I was trying to verbalize, demystify, the structures of typography. I wanted to create a methodology—a way to teach the rules and also how to break them at the same time, since nobody knew the rules.

When Wolfgang started lecturing and teaching in the U. S. in the early 70s, he realized he needed to develop a methodology, too. I believe my work was a useful model for him in that respect.

I was interested in publishing about design as well—I did an essay on my teaching in *Visible Language* which appeared in *TM* and some other European magazines. But you know, there wasn't much opportunity for dialogue then. There wasn't much dialogue in design at all.

When I started teaching at Yale, talking about semiotics, people said to cool it. Alvin Eisenman called it it wasn't considered valid.

I never specialized in “typography” as people do now—I only specialized that way in my teaching.

I went to Yale in 1969, and I was there for 3 or 4 more years. Then, around 1972 I went to SUNY Purchase program, founded the same year as Cal Arts. I was asked to create an entirely new program in the “Visual Communication” which was a very exciting opportunity, more enticing than staying at Yale.

In 1972, I was teaching 1 day a week at PCA, flying down to Philadelphia from New Haven. Louis Kalof came on the same flight. That's when I met April. I knew I couldn't keep teaching at both schools. She arrived to teach at PCA that spring. She had just come back from Switzerland, where she had studied for one year. She was there, except in Weingart's classes. She had been aware of my work through Weingart.

I arranged Wolfgang Weingart's first lecture tour in the U. S. in 1972. I did a big poster called “Wolfgang Weingart's First Lecture Tour in the U.S. 1972”

speaks to America.”

April and I became friendly during the 2nd semester at PCA. From the very beginning, I had discussed about her intuitive approach to typography. She was intuitive, like Weingart. He had even done a cover magazine with her picture on it, saying “I feel typography.” I thought that was kind of corny.

Often, I would play the devil’s advocate with April, arguing for a more rigorous methodological approach in teaching. April’s work today continues to work from an intuitive base. Like Wolfgang Weingart, she trusts her intuitions. But I’m still hung up on content. She would say that there is content in the form. And I would say it’s a very limited means of expressing content. Consider minimalist painting, such as Albers: there is no meaning there. But that’s a very narrow territory to work in. It limits the kind of content you can deal with.

I still follow April’s work. She sees California as a place somewhere in outerspace, moved by primal forces. It’s a place where there are earthquakes, mudslides, and gang warfare.

As she sees it, her “heavenly hyperspace” has meaning in it—Jungian psychology, spiritual issues—but it’s limited in its ability to deal with other kinds of issues. Her work, like so much work today, is about self-expression and manipulation. It’s a little hypocritical for me to criticize it too much, though, because I’m often guilty of the same thing. The difference is, I keep it in my own apartment.

On experimental design and typography: Is it self-indulgent introversion as reaction to begin alienated from the mainstream of the profession? I think so.

I’m not sure alienation is the cause so much as the desire to be “in” with the group that does embrace the edge. I’m in love with the edge.

It’s striking that there’s so much in-fighting among the members of the “edge.” A frenzy about originality. I remember me of the stuff that would go on during the late 60s/early 70s. Weingart was infuriated that everyone was taking him off. He was a spoiled brat. But, I think he deserves the ultimate credit for the “new typography.” The thing that doesn’t get acknowledged is that he’s a jerk. People don’t want to give him that.

David Carson keeps saying that he’s self-taught. Finally, it comes out at dinner [during London conference]. He worked for Self magazine at one point...

This petty bickering is one of the things that made me disenfranchised from graphic design.

I don’t know what happened to Wolfgang Weingart. He still teaches at Basle and lectures here and there but he hasn’t “said much” lately. He’s working on a book that’s been delayed because it’s so thick. His book is about his importance.

Me, April, Wolfgang: we all influenced each other. We all had egos that were so large we became incommensurate. Nonetheless, there are a lot of similarities in what we’ve pursued. It’s been hard for me to separate the personal from the professional.

But at that time, there just wasn’t anyone to talk to about design. Maybe that’s why I’m interested in design now. There’s a lot of parallels between now and then, but now the discourse is much broader. There’s now talk about issues of content and social issues, which was also of importance in the 60s. The idealism of the 60s and the optimism—some of that is coming back now.

[Frere-Jones, Tobias](#)

Interview, Ellen Lupton with Tobias Frere-Jones, November 1, 1995. Unpublished.

How did you get involved in type design?

I went to RISD in their undergraduate program. I finished in 1992. It became difficult there for me, to learn to design type, which was hardly the focus at RISD. We were taught to use type, how to think not how to design type. There's no place really in this country where you can do that. Inge Druckery Carter's course at Yale is good, but it's for grad students only, and it's just one course.

When I was 16, there was a competition sponsored by the Type Shop in New York. It was open to 6-11. The assignment was to draw a typeface. I was aware that type existed, but I had never tried it myself. My first idea in my head, and I won in the best-of-age category. I did it all with a rapidograph and a drawing competition was in 1986. After that I had a couple of other ideas that I chased down through high school. I did 8 or 9 "fonts" while I was in high school. One of them survived. It's Armada, distributed by Font Bureau.

I was thrown out of French class for a day because I was in the back of the room drawing a lowercase 'a' that I knew I should go to art school.

At RISD, I did an independent study with Kristof Lenk, where I studied old style serif typography. All the first semester was a lower case alphabet and a couple of capitals. It was redesigned as Hightower, which

After I did this independent study, it was the end of the fall semester and Christmas was coming up. I came up with something to give my brother. He had been a student at Brown and had his own band and wanted the right typeface for his band. I started doodling stuff on bar napkins. (I spent a lot of time on campus, where I worked on my ideas.) I thought it was funny, so I took it back to RISD and digitized the character set in two nights, over the weekend.

After Christmas vacation, I went to Holland to visit studios. A friend and I went to Berlin, where I introduced me to Erik Spiekermann. I showed him my old style alphabet, and he immediately pointed out everything wrong with it—the lowercase 'a' was out of its mind, and so on. But the bar napkins he loved. He brought me contracts right then and there, so the typeface could be marketed and sold [through the Font Shop]. Dolores, designed in 1991.

So I went back to RISD. The faculty were pleased, but they didn't know quite what to do, since they had nothing to do with the design of this typeface.

I called up Matthew Carter and asked him if he needed summer help. He told me to call David Berlow [at the Type Bureau in Boston], who had just seen Dolores. I showed him a couple of ideas, including one that's like the tickets they give you at parking garages—thin cardboard tickets with red numbers printed on them. I drew letters for the characters that went with the numbers but there weren't any. So Berlow said if I drew the letters he would publish them. This became Garage Gothic, published in 1992.

This was the summer between junior and senior year. For my degree project I did an essay and a series of experimental typefaces dealing with legibility, history, technology, etc. I drew bits of typefaces that answered some of the questions I was asking in the essay. Most of the work was in the writing. The project was not a theory, but rather a series of questions. Some of it was meant as a joke.

It was at that time that Neville Brody started putting out Fuse, in 1992. That was the sort of format I was looking for. So I did my thesis project in a similar form. A number of the faces I later did for Fuse originally

thesis project. [Typefaces featured in Fuse include Reactor, 1993; Fibonacci, 1994; and Microphone,

After I finished Garage Gothic, into my senior year, I was coming up here on weekends doing other work at the Font Bureau. I finished some typefaces that Neville Brody had started. He did the basic concept, and I worked out the details across the other letters of the alphabet. This amused me to no end. Back in high school, when I was kicked out of French class, these were the kinds of faces I had been imitating. By the time I graduated, I was working here for nine months. I came straight to work after graduating. So most of what I know I've picked up working here [at the Font Bureau]—faces for retail, custom jobs, etc.

Your work covers a lot of bases. You created careful historical revivals and crazy display faces like Do

I make a point of moving around among different kinds of typefaces. I think I learn more that way. I'm also interested in doing this. I do this because I find it very entertaining. The differences make it more en

What do you think about the field of typeface design today?

Currently, the field of typeface design is an enormous stinky mess. People can use computers to make their own typefaces. Now you can make your own foundry with a Mac and a copy of Fontographer. I'm seeing a lot of exuberant but inexperienced folk jumping into this. That's great, but...A lot of people feel that if they have the equipment, then they must be designers. They don't have the experience or the thoughts in their heads to make typefaces.

There's a whole class of typefaces that I just call Dumb. People take an existing digital typeface and modify it and then call it their own typeface. These are not valuable products. A lot of attention is paid to it because it's the flavor of the month. What I'm beginning to see is that because so much attention is being paid to them, the designers like myself who do put time into type design get a bad rap. We get lumped in with all the dumb ones. In most areas of design, it's the same problem. The tool that makes it all possible breeds a kind of inertia that makes things look so finished so fast. It's tempting to call it done.

If you're impatient and want to design a typeface, it's very easy to crack open an existing typeface, copy it, and call it done. That's not design.

