(Image: Miriam Koban)

The Cultural Turn in Swiss Graphic Design from the 1980s to 2020

This project focuses on the cultural turn in Swiss graphic design, representing a shift away from graphic design as a pure service and towards commissions from the cultural sector, which promised more creative freedom and a redefinition of the profession as a lifestyle. It examines three stages of "cultural graphic design": the emergence of new values (1980–1992), the development of a discourse (1993–2002) and its institutionalisation in federal policy (2003–2020).

Das Projekt untersucht den Wandel im Schweizer Grafikdesign von Anfang der 1980er-Jahre bis 2020. In dieser Zeit entwickelte sich das Grafikdesign weg von der rein kommerziellen Dienstleistung für Industrie und Wirtschaft, hin zu Aufträgen im Kulturbereich. Hier hatten Grafikdesigner*innen mehr kreative Freiheit und begannen ihren Beruf als neuen Lebensstil zu begreifen. Beforscht wird in drei Phasen: das Aufkommen neuer Werte (1980–1992), die Entwicklung eines Diskurses (1993–2002) und seine nationale Institutionalisierung (2003–2020).

Publications: Fornari, Davide, Robert Lzicar, Sarah Owens, Michael Renner, Arne Scheuermann and Peter J. Schneemann, eds. *Swiss Graphic Design Histories*. 4 vols. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2021; Lzicar, Robert. "Popular Culture." In *Swiss Graphic Design Histories: Tempting Terms*, edited by Ueli Kaufmann, Peter J. Schneemann, and Sara Zeller, 126–139. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2021; Fischbacher, Roland and Robert Lzicar. "Fan Talk." In *Die Not hat ein Ende: the Swiss Art of Rock*, edited by Lurker Grand, 443–474. Zurich: Edition Patrick Frey, 2015; Fischbacher, Roland, Silvan Lerch and Robert Lzicar. "Papierkrieg: Flugblätter, Pamphlete, Artefakte." *In Autonomie auf A4: Wie die Zürcher Jugendbewegung Zeichen setzte. Flugblätter 1979–1982*, edited by Peter K. Bichsel and Silvan Lerch, 177–184. Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 2017.

Introduction: The present research project investigates the discourse on graphic design in Switzerland in the under-researched period from 1980 to 2020. While the 1950s and 1960s saw graphic design in Switzerland achieve international recognition and commercial expansion under the label "Swiss Style", a paradigm shift took place in the following decades. Many practitioners turned their attention away from design as a pure service for the industrial and service sector and moved towards cultural commissions on a local, national and international level. Instead of aiming for maximum return, they chose their commissions according to whether they promised them creative freedom and whether they contributed to the profile of their portfolio in alignment with their new definition of their profession as a lifestyle. This phenomenon in professional graphic design became known as "cultural graphic design", and the present project is examining its emergence and development in Switzerland.

Methods: The project has identified three stages in this cultural turn: A) the emergence of new values (1980–1992), B) the development of a discourse on cultural design (1993–2002) and C) its institutionalisation in federal policy (2003–2020). Accordingly, the project is divided into three case studies bookended by symbolic socio-cultural, political and institutional turning points. It traces the development of design in Switzerland with a focus on transregional relations.
The case studies share a common methodology of triangulating network analysis, oral history and the discourse analysis of visual and textual material to create comparative readings of the last decades' developments in design and to stimulate a discourse on its current status. As a whole, it sheds light on under-researched areas of design history while situating them within the wider socio-cultural context.

Results: The present research follows on from the Sinergia project "Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Revisited", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which focused on Swiss graphic design and typography and their ongoing legitimacy, reputation, and status from the 1920s to the 2010s.