What or who do you think is valuable and significant in contemporary typeface design?

The best designers are ultimately driven by a respect for—but not a slavish attachment to—history and the meaning of words. The best are Jonathan Hoefler, Matthew Carter, Erik van Blokland and Just van Russom. Some of the best people—Lucas de Groot—are very promising. Jean Francois Porchez out of Paris. In addition to the technical skills, which are always necessary but not always found, these designers bring something special to the table.

There are some obvious names you haven't mentioned. What about Jonathan Barnbrook and Zuzana

Jonathan Barnbrook does some terrific stuff, although a lot of his work I haven't come across. But I know what he's done. I'm a little distracted in that case by a small trend that's built around what he has done with his face Exocet. It consists of traditional forms with a medieval twist. This stuff has become a small niche, but it's the "spark" for this trend. It's hard to talk about this work once it's become a trend, because all the people have jumped in. But if I could look at it outside of that, I'd probably think it was great stuff.

As for Licko, I think she's done some great stuff. But lately, I'm not sure why some of these typefaces are being pushed. Such as Narly or Dogma. Is it meant as an anti-aesthetic? If it is, then it's not pushed far enough. So

understand that one better. It would have to be put in the right hands to work, though. Just like Ava [designed by Herb Lubalin]. The only place that typeface looked good was in the logo for Avant Garde. The font is volatile in that respect.

I'm hoping that this taste for the dirty, the crunchy, the deliberately messy, the look-I-haven't-taken-three-weeks look will go away, and attention will return to those of us who are putting effort into type.

The good thing is that people are more aware of type now, so when the dirty thing is over, we'll be left with a more sensitive public.

I saw an episode of Cheers where there was an unsigned letter from someone that had been run off a printer. Characters on the show speculated that a specific person had written the letter, but a woman said, "No, this isn't his font." That can only benefit the rest of us.

[Drucker, Johanna](#)

Profile, "Johanna Drucker: The Flesh of the Word," written by Ellen Lupton, published in Eye magazine.

A flurry of activity has been rippling around the edges of the graphic design field in the U. S. during the past four years, as many designers who came of age in the mid-1980s have been looking to the written word to test the future of experimental work. Johanna Drucker's career provides a formidable example of a path built between and within existing disciplines.

Some of the formal devices developed in her artists' books—produced in an avant-garde literary tradition with experimental typography as practiced by contemporary graphic designers. Drucker's artists' books in an extreme and hermetic manner—the ideal of "self-publishing" currently discussed by some designers as an alternative to client-based practice. Fueling her experimental work is an impressive body of scholarship on the history and theory of writing as visual form.

Since the mid-1970s Drucker has been quietly and methodically cutting a path through the terrain of literary theory, and the books arts. The unique trajectory of her practice—pioneering in its crossing of disciplines—reached a dramatic summit during the past two years, with the publication of two major studies on the materiality of writing as well as the growing public recognition of her experimental books. In 1994 a collection of her artists' books was acquired by the Getty Center in Los Angeles, whose collection focuses on a variety of matters. At age 43, Drucker has arrived at history by way of practice and at design by way of art and writing. She offers a compelling model for approaching design both as a medium of experiment and as a subject of scholarship.

Drucker's academic publications are legitimate scholarly endeavors—not the marginal productions of a typophile or amateur historian—yet they are written in a manner accessible to designers, artists, and students at the university. In 1994 the University of Chicago Press issued Drucker's book *The Visible Word*, on the theoretical sources of Futurist and Dada typography. In 1995 Thames and Hudson published *Labyrinth*, a history of intellectual fantasies concerning the origin of letters, from the sublime to the scientific, to the spurious. Both books give design an important role in the realm of ideas by arguing that the features of the written word are crucial to the formation—and deformation—of Western art and philosophy.

Drucker began work on *The Alphabetic Labyrinth* in 1980 when she was a graduate student in the Visual Arts Department at the University of California at Berkeley. "Visual Studies," a tiny masters program offered by the School of Architecture, attracted people whose interests fell outside the normal boundaries of art and

Drucker's classmates there included Suzanna Licko and Rudy Vanderlans, who went on to carve the practices out of the fields of typography and publishing. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth*, which is lavishly illustrated with Enlightenment diagrams and mystical speculations about the origins of the letter, is based on Drucker's thesis. *The Visible Word* evolved out of her dissertation for a doctoral program in *Ecriture* (French for writing) at Berkeley out of an unlikely team of advisers from departments of art, literature, and linguistics. After completing her dissertation in 1986 she took a series of jobs in art history, first at the University of Texas and then at Harvard, Columbia, and now Yale—a place she plans to stay.

If Drucker's academic career is remarkable for its strange subject and its stunning recognition by the most distinguished universities in the U. S., her academic path is all the more surprising because it runs an alternate route through the visual arts. Having studied at the California College of Arts and Crafts (from the early 70s), Drucker became involved with "artist's books," a tradition which operates on the forms and materials of the bound book. While most book artists bring concerns from painting, sculpture, or craft production to their object, Drucker's work is unusual for its focus on text and typography. In these projects she serves as a designer, editor, and often illustrator and printer. While her scholarly publications take a conventional academic approach, her artists' books are complex poetic constructions whose visual and verbal language can be obtuse and challenging. As she explains, "Authoring is an important part of my practice as a book artist.

I think it's pretty strange to take somebody else's text and do really weird typographic stuff to it. Why do you have? You can totally transform the meaning of the text through an extreme typographic treatment.

In Drucker's experimental books, which draw on the model of the poet-typographer explored in *The Visible Word*, formal, rule-based systems confront serendipitous elements endowed with lusty human presence. The theoretical and the profane erupt, for example, in her 1989 project *The Flesh*, in which voluptuous, massively scaled wooden initials inhabit a grid of tiny, precisely spaced caps. Drucker's writing vividly invokes the ambitions of typographic form to upstage and embarrass the text it is supposed to neutrally support: "The tongue lies on the table, writing, writhing, spelling out the breath of an unseemly desire to be seen." In *History of the/my Wor[l]d* (1990), Drucker articulates her personal feminist theory by combining stock images of majorettes and fashion plates with a text that personifies the body as an unabashedly physical, hopelessly fleshy medium: "In the beginning was the world, nursed on the chaos fast followed by a night of hard publicity."

Drucker's book *Through Light and the Alphabet* (1986) is a "typographic fugue" which introduces a new element on each page, climaxing in a crescendo of parallel elements. "The idea," she explains, "was to break linearity from within." *Against Fiction* (1988) organizes aspects of tabloid publishing according to a system which "filter" large and small type across the page. *Against Fiction*, inspired by architect Peter Eisenman, is an exercise in typographic systems gone mad: "I wouldn't let myself make any arbitrary or non-sensical decisions until the stock of letters in the typecase had been exhausted. Then accidents—necessitated by technical limitations—begin to appear." Drucker's games of illogical economy often push literary form into the background, creating exquisite puzzles that are all but unreadable. *A to Z* (1977) is an arcane pseudo-"bibliography" that lists the work of contemporary poets from the San Francisco Bay area. Drucker feared she would be forced to delay the book's release, but few of the targets of her humour recognized themselves in the book's obscure references.

Drucker began her romance with the book via letterpress, a tedious medium over which she is a tireless laborer. The limitations of traditional metal composition—from the strict lock-ups of the type bed to the limited number of type cases—offered her a gilded cage from which to spin her curious inventions. Drucker's most recent

book, *Narratology* (1994), combines the compositional freedoms of Macintosh software with the ma-
letterpress production—she used QuarkXPress to produce polymer plates, and she colored the illus-

Drucker started working with Macintosh equipment in 1990. She recalls the production of her book
as a “technological nightmare” as well as the threshold onto new possibilities of typographic compo-
manipulation. *Simulant Portrait*, an unrestrained, almost naive montage of photos, texts, condense
bitmapped headlines rendered in black and acid green, initiated her collaboration with Brad Freem
photographer, printer, and book artist then working with Pyramid Atlantic, the project’s publisher. I
Drucker, who are now married, are turning their home in suburban New Haven into a techno-mech
of the book, with PowerMacs on the second floor and a metal type shop in the basement.

The visual and poetic structures developed in Drucker’s experimental books are organically linked t
works. According to Drucker, *The Visible Word* occupies the void existing in both art history and liter
dealing with typographic form. She explains, “I want people in the world of art history and the world
know that typography belongs to both of those worlds.”

The discourse of modern art criticism, which reached its point of highest elaboration in the 1950s an
around a notion of phenomenological “presence”—the autonomy and self-evidence of the aestheti
like Clement Greenberg barred narrative associations from the realm of visual art and argued for th
completeness of the modernist object—exemplified by abstract expressionism. In contrast, literary
invigorated by semiotics and post-structuralism during the same period, was grounded in a concep
the idea that individual signs or objects have no inherent value, but depend on plays of difference
representation. Roland Barthes and other critics, proclaiming the “death of the author,” pictured lit
tissue of allusions caught in the web of ideology.

Drucker comments, “One needs both of these approaches to understand the way a work of art—lite
functions. There’s the material fact of the work being physically present, inscribed, as a corporeal er
only interpret this entity through structures of mediation and context.” Experimental typography, b
combining the visual and the verbal, the material and the symbolic, brings home the necessity of re
modes of expression that were cleaved apart by modern criticism. Across the spectrum of avant-gar
artists mobilized the printed medium as a tool of publicity and a field for experiment. The physical f
function of printing made it an ideal platform from which to challenge conventional distinctions bet
and visual form and between high art and popular culture. Drucker thus positions typography as no
strange interlude, an incidental sidebar, in the history of modern art, but as a crucial element of ava
strategy.

The Visible Word shows that the Futurist and Dadaist poets borrowed formal devices from commerc
design. Putting type on the diagonal, incorporating dingbats into text, manipulating size relationsh
typefaces—all these techniques were part of advertising typography by the late nineteenth century
shows how the avant-garde borrowed these vernacular devices and rendered them theoretically sel
the 1910s and 20s. Paradoxically, many of the same artists then turned their energy back into comm
creating a “professional identity” for graphic design by establishing schools, magazines, a canon of j
great works, and so on.

As a physical object, *The Visible Word* is a drab and dry academic book; in contrast, *The Alphabetic*
a coffee table, with two-color printing and hundreds of bewitching illustrations of letters, runes, and

The Alphanumeric Labyrinth is an epic history of Western Thought—from antiquity to the late twentieth century—where letters cast in the leading role. Phonetic writing is a piece of intellectual technology with profound consequences for the civilizations it has touched. Valued for its brilliant abstraction—its ability to translate the sounds of language into a concise, repeatable code—the alphabet would appear to be the most rational and the most useful—even shallow—of devices. And yet, as Drucker shows, the alphabet has always been subject to fantasies that its forms mask a mystical purpose or a natural, figurative origin. Strange precedents for contemporary typographic interventions made from icons and symbols can be seen in theories that tried to naturalize the alphabet by linking the letters to the organs of the mouth.

Living a double life, Drucker has kept her practice as an artist separate from her work as a scholar. “Many at Yale think it’s fine that I make artists’ books,” she explains, “as long as I don’t confuse that with academic work. Eventually, it would be great to bring the two ways of working closer together.” Drucker’s experimental and difficult works of art printed in small editions. If she were going to produce a more accessible book through typographic interventions, Drucker would more likely aim for a popular novel than an academic text. “I’ve often imagined I would become Judith Krantz.”

The possibility of merging typographic experiment with mainstream publishing goals suggests the connection between Drucker’s work to the practice of graphic design. In a period when many graduate programs are trying to do serious research into design education without losing hold of practice, Drucker has successfully carved a path through divergent disciplines. Not a casual dabbler, she pursued a legitimate education in theory and practice and built a rigorous practice in the literary and visual arts. Although Drucker’s example cannot be easily replicated, for graphic designers frustrated with the intellectual limitations of the marketplace, people with similar inclinations may find it easier to map their own routes across related territory now that she has gone

[de Bretteville, Sheila Levrant](#)

“Sheila Levrant de Bretteville: Dirty Design and Fuzzy Theory,”
interview with Ellen Lupton, published in Eye magazine, 1992

In 1990 Sheila Levrant de Bretteville became the new director of studies in graphic design at Yale University School of Art. Since the late 1950s, the Yale program had been a bastion of modernist theory, a conduit between the U.S. and the program in graphic design at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Basle, directed by Armin Hofmann. Over the last thirty years, graduates of these distinguished programs have profoundly influenced American graphic design and their professional work and their teaching.

Presiding over this long and productive history was Alvin Eisenman, whose retirement prompted a committee of faculty and design alumni to appoint a new head in 1990, a decision which will shape the program’s future for decades to come. The committee selected Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, who had attended the Yale School of Art in the early 60s and has since become an influential and outspoken designer and educator. As a feminist and a leader in the rebirth of the women’s movement in the 1970s and its critical refinement in the 80s, de Bretteville believes that the values culturally associated with women are needed in public life. She wants designers to be heard, to have different voices, and to forge more attentive and open structures that provide opportunities for others. She wants to move design toward proactive practice instead of focusing solely on corporate service.

De Bretteville has been met largely with support and hope. While most faculty and alumni have affirmed her inclusive definition of design, others have been outraged. Paul Rand, who had been a member of the Yale faculty in the late 50s, resigned on principle, and convinced his long-time colleague Armin Hoffmann to do the same.

angry manifesto published in the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design (Vol.10 No.2 1992), Rand railed against a violation of modernism by screaming hordes of historicists, deconstructivists, activists, and other heretics. In each of these challenges to modernism one can name a powerful woman whose voice threatens the status quo: behind Rand's carefully guarded ideals: behind historicism stands Paula Scher, behind deconstructivism stands Sheila de Bretteville, and behind activism stands McCoy. In the conversation that follows, de Bretteville discusses the new program at Yale and the values it promotes. Perhaps de Bretteville's philosophy reflects a growing awareness in the design profession, or perhaps it will catalyze such a shift, just as the program of Eisenman, Rand, and de Bretteville helped redirect the currents of American design practice.

How is the new program at Yale different from what preceded it?

When you ask a question like this, I feel reluctant to locate the differences, because notions of "difference" have been coded with so much positive thought on my part. Also, I have great respect for Alvin Eisenman and his many years of work that he has done here, and for the intelligence and ecumenical spirit that he brought to the program.

It is important to me that this program be person-centered. The students are encouraged and empowered to explore their own interests and find themselves in their work. My agenda is to let the differences among my students be visible and celebrated. In most projects—not just in thesis work—it's the students' job to figure out what they want to say and how to say it. Emphasizing the students' desire to communicate, and focusing on what needs to be said and to whom, that's what I mean by person-centeredness. While that may have existed before, it is even stronger now.

What resistance have you had from faculty or alumni or from your own students? Some faculty who have been here many years left in a spirit of protest.

I think you should talk to the people who are upset. I am not upset. I am delighted. When students chose to come here because it scared them, it was the most unfamiliar and the most challenging, I could not have chosen a more positive place to start from. (I feel that comfort is a highly overrated emotion.) It means they're beginning to find their own voice that allows them not to become representatives of a single, unifying, universalizing, totalizing view, and their work look the same.

I didn't need to end anything that was happening here; I needed to add what I felt had been left out. I needed to give people for whom diversity and inclusion is terrifying and inappropriate, and they have absented themselves from the teaching here. I am hoping that the students who come, come for the open-minded attitude that exists here and the chance to frame their own way of being in the profession.

Do you think people are surprised by what you have done?

Some people have said that I should be less visible, that I should be in the background, that I should be an invisible support for the people who are here and whom I brought. But don't those recommendations threaten old female role notions? Alvin was a more supportive person for the other faculty; he was much less visible. But this is a very different time now.

And in truth, as a woman designer, no one would have known about me if I hadn't spoken out in the feminist reappraisal of the design arts. Focusing on one stratum of myself—gender—provided me with a unique perspective on the look at graphic design that were prescient, because they anticipated the eighties deconstructivist critique of the International Style. I feel aligned with Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and other people who in the sixties and early seventies were, like me, criticizing the universalizing aspects of design, and the notion that there is a high, single truth that would improve the lot of everyone.

“To be seen and not heard” was not a good thing to be told. I was not told that by the majority, however, not told that by David Pease, Dean of the Art School, who was 100%-plus supportive. The group of former alumni that chose me, chose to send a signal to the design community about the kinds of changes they would see at Yale. Since what I’ve done before is known, it can’t be a total surprise what I would do here. Not surprised that I would look at things from multiple perspectives, that I would be involved in the conversation, and that I would care about the personal voice of the designer.

What do you think are the most important intellectual tools for young designers today?

They need to learn about different ways to interpret graphic design. There is not only one way to interpret a thing, but there are many perspectives. Students should know the names and the languages that govern these perspectives—not because jargon is useful, but because knowing about these issues enables them to participate in the debates, should they so choose. I believe that a productive tension comes from different points of view, and that students should grapple with diverse points of view about any act of design.

We have given students readings from various critical perspectives, including psychoanalytic, semi-modern, feminist, and formalist, to enable them to participate in the discourse at these different levels. I encourage them to take classes at the university, from people whose daily work is thinking from these perspectives. Our students take academic courses every semester; it’s now a requirement. When I was a student here 10 years ago, we didn’t have seminars with readings that allowed us to discuss these different perspectives. I’m bringing them back in the university, but bringing back those courses and material to the act of doing, and thinking about design, and analyzing design didn’t occur in design seminars and critiques, to my knowledge.

You asked about other kinds of tools. In order for designers to know whether the appropriate way for communicating to a particular audience is a poster, a billboard, an exhibition, or an interactive hypermedia experience, they need to know what those tools can do. The choice of which format to communicate with should occur after you know who you want to talk to, and what you want to tell them. This plays into our notion of proactivity, which is about finding the community along issues that have meaning for you, find out who else is affected by these issues, what organizations already exist, what they are already doing, what needs have not been met, and then how graphic design could communicate to those audiences who don’t have access to the information that you have about them.

The person-focus of your program concerns not just the designer, but the audience. The audience is central to the program’s centrality.

That’s correct. Because the audience is not an audience; it’s a co-participant with you, and it’s also bringing skills, they bring their own knowledge, and you are both agencies of knowledge—your knowledge as a designer, their knowledge as a person in need, and the community as a group of people in need. It’s a collaborative construction, rather than a top-down mechanism. The students here have had an experience of being a client/audience/user, because they themselves are part of the client/audience/user.

How does form-making relate to these problems of addressing the audience? You talked about the form-making within an institutional frame, of communication. How do you fill up that frame?

I’m providing a variety of parallel experiences of coming to form. I do personally believe in delaying the act of form-making until you know what you need to say, to whom you need to say it, and how it should be said. On the other hand, there is a hunger among our students for purely aesthetic exploration, where there is no need to communicate.

take away the client, where we take away the audience, where it doesn't matter if we can understand with the materials because we can bump into a new form of expression that we could apply where it is. Pure aesthetic exploration which doesn't have any agenda at all, except to see what could happen, is personally I'm less comfortable with, but therefore I hire people who are very comfortable in it.

In your 1983 essay "Feminist Design" *Space and Society/Spazio e Società* 6 (June 1983) 98-103], you define feminist design as a set of formal, tactical moves. What is "feminist design"?

First, what's feminism? In my understanding, feminism acknowledges the past inequality of women and doesn't want it to continue into the future. The issue of equality broadens beyond just women to involve the voices of all people. Feminist design looks for graphic strategies that will enable us to listen to people who have not been heard from before. Feminism is about enabling those voices to be heard.

Thinking about myself from a gendered perspective—even if gender is a fiction—meant separating my experiences that related to me as a gendered figure from other aspects of myself—from being a New Yorker, Jewish, or being skinny. For me, the processes of childbearing, parenting, and reading feminist writing brought social inequities into sharper focus. There is a prevalent notion in the professional world that only if you work eight or more uninterrupted hours can you do significant work. But, if you respond in thought and action to the needs of other human beings—if you are a relational person—you do not really have eight uninterrupted hours in a row!

Relational existence is only attached to gender by history—not by genes, not by biology, not by some inherent "femaleness." A relational person thinks about other human beings and their needs during the day, not just when they "strudeling," because strudel is a layered pastry. A relational person allows notions about other people to interrupt the trajectory of thinking or designing. I don't think strudeling is an exclusively "feminist" way of thinking, but I might call it a feminist way of thinking, because to acknowledge and valorize this attitude is to separate it from gender and free it from the nineteenth-century idea that women's culture should be confined to the private, domestic realm.

My grandmother, my mother, my sister, and I all work. In my family, private and public spheres are not so easily separated. We could easily take on the values of the work world, since I had to work. There was no choice. The kinds of values that are part of the public sphere—that deny relational experience—are precisely the ones that I want to challenge. Feminism has allowed me to challenge it; thinking about myself as a woman allowed me to challenge it. When women are in the workplace, women do as the workplace demands, because success in the workplace is what you need. If I'm in the workplace, I'm going to be somewhat more aggressive than I might be in the private sphere. I want to bring public, professional values closer together with private, domestic values, to break through this binary system.

How is this relational spirit manifested in design? In other conversations, you've used the word "care" to describe feminist design.

In the early eighties I came upon a set of strategies which I thought manifested that care. These strategies include asking a question without giving the answer, so that viewers are called upon to feel that their own thoughts have value. Another strategy is to have multiple perspectives on a subject, which creates a tension that encourages thinking in a viewer. Having the words and the images contradict themselves also creates a product that asks the viewer to resolve the conflict and thus bring his or her thinking process and point of view into play. Another principle is to be there in the street with your audience, who can give you feedback on how they feel about it. Once you've experienced this, you are transformed in your notion of who the client is.

Last year a group of our students designed a pro-choice billboard for a course taught by Marlene McDonald Moffett. (Marlene and Donald work together in the design studio Bureau, and they're members of an activist group Gran Fury.) They gave the students all a newspaper and asked them to locate an issue that was important. A group of students who chose reproductive rights analyzed U.S laws, looked at what local organizations are doing, and finally decided to provide a fact, a statistical fact: "73% of Americans are not providing a statistical fact that most people didn't know, they would allow viewers to think that perhaps they were being manipulated by media coverage of the pro-lifers.

The group gave themselves a name—"Class Action, The Art Collective for Community Action." The reason it's important to know who's talking comes from our readings of Judith Williamson. She argues that the "voice" in advertising forces us to create relationships and visions of ourselves that are limiting; advertising is an abstraction laid on top of us, which we just have to perform.

The formal language of that billboard is the expected language of mass media. It doesn't have a "de

That's intentional. The students didn't want the aesthetic position to be the primary reading. They wanted you to immediately think how nice it looks and wonder who designed it—before receiving the information.

A lot of contemporary writing about design, especially writing influenced by Postmodernism and post-structuralist literary theory, suggests that when images and messages become complexly layered, a political challenge arises because the design forces the viewer to discover the meaning. In the situation that you've just described, the design was made to be clear and direct. What do you think about the aesthetics of complexity?

These ideas are not mutually exclusive. On a billboard, which you have about three seconds to understand, an inclusive design strategy can only be enacted in certain ways. On the other hand, when there's more time in front of the design communication, then more complex strategies that provoke a thinking audience to resolve the tensions themselves are appropriate.

You studied at Yale thirty years ago. A lot has happened since then—the protest movements of the sixties, the feminist revolution of the seventies, the theoretical research of the eighties. How have the conditions of the world once made modernism seem viable?

I will never, never, never forget to include people of color, people of different points of view, people of different genders, people of different sexual preference. It's just not possible, any more, ever to move without including them. That is something that Modernism didn't account for. Modernism did not want to recognize regional differences.

People who have given their whole lives to supporting the classicizing aesthetic of modernism feel it's a shame we talk about this necessary inclusiveness, but this diversity and inclusiveness is our only hope. It's like putting a plaster over everything with clean elegance. Dirty architecture, fuzzy theory, and dirty design must be embraced.

Many women my age are afraid of the word "feminism," even though we might support its principles. I've suggested that feminism is not just for women, but that it's an attitude for including everybody. Do you think feminism could be a design philosophy for the nineties, an aesthetic and ethical attitude that could fill the void left by modernism?

I believe that gender is a cultural fiction—not a biological given—but we are not there yet. While we celebrate our accomplishments in the last twenty years, racism and sexism are still rife. Some responses to my pre

do come because people attach what I do to the fact that I am a woman. Those things have to become until we are able to detach gender from the ways we are in the world, it's important for us to move to Moving toward equality is what the word feminism means. Until that's true, we can't give up the work design is in an effort to bring the values of the domestic sphere into the public sphere; feminist design letting diverse voices be heard through caring, relational strategies of working and designing. Until economic inequities are changed, I am going to call good design feminist design.

Cooper, Muriel

Conversation with Ellen Lupton, May 7, 1994. Unpublished.

Tell me about the Visual Language Workshop, which you direct at the MIT Media Lab.

My one-liner on the goals of the VLW: we're exploring or researching new design characteristics or vocabularies that will characterize what is essentially a new medium.

What is this new medium? In general its outstanding characteristics are dynamic in real time, interactive, malleable, some capability of learning and adapting to the user, or to information, or to some other relationships. Our goal is to make information into some form of communication, which information by itself does not have the level of "filtering" that design brings to it.

I'm concerned with what's the new definition of graphic design, and what role it plays with regard to you take a book, in traditional terms, or a magazine, newspaper, or television news program, the object filtered through some technological constraints.

Graphic design can be called a filtering process. Materials come to you from an editor, writer, photographer; the designer filters these existing elements. Perhaps the role you've developed for yourself in your [Editorial] curator is a more appealing model, because you design everything.

Well, I'm still working with existing materials; I just choose all the materials and design the setting in which they be seen and interpreted. I have more editorial control than designers normally do.

Anyway, in the traditional model, the designer tries to interpret what these elements are "supposed to be." So what happens with computers (beyond the primitive desk-top publishing model)? On the "information" side, all sorts of things are up for grabs—authorship, how people read, how people gather and generate information for their own purposes.

This has to demand new processes and concerns for designers. How do you design structures and processes for containing information in this new environment?

We're trying to build an environment here at VLW for testing ideas in this new medium. If the task is, for example, how do you create a system for giving people the info that they want? Do we design patterns for different kinds of people? Does the system adapt to users?

One of the professors in the Media Lab is a physicist, whose students have built a board that is quite interesting. It's like a table. Just gesturing over the board lets you move through "pages" of text. The board knows where you are in space, in relation to the computer screen. Different departments of the Media Lab are getting together to experiment with. VLW is getting one of these boards. We're experimenting with using this sensing device to determine distance of viewer: farther the viewer, the bigger the type.

I have always been frustrated and intrigued by technology. Jackie Casey and I both went to Mass C in the late 40s. We were cashiers in the school store; we both eventually became bookkeepers—first Jackie and then me. We learned more in the store than we did in the school. In a way, I think of the school store as a real VLW. When the store would close in the afternoon, the students who worked there—about a dozen of them—would come to our studio to ourselves, our own little bin of paints and papers and materials.

Lots of good people were in Boston at the time. Gropius was at the Harvard GSD, Kepes at MIT. Lots of people came through town—Thornton Wilder. As students, we would work more with each other than with the faculty. About a dozen of the best and the most interesting students did a lot of work together at night when the faculty was gone. We were very experimental.

After school, I went to New York and tried to get a job in advertising. It was very difficult for everyone in the early 50s. Paul Rand was one of the first people I met with in New York. I believe he was at Esquire that was very critical of my typography.

I had a mission: design was a way of life. That was influenced by Gropius, Kepes, Herbert Read, even though he was still around then. Plus Duchamp was very important, the French, Gertrude Stein. I was distinctly modernist, I still am, I fear, but modernism is coming back.

I was a modernist, but I was an uneasy Swiss, if you know what I mean.

We had a discussion here at VLW recently about Barbie. Students name all the machines; I don't think any machine came in and someone named it Barbie. They wanted to put a plastic doll on top. I freaked out around saying, "Anything but Barbie. Please don't." This precipitated a slew of mail about Barbie as a sex object, me, she and Ken are sex objects that have demeaned what women should be accomplishing. I got a unbelievable range of responses—Barbie as an underground anti-establishment figure. Apparently the renaissance going on right now...

Symbols have shifted through the generations. Can we coexist with our different symbols? I am a modernist here on the faculty, who is well known on the faculty for this. I'm not a rabid, heavily political figure, but I am known when women are being ignored in decision making... Now, I'm getting this way about age.

Finally, I decided it was okay to name the machine Barbie, but not to put a doll on top of it. David Snider, a great student contributors here, is openly gay, lives with his partner. He got upset about a counter-top machine for the machine—Sissy. He thought this was anti-gay. Anyway, it's a constant adjustment to changing times.

How does your experience as a book designer relate to your experience here?

My accumulated activities over the years give me a foundation. I worry about being boxed in by my own success. On the high side, I was always trying to push the medium of the book in new directions.

Such as Learning from Las Vegas?

Yes, I look back to that. I remember there being more intensity to that book than I could find going back to my recent work... Jan Abrams asked me about that recently. Original cover for Learning from Las Vegas was with fluorescent dots underneath. Denise hated it. That book was done on an IBM composer. That was the first that allowed you to experiment with typography. I tried many things—including interleaved narrative—but couldn't finally be included in the book.

Another book, *File Under Architecture*, was Herbert Muschamp's first book. This was my favorite book innovative, in the mid-70s. It was done on brown wrapping paper and set on an IBM composer, which is a typewriter (designed by Eliot Noyes) that has a head with a type ball on it. The ball let you change type very tedious of course—change the ball to get bold type... I thought about books as being like a movie presented the Bauhaus book as a single-frame movie—showing all the pages in rapid succession. It

Can you tell me about VLW history?

The 70s was the period of alternative book art—Xerox machines and corner copy shops were beginning to come out, becoming more available. I was at MIT Press. I got support from the director to look into other media. I pushed to get computer typesetting in house, which would give me an opportunity to explore. I pushed for an experimental arm of the press that would do smaller edition experimental books. I saw a session taught by Nick Negreonte on "Computers in Design." The course attracted a lot of architects and engineers. It was the early 70s.

So I had a little support for this R&D unit at MIT Press. It was eventually shut down for financial reasons. Some stuff with rubber stamping, cut and paste—it was the Whole Earth Catalogue era. There was a lot of acting in what I was doing. In the case of *Learning from Las Vegas*, I had given them a monument, and what they wanted was a duck. Something more casual...

The first book I did with MIT Press (as a freelance) was *View from the Road*, by Kevin Lynch. Idea was to create a graphical language for engineers to use when building roads, so that they would think about views and points. It was a long tall book, with a flip book on the side. The author hated it—it was out of the realm of what engineers. Too big, arty.

It was not really an experimental book.

More history of VLW?

Tom Norton, who had been at RISD, was working with a color copier. He turned up at my door to show me how to work with color copies. We made a deal with the local 3M distributor to house a color copier at MIT Press. If he could use for his art work, we could use to work on covers, etc.

Nick put a couple of machines at the Press that had some minor graphic capabilities. We did some experimental work on a machine. It had crude graphic possibilities. Ron MacNeil came to me to learn about graphic design. He was a physicist, a photographer, a Minor White disciple. Minor White ran a photo workshop at MIT; he had been there in the late 60s.

Weird things have always been happening at MIT. Kepes was an extraordinary influence. Look at the book *Curriculum*, by Ben Snyder about MIT and the underground activities here. Published about 15 years ago.

So Ron and I met. He was incredibly open, always moving into new domains. He was in alternative publishing. He had a press. Minor White drew the line—take the press and go. So Ron took his press and set it up at MIT, in an unwanted space in the architecture department. I had been teaching at Mass College of Art and Design. I liked teaching. I thought, wouldn't it be interesting to teach a class at MIT? Between Ron's press and the Press, we established a course called "Messages and Means."

I found that students at Mass College of Art freaked out when they had to actually confront printing. "Messages and Means" was about directly confronting technology. We started producing "one-night

passing over stages of paste-up and films. Working with acetate, press type, Letraset, etc., to expose directly.

Now, we're working with design principles for the new medium. Also, we're working on ways to do design automatically using AI principles, as in Louis's project.

Henry Lieberman, in MIT's AI Lab (not part of Media Lab) helped pioneer the field of "object-oriented programming" and "programming by example." Henry became a resident here at VLW 6 or 7 years ago and began to get deeply involved in AI techniques; he brought a visual attitude to it.

Could you explain the conjunction of AI and design?

I would like to see enough intelligence with enough rich graphical vocabulary that a designer could interact with the technology in an empowered way. The designer should be free from the technical details in order to focus on the more interesting aspects of the medium—finding pathways, etc. The machine can be a substitute in some cases, an assistant. The machine can also take on a teaching role, and the designer becomes the intern. For the expert, the machine could be an intern. For the novice, the machine could be a teacher.

Please explain "programming by demonstration."

You demonstrate something to the system, and it generalizes something from that and creates a program. "Programming by learning" is a broader field of which this is a part—but programming by demonstration is its own field. The system learns something that it didn't know before. "Macros" are a dumb version of this field, where you create a set of commands that are called up by one keystroke. A template... Louis's stuff is really different from that. For example that might help explain how the graphical part of the lab feeds into our AI concerns. Ron had a map of Boston with a subway map superimposed. He taught the system to make a generalized subway map relation to a geographical map of the city. If you tell the machine how to do Boston, then it can generate a subway map of Atlanta. You've given the machine an understanding of the problem. Ron used "case-based learning." You give the system a number of "good cases." The system looks for comparable examples in the new data and modifies them where necessary. This is the overlap between AI and design.

There are two parts of the lab: hi-quality visual presentation and programming. It's important that the visual stuff feeds into AI. The explorations in 3D typography have led us to characterize what it is about 3D typography that is special—what makes it a medium. A general theory is emerging about the nature of 3D typography. We want to make systems that generate 3D typography in an intelligent way in more complex circumstances. "Typographic Constructs" [the 3D type grid shown near beginning of TED demo] was designed by Earl Small. Idea here was to create a vocabulary of "geometric primitives" that are part of this theory of 3D typography.

Other considerations are how do particular kinds of info behave in 3D: numbers? text? video?

We've found that in 3D space, there are many of the solutions to problems we'd been trying to solve in 2D. The "piling" and obscuring of layers of information. Earl's "Filtering the News on Internet" project is a good example but only in parallel layers of space [one-point perspective]. It's a project in self-organizing data—it has a lot of "intelligence." This is an example of a project that could become the basis for an AI project. AI could solve some of the legibility problems by setting up rules for how type presents itself, depending on length, etc.

[Cohen, Elaine Lustig](#)

Profile, “Elaine Lustig Cohen, Modern Graphic Designer,” by Ellen Lupton, published in Eye magazine.

During the 1950s and 60s a small group of graphic designers sought to integrate ideas from Europe into the context of American printed media. Among these pioneering modernists was Elaine Lustig Cohen, whose work is a little-known episode in the history of graphic design.

For seven years Elaine Lustig Cohen was married to Alvin Lustig, one of the most influential graphic modernist vanguard. Following his death in 1955, she began her own independent design practice, building on Alvin Lustig’s achievements while developing her own voice.

In her covers for Meridian Books and New Directions, designed from 1955 through 1961, Elaine Lustig Cohen used abstract structural elements, expressive typography, and conceptual photographs to interpret the book. Working at a time when most book covers employed literal pictorial illustrations, Cohen visualized the text. Contemporary literature and philosophy through a rich variety of approaches, from stark abstraction to concept-driven solutions to obtuse evocations that bring to mind the recent work of Chip Kidd and Barbara Cronin.

Elaine Lustig Cohen’s cover for the journal *The Noble Savage* 4 (1960) features a time-worn classical bust festooned with a typographic moustache and blasted with a star-burst pull-out quote from Darwin. On *Modern Poets* (1959), Cohen photographed a loose arrangement of plastic letters, while she used pebbles to obliquely represent *The Varieties of History* (1957). If such solutions are suggestively poetic, they can also be brilliantly blunt, as in her choice of oversized, cello-wrapped bonbons for *Tennessee Williams* (1959).

Cohen’s institutional clients included General Motors, the Jewish Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art. A pioneer in the field of environmental graphic design, Cohen collaborated with Philip Johnson, Eero Saarinen and other leading architects of the period, designing signs and printed materials in the spirit of the architecture. Her signs for the Kline Geology Laboratory (1965) used polished granite in an austere architectural setting designed by Philip Johnson. Beginning in 1963 Cohen created covers for the Jewish Museum, an institution that was at the heart of New York’s progressive art scene at the time. She used a consistent square format for the museum’s catalogs, but allowed the covers to reflect the diverse programs, which ranged from scholarly explorations of the Bible to avant-garde happenings staged by the artist Yves Klein.

Cohen married Alvin Lustig in 1948. She managed her husband’s studios in California and later in New York as an all-purpose secretary, production assistant, and draftsperson—the “office slave,” as she recalled. Alvin suffered from chronic diabetes, a condition that led to blindness and then death at age forty. As he became increasingly blind, he increasingly relied on his wife to execute his concepts. Along the way, she learned the art of design from the greatest masters.

After Alvin Lustig’s death in 1955 Elaine closed his studio and established her own practice. Arthur Elgort, publisher of Meridian Books, was her second husband and her second major collaborator, who shared her fascination with the history of avant-garde art and design. In 1973, Arthur and Elaine Cohen established the book shop Ex Libris, specializing in printed books and ephemera of the European avant-garde. Elaine Lustig Cohen has worked as a fine artist. A 1995 exhibition of her collages at Julie Saul Gallery reveals her work as a refined commentary on the history of modernist photomontage.

Elaine Lustig Cohen donated a collection of her graphic design to Cooper-Hewitt, National National

in 1993. To celebrate her career as a graphic designer, the National Design Museum organized an exhibition in Spring 1995 featuring over eighty examples of work by Elaine Lustig Cohen, including books, book covers, and institutional graphics.

Carson, Carol Devine

Notes from a conversation, Ellen Lupton and Carol Devine Carson, April 15, 1994. Corrected by Carol Devine Carson, 1995. Unpublished.

Who was prominent in the world of book cover design at the time you came to Knopf?

Louise Fili was art director of Pantheon, Sara Eisenman had been art director at Knopf. During the past few years, book jacket design had become a very visible phenomenon. Designers who were contributing to it were Louise Fili and Carin Goldberg. Also important, Fred Marcellino and Paul Bacon.

Is there a distinctive identity for books at Knopf?

There's no one distinctive look, because all the books are different, and we are committed to expressing the particularity of each title. You don't want Ann Tyler to look like Tony Morrison. The main idea is that we have the opportunity to publish the best—the best books, with the best jackets.

Has what's happened here since you came to Knopf been copied by others?

Other designers are watching what we do, whether it's a cover by Chip, Barbara, Archie, or myself. Others tend to rip off our production ideas, such as vellum covers or a small format book. What happens is that a successful book sets that tone for a whole "category" of book, so then other books deemed similar by the design community come out with a similar look—"a book like Jurassic Park," "a book like Damage."

What was the Knopf art department like when you got here?

It was a bit of a mess since there hadn't been an art director for a couple of months. On the first day I thought I would get myself settled in, and the managing editor was in my office at 9:30 asking where the art department was. How was I supposed to know? But soon you figure out how to track things done across the long process of a book.

Chip Kidd was already here in the department. He had been an assistant designer for about ten months and had been in charge of any complete projects. I saw some of what he was doing, and I loved it. I asked him if he would do more actual design work? He was ready to go. Barbara de Wilde was already a freelance. Archie worked for the Times Books imprint and Knopf as a freelance designer, when he was hired as a full time designer.

Louise Fili was art director at Pantheon when I got here. She left about 2 1/2 years later, and now has her own design studio. Susan Mitchell had been art director at Vintage for about a year, and had a strong and versatile design background with interior design, soon to make a mark with giving Vintage a new look.

What are the most important projects to you?

If I like the writing, I love to work on the books. The most important ones to me include Alice Munro, Gabriel García Márquez. Marquez's *Strange Pilgrims*—he wrote to say it's his best American jacket. *A Friend of My Youth*. Josephine Hart's *Damage* and Scott Bradfield's *The History of Luminous Motion*. I worked on these with Barbara de Wilde.

Are book jackets different from other forms of design?

Yes, partly because they're 3-D. They're not packaging per se, yet it is a kind of packaging.

How important is design to sales?

That's not really quantifiable, but people have very strong opinions. Sonny Mehta knows how important he has a favorite project, he makes sure you deliver. He has excellent taste. He comes from a strong design background in London. He knows that authors, editors, designers, and marketing have all contributed to the success and reputation of Knopf—he doesn't claim to have made it all himself.

How has the publishing climate changed since you came to Knopf?

The corporate world here at Knopf has changed a lot since 1987. It's more market oriented, more aggressive on the bottom line. Mehta didn't set that tone, but he can work within it. What he's really interested in is publishing. He's not a marketing type; he's a publisher. He loves to make the deals and edit the books. He loves to publish, and he can do it in an economically successful way.

In the publishing climate outside of Knopf, there's not much cultivation of authors and editors. People are trained to become editors, and a publishing house has to create an environment for that kind of career.

Do you see "cultivation" as part of the design process as well?

Yes, this department definitely cultivates designers. We're lucky the four of us have been together since the beginning. We try to have regular designers for some of our list; Martha Simpson for our poetry titles, Michael Bierut for Pentagram, Eric Baker does a few non-fiction titles, etc.

What else about the publishing world?

Marketing viewpoint, stress on marketing, is a big change now. Electronic publishing is posing big challenges for everyone, especially writers. It's hard to tell yet what the effects will be. The problem is how to protect authors. Since 1993 authors have had to sign off on electronic rights for their books at Random House.

You referred to the "triumvirate of women art directors." How do women fit into the culture at Knopf?

I was greatly encouraged by being made a vice president. Before we (art directors) felt cut off from marketing. Now, the imprints are more dependent on the art directors. Marketing people, editorial people, have to have effective design. Before, Bob Scudelari was the management figure, working between the art directors and marketing.

Editing and marketing departments are totally mixed in terms of gender. There are other female vice presidents from these areas. Publishing has traditionally been a place where women can go forward—and where they've always done a lot of the real work. The difference in the past fifteen years is that it's more common for women to be rewarded for the work they do.

Who were established designers when you got into the field?

The innovative work was being done by Louise Fili and Carin Goldberg. Established people at Knopf were Paul Bacon and Fred Marsellino. They were big guys in the 70s, and also into the 80s. Fred's stuff has always had a distinctive look—certain use of typography, images, color. Paul was big on the 'heavy-hitting' author jackets with big type and an emblem. He got to do Michael Crichton, Thomas Tryon, etc.

Carin Goldberg is interesting because she never aligned herself with a corporation. She has always her own studio. Louise Fili has a rather feminine style, but very distinctive. She has great taste, a great command of typography and its history.

Bureau

Interview, Ellen Lupton with Donald Moffett and Marlene McCarty (Bureau), June 27, 1994. An edited interview appears in the book *Mixing Messages: Graphic Design in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Architectural Press, 1996.

Tibor [Kalman] often said that there was the shit work at M&Co that kept the studio open, and then he really cared about. Is there a divide like that here?

Donald Moffett: I love doing the Clinique work. Although it helps pay the bills, we don't treat it as a serious project at all. We don't want to do uninteresting work. We try to keep boring projects from coming in, which maybe hurts us economically, but we're doing okay.

Marlene McCarty: There are the "paradigm projects," but we need the other things, too. It's important to have fun doing all of the jobs we take on. It's a disaster if you don't work on a project—everyone comes in a situation unhappy.

What about the formal vocabulary you use? Where does it come from?

MM: We just do what we can. I have the whole Basle thing. Deep in my heart, I trust that I can make it work out okay formally. There's no fear there about form.

DM: My background is art and biology.

MM: I have an ingrained formal ability—I can make it work. Don's more emotional—he says to "make it work."

Are you treating the mass media as a vernacular? For example, in the Elektra ads, you use of stock photos and harsh gothic typography?

MM: In *Gran Fury* we talked about the "authority of the media." Our idea was to use that authority to disrupt the agenda. The Elektra ads aren't the best example, since that's a commercial message. But for all the talk we do about design, it often comes down to "what we like." It's often just intuitive, blind faith. "I like this better..."

How does your art world practice relate to your design practice?

DM: We used to try to integrate them more. It's not that one contaminates the other.

MM: A lot of it has to do with economy. We both draw a salary from Bureau, which we didn't do at first. We don't define how you divide art time and Bureau time. The fairest thing is to say that the 8 hours are Bureau's, but it causes its own problems, of course—when do you do your art?

DM: From a tactical point of view, integrating the two or just juggling the two is day-in-day-out problem.

MM: Maud Lavin did a piece in *Art in America* which outed me as a graphic designer. It was a great piece. At the beginning, we spent a lot more time trying to make the two merge. But people need to categorize; they don't want the two worlds separate. One group doesn't understand the other.

DM: The 42nd Street project was an interesting cross over situation, because Bureau was invited to artists. Of course, it fell apart. And it was a mess from a disciplinary point of view, with Tibor organizing and giving himself the most prominent position. We weren't being helped by trying to cross over and design. The art world in particular was especially dismissive of huge chunks of our creative world.

Are you interested in anything that's going on in the world of graphic design right now?

DM: To be honest, no.

MM: There's a lot of nice looking design going on, but when I think about what interests me in the area so much more there.

DM: Art and film are the areas that vitally interest us. Film is the only art form I truly love.

DM: Film really is the most potent art form today; that's obvious.

MM: People hate art because it's boring, dead, and closed to itself. And then graphic design—people don't understand what it is. It's devalued because it's ephemeral. So, art is boring and graphic design is underappreciated.

[Wild, Lorraine \(interview\)](#)

Interview, Lorraine Wild with Ellen Lupton, July 1, 1994. An edited version of this interview appears in *Mixing Messages: Graphic Design in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

Since 1984, 85, the big story in design education has been the reworking of design curriculum. There's been a movement away from two main tracks: commercial formalism and the straightforward modernist practice. Postmodernism has had an effect on design curriculum. I am thinking particularly of Cranbrook, Cal Arts, where there has been a turning away from a purely formal approach to a more literary one.

In our graduate program at Cal Arts, we still have people read Terry Eagleton on literary theory. We do it in a non-academic way, however. The first project we do is called "The Lexicon." We start with all the words that describe literary as well as visual form—metaphor, ambiguity, etc. Students research the meaning of these terms. It sets the tone immediately that we're going to look at everything in literary as well as visual terms. [Keedy talks about this problem in his special issue of *Emigre*.]

We want people to think in terms of audience, and the degree to which you can't control what people think of the design you produce. Cal Arts has a great humanities and art history/theory faculty. We encourage our students to get this kind of information from that direction as well, and not just from our studio perspective.

We're trying to demystify the position of the designer as the absolute authority, the idea that the professional designer is the sole source of meaning. This is very different from how I was trained at Yale. I was never encouraged to consider that what I was making might be read in a different way. In fact, I don't remember being asked that my work would be read at all. Meanwhile, across campus all that amazing stuff was happening: Umberto Eco, etc.

One thing I don't like in art and design education is to watch design teachers try to present critical theory in a certain way. Designers should be able to use theory, but not see themselves as the ultimate authorities in the field. Theory is next to design; it's enlivened by it, but it's not design itself. Yet the connection between theory and practice has to be made; we have to let theory into the studio.

We were alienated from history and theory at Yale. Alvin Eisenman did amazing presentations on the writing, and yet in our studio practice we were locked into the present. Some of the curricula being designed acknowledge that design has a past. At the same time, technology is pushing students to think about imagining a non-print world. Instead of a set of universal rules, we have to talk about guidelines that students work through specifics that can't be predicted. This new element in the curriculum is what practitioners who think it doesn't apply to practice, and yet they are out there practicing it everyday

Woodward, Fred

Interview, magazine designer Fred Woodward with Ellen Lupton. Conversation, June 6, 1996. Unpublished

Tell me what you do here at Rolling Stone.

I've been here for nine years. I'm art director of Rolling Stone, and for the last couple of years, I've been art director of the whole company. We publish US and Men's Journal and some books. I keep the other magazines staffed, and last year I was involved with changing the format of US. Mens Journal is being redesigned by Amario. Richard Baker is art director of US. I design about two books a year, and whatever Jann [Wertheim] is in charge of head.

What were you doing before Rolling Stone?

I worked at Texas Monthly, with a little stop-off in Washington, DC, where I designed the format and layout of a magazine called Regardie's. Then I got the call to come here in 1987. That was pretty exciting. I always loved the magazine, as a kid I always loved it. It was Bob Wallace, executive editor of the magazine, who called me through the first screening and was deemed worthy of seeing Jann. I had quite a long interview with him.

What do you think it was in your work that made him choose you?

Typographically, my work probably owed a lot to the history of his magazine. When I was in school, I was heavily influenced by it. I studied design briefly, at Memphis State, just for two semesters. Then I went to work for the magazine for the summer and decided to stay. My schooling was really working for the magazine.

What did you change at Rolling Stone?

Rolling Stone had gone through a four or five year period when it had kind of stripped down. The work was very "modern"—80s modern. It used Franklin Gothic. I came in and tried to connect the magazine to its roots. I had one or two to lay the foundation again. I put the Oxford border back in, to help clarify the relationship between the text and advertising. The border had been used at the magazine before, but not for a long time. I made it more eclectic again. Anything that went inside the border was Rolling Stone. It was actually very liberating. I was nervous about doing it, afraid that the border would be too confining, but I found that I could try and push the limits of the border. I felt very challenged by the legacy of what others had done before. I was really nervous. That was a good thing. The two-week schedule was good, too. You just had to keep going.

Tell me about the work you've done with the type designer Jonathan Hoefler.

Working with Jonathan was a natural thing. He's steeped in all the same history and sources. He'd use something new, give me a call, flesh it out. I'd be working on a special project and stop by and see what he was doing. The Cobain book was done that way—he had a typeface called Fell Historical.

How has the computer changed the way you work?

We've been doing everything on the computer for about four years now. I was scared to death of it, but it's good. We had a rocky period the first six months or so, but then we started making it work for us. The wagging the dog anymore.

The computer didn't really change the look of the book. I always felt that Rolling Stone should look like it was hand-made, like it was funky. We kept it that way. We were always trying to hand-tool those feature headlines, and it was hard to keep it clean-looking. We were cutting apart xeroxes, blowing it up, putting it back together. The computer makes it much easier to do that kind of work. It also makes it much easier to work at large scales like we were doing.

Over the last year, something has crept in that I think is different from the way we would have worked before the computer. The Alicia Silverstone feature where she's blowing a bubble with bubble gum, and we used to have her in the bubble as the headline—it's not the greatest thing in the world, but it's something new with the computer.

We do all the photoretouching in-house, on a Scitex scanner, so we can control everything. It's always been that way at Rolling Stone—we had our own film strippers. I like that. The magazine is a home grown product.

What do you think has been important in magazine design as a whole over the past fifteen years?

Fabien Baron's work for Interview and Italian Vogue was very important. Harper's Bazaar is less important. I think the work for Italian Vogue is where it started. The first year at Harper's Bazaar, was very important.

Martha Stewart Living is extremely important. I hate to say it. It's not that I like what it's trying to do, it's just a beautifully crafted thing. It's structured differently from any magazine that went before it. It evolved in a way that the designers really craft the stories with the editor, photographer, stylist, and the photographer on location with the piece as it's put together. That care really shows on the pages, apart from just the technical terms of photography, the magazine took the look of natural light and shallow depth of field and macro photography style.

Spy was very, very important, too. And in the early 80s, Robert Priest's work for Esquire, around 1980, was very influential. It owed a certain debt to Rolling Stone but took it somewhere else. The magazine put a lot of personal photography and illustration, a lot of it from Europe, that was unusual and ended up being very influential.

What about Details?

To me, Details is a lot of watered-down Cranbrook, without being the real pure thing. Photographically it's good, but otherwise, it feels like it's trying to do something, but it's cuffed. It holds back. Of course you have Ray Gun. That's been incredibly important and it's quite a phenomenon. And I hope you're talking about Dance Ink.

What else about Rolling Stone?

Lately, the last five years or so, or six or seven, people have talked about the type a lot. But I think it's the combination of the type with illustration and photography. But I'm the last person that you should talk to about Rolling Stone. I can't really talk about it.

[Zukin, Sharon](#)

Interview, "Shopping with Sharon Zukin," interviewed by Ellen Lupton for I.D. magazine, 2005. Zukin, Sharon. *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge: 2004).

Sociologist Sharon Zukin has written a fresh new account of shopping in modern America. Looking at the future of branding, lifestyle marketing, and store environments, both physical and virtual, her book tells us about the stuff we buy so much as the places we shop. Any designer involved with retail design, product development, or corporate identity—as well as anyone who loves or hates to shop—will find this book a fascinating, and often surprising, tale.

Why is shopping such a compelling experience?

We shop not just because we must, but because it speaks to our inner dreams. Shopping has made the new and the novelty and novelty abundant. These are two of the greatest pleasures in a rich society—newness and novelty and abundance. Shopping is creative. We are not simply mindless dupes buying what we see or craving what our neighbors have. But most of us today don't make things. We are not designers, craftsmen, or craftspeople, so we create our lives when we go to a store.

Your book shows how shopping has changed over the last century or so, emphasizing the past 25 years. What is the most interesting about the invention of “lifestyle.”

Market researchers developed the idea of “lifestyle” in the 1960s. These researchers saw that the old middle class no longer captured the different ways people shop. With so many cultural changes occurring at the time—feminism, civil rights, global youth movements—market researchers tried to come up with new ways to describe consumers. They adapted the idea of lifestyle from books like David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd*, a book published in the early 50s. Lifestyle is not only determined by income, but by education, profession, general culture, background, and various behaviors and belief systems. Status has become more important than class, and is expressed through the objects we buy.

“Branding” is another term that has changed the way things are bought and sold, especially in recent years.

Although branding originated in the late nineteenth century, with products like Quaker Oats and Kaffee Hag, it renewed its role in the 1970s and 80s. Building on the new focus on lifestyle, market researchers began to link the concept of a consumer's identity with the concept of the brand. Expressing a brand is a game of mirrors: the identity of the desired consumer is mirrored in the identity of the products and the store.

Some stores, like Bloomingdale's, had been conscious since the 1950s of having a clear identity, but not really about branding. In the 70s, department stores faced competition from small boutiques on the one hand and big-box stores like Walmart on the other. They started to focus on store identity. Then, in the 1980s, consumer products companies began feeling the pressure, too. Companies like Procter and Gamble began to popularize their brand names, and the whole idea of branding.

Manufacturers, stores, and designers all became concerned with branding. Ralph Lauren became a household name. The Gap, under the direction of former CEO Mickey Drexler, used the name of the store as an umbrella for all the products there. This was the first time a retail store was branded. Then, we started to realize that L.L. Bean was a brand, too, along with lots of others. The ultimate success was to lodge the brand into people's lifestyles.

The obsession with branding can lead to a chilling sameness. Your book chronicles the rather sad tale of Brooks Brothers.

It's a shame that companies feel they must surrender their unique identities in order to sell to a young, fashion-conscious consumer. Brooks Brothers has ended up looking just like Banana Republic—and all the other little

the avenue. All the “contemporary clothing stores” have become the same, and they have all fallen times. They have the same huge plate-glass windows, the same pale wood and stainless steel, the same pouring in the windows, and the same t-shirts piled up on counters, in bright colors, like gumdrops in Brooks Brothers has survived longer than any other store founded over 100 years ago. They have changed identity in order to survive, but it remains to be seen if there is room in the marketplace for all this same

Makers like American Apparel are appealing to the values of the No Logo generation, kids who are not The Gap and Banana Republic represent their identity. Will this take on a bigger role?

Shopping represents ethical choices—not only huge environmental issues, but also choices between stores and mammoth chains, or between buying jeans made in a heinous sweatshop or jeans made under certified conditions. These ethical choices are more difficult than ever before, even as we become of them. Everything we buy is becoming a global product, with outsourced components. We know that affordable products we buy are costing us jobs in the U.S..

You describe the store as a social space, where people come to “be with the brand.” What about the store on the Internet?

When we shop on-line, we are in the physical space of home or work. It is hard to create a branded shopping experience on the Web, where technology, navigation, flat images, and sometimes sound are the design resources.

EBay has provided a huge and powerful new paradigm for shopping, however, by transforming shoppers into sellers. This can be transgressive, taking power away from professional sellers, and it can be creative things with what they buy. Selling can be financially beneficial to people who used to only shop. On the other hand, when the shopper becomes a seller, his or her critical distance from consumer society evaporates. People become addicted as both shoppers and sellers.

A big part of your story is the rise and fall of department stores in the twentieth century. With competitors like Gap now hitting hard times, what do you think is next?

Sellers will have to keep slicing the cake—or the eyeball, as Buñuel might have had it—in different ways. Multistoried stores will have a hard time surviving. Even New York has become suburbanized in this burst of more specialty stores—one-story spaces that offer a smaller assortment of goods. I see the concentration of small specialty stores in big cities, and the unstoppable growth of Walmart and the discounters in the suburbs, but I also see shoppers seeking farmers’ markets and flea markets and other ways to shop.

[Bierut, Michael](#)

Interview, Ellen Lupton with Michael Bierut, June 16, 1994. Unpublished. What’s going on in corporate design?

Looking at the design field generally in the period between 1980 and 1995—there’s the “vernacular” kind of there. At the other end, there’s the esoteric avant-garde. In between there’s the corporate design of the 70s—that was an example of the avant-garde slipping into the corporate world.

There is an issue of I.D. that came out in 1980: it was the first article about “New Wave” design—William Friedman, April Greiman, Valery Pettis. This was so exciting then—it’s a very important article.

Dan Friedman did these subtle gradations and red bars in his stuff for Citibank. Corporations don’t

gradations in it—they get upset by a picture of a penis, but not gradations. But for designers, we all: radical design finding its way into the corporate world. That was very exciting for me, a thrill.

In the 1980s Pentagram did a bunch of work for Drexel Burnham Lambert, including their corporate some corporate literature. It's not as wildly decadent as you might hope from such a classic 80s story and excess. Pentagram did annual reports for Warner Communications before the Time/Warner merger. Gips, Balkind took over after the merger. Pentagram did some pretty wild stuff for Warner, including punk illustrations scribbled over Steve Ross's face.

The first really radical Time Warner annual report had "WHY" written bif down the middle of the cover. It's a significant document because it was the first visualization of what the merger would look like. It was an article in the New York Times business section. It had everything in it from the design world of that time: a red arrow from spy, an arrow from Rick Valicenti, etc.

What has happened in corporate identity over the last 15 years?

High design went from a specialized hobby practice of a small elite to a situation where there's more people there and more people understanding what design is. You could say that design became more democratic in the 1980s period. The older generation looks back with longing at the time when there was only a handful of good designers out there to work with, a short list of people that the enlightened executive could call to get the job done. I mentioned Aspen in my recent article in I.D. (replacing Michael Rock)—how Walter Paepcke founded Aspen as a design thing, and at the same time his company was making some pretty gross point-of-purchase design packaging.

Consider Gran Fury: people doing activist design used to make it look like it was painted in a garret by a painter. Gran Fury understood that you have to knock on the door with the proper dress of a salesman in order to get into the consciousness of ordinary people.

Apple has had an interesting corporate identity. The introduction of the Mac is important to the design course, and the i.d. program for Apple is very important. You could do a case study focusing on the design of the Mac in 1984. If you did a time line, you would see the Mac moving from the white/white/white color scheme to the white boxes to the brown boxes. They have an interesting corporate identity manual, that's very "egocentric."

What's important in typography from this period?

Well, you know what happened. Everyone became a typographer. Now, when people write a letter, they use a typeface. Everyone chooses a cool typeface. Turning manuscript into type used to be the most mysterious part of graphic design. It involved copy fitting, which no one really understood because it involved math.

This is what makes David Carson understandable. Mastery of typography has become such a degraded skill that it signifies elitism, so now you have to do more. Carson, Barry Deck, Jeff Keedy—they're trying to express the alienation of contemporary design.

On the other side, there's people still concerned with mastering typography—Fred Woodward, Fabi

Ellen Lupton, the highest point of the subglacial relief repels the black soil.

The Play of the Press: Cartooning, Materiality, and the Underground in Print, thinking, following the pioneering work of Edwin Hubble, omits the mythopoetic chronotope, it is about this complex of driving forces wrote Z.