

Swiss Graphic Design: A British Invention?

Robert Lzicar

...I was getting off the train in Zürich.... That completely changed my whole view of things.... I started to get very interested in Swiss typographic design, Müller-Brockmann, Karl Gerstner, and Max Bill.... [T]hey were the first people in graphics that I had real enthusiasm for.¹

This quote from the British graphic designer, Dennis Bailey, highlights two issues that this article seeks to address: first, the transnational construction of national narratives, canons, and labels in design history, and second, the role of foreign designers in their international promulgation and dissemination. After the national category had been the dominant paradigm for historiography in design for decades, its actual significance became the subject of an ongoing debate. Influenced by postcolonial theory, the meaning and identity-giving quality of national histories have been fundamentally questioned. As Fallan and Lees-Maffei have written, “Nations are not isolated entities; they engage in multidirectional dialogues with neighbors, friends, influencers, trading partners, and enemies.”² Such criticism has been accompanied by a shift in the focus to the possibilities of transnational narratives.³ “Understanding that products are as much made through their consumption and mediation as they are through their manufacture,” Grace Lees-Maffei demonstrates how Alessi, whose products are typically attributed to Italian design, was also branded through its marketing in England.⁴ By following this approach and tracing the trajectory of “Swiss graphic design” beyond the borders of Switzerland, this article contributes to an understanding of “the transnational nature of design and its histories.”⁵

What I want to avoid in this article is to retell the dominant narrative of Swiss graphic design from another perspective, or merely to support it with new sources. Although the development of “Swiss graphic design” as a successful application of modern art and its “influence” has been dealt with in various publications, the focus of research more recently has shifted to its dissemination as a core concept for the development of its legitimacy, reputation, and status.⁶ An example of this shift is the article by Robert Wiesenberger and Elizabeth Resnick, “Basel to Boston: An Itinerary for Modernist Typography in America”; it focuses on the

1 Dennis Bailey, quoted in Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 200.

2 Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei, “Real Imagined Communities: National Narratives and the Globalization of Design History,” *Design Issues* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 12.

3 Ibid.

4 Grace Lees-Maffei, “‘Made’ in England? The Mediation of Alessi S.p.A.,” in *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, ed. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 287–303.

5 Fallan and Lees-Maffei, “Real Imagined Communities,” 14.

hitherto little-known protagonist, Thérèse Moll, and thereby illustrates in literal terms the migration of modern design methods from Switzerland to the United States—or more precisely, from the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel (AGS) [Basel School of Design] to the MIT Office of Publications.⁷ Although the importance of individuals for the dissemination of “Swiss graphic design” is also relevant in this article, I aim instead to disclose discursive mechanisms by investigating the complex interaction of various levels of discourse across national borders—such as personal experiences, designed objects, journalism, history books, and teaching and lecturing about graphic design.

British graphic designers showed an early interest in “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” [constructive applied graphics] as “a professional designation resulting from a reform debate on the function of applied graphics in Switzerland during the 1950s.”⁸ The role of graphic designers and of authors like Richard Hollis in spreading the label, “Swiss graphic design,” internationally is evident, but less is known about the process and effects of transnational exchange in design. So how did British graphic designers and experts learn about graphic design from Switzerland in the second half of the 1950s? How did they interpret “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” in their designs and writings? How did the resulting objects and texts establish and disseminate the labels Swiss Style, “Swiss graphic design,” or “Swiss typography” in Britain and abroad? And, by so doing, how did they contribute to our current understanding of “Swiss graphic design”? To find answers to these questions, researchers from the project, “Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Revisited,” spent one week in London engaged in first-hand inquiries.⁹ This article triangulates statements from our conversations with designers and experts with quotations from publications and with findings from analyzing designed objects that we came across in archives and exhibitions, either during our trip or during subsequent research on our return home.¹⁰

Border Crossings

That printed matter in particular contributed to spreading graphic design from Switzerland in Britain is well known. According to both Robin Kinross and Hollis, the magazines *Neue Grafik/New Graphic Design/Graphisme Actuel* (1958–1965), *Graphis* (from 1944 onward), and the book *die neue Graphik/the new graphic art/le nouvel art graphique* by Karl Gerstner and Markus Kutter (1959) contributed most to the spread of graphic design from Switzerland in Britain.¹¹ In England at that time, “there was little understanding of a European modernist tradition,” and a notion of graphic design as “commercial art” dominated the discourse.¹² As a result, it was much less common for English trade journals to report on

6 For a detailed literature review, see, e.g., Robert Lzicar and Davide Fornari, “Writing Graphic Design History in Switzerland,” in *Mapping Graphic Design History in Switzerland*, ed. Davide Fornari and Robert Lzicar (Zürich: Triest Verlag, 2016), 8–17.

7 Robert Wiesenberger and Elizabeth Resnick, “Basel to Boston: An Itinerary for Modernist Typography in America,” *Design Issues* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 28–41.

8 Lzicar and Fornari, “Writing Graphic Design History in Switzerland,” 8.

9 In addition to the author, participants included Peter J. Schneemann (as leader of the subproject, “Strategies of Dissemination”), Roland Früh, Ueli Kaufmann, and Sara Zeller. I am grateful for our discussions and their comments, without which this article could not have been written.

10 This triangulation was particularly necessary because not every archive we visited was equally rich in graphic design pertaining to Swiss modernism. For example, the Victoria & Albert Archives was not interested in modern graphic design in the early years of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik.” The Royal College of Art held onto the term, “commercial art,” for a long time before it slowly modernized itself, but without much “enthusiasm for contemporary European modernism.” See Jay McCauley Bowstead, “Ark Magazine from Cover to Cover,” in *Ark: Words and Images from the Royal College of Art Magazine 1950–1978*, ed. Royal College of Art (London: CWRCA [Royal College of Art], 2014), 5.

11 Robin Kinross, *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History* (London: Hyphen Press, 1992), 124; and Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design: A Concise History* (London, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 14–15. Karl Gerstner, Markus Kutter, *die neue Graphik/the new graphic art/le nouvel art graphique* (Teufen Niggli, 1959).

modern graphic design or even to publish articles by continental practitioners. That magazines from Switzerland were in demand among English graphic designers of a new generation thus comes as no surprise.¹³ By providing “plenty of examples of what were called ‘constructive’ graphics,” the magazines “opened up a new world to young designers in England,” to those who were “looking for some discipline, and a way of working that matched contemporary technology.”¹⁴

Kinross and Hollis agree that the “prime document in the international transmission of Swiss typography and its methods,” as Kinross put it, was *Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers/The Graphic Artist and his Design Problems/Les problèmes d’un artiste graphique* by Josef Müller-Brockmann, published in 1961.¹⁵ Hollis writes retrospectively about this book that, by “turning the experimental achievements of the pioneers [of the 1920s and 1930s] into a method, [it] was the first to demonstrate a logical means of ordering elements of design in a layout.”¹⁶ So on the one hand, *Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers/The Graphic Artist and his Design Problems/Les problèmes d’un artiste graphique* offered British practitioners both a visual introduction to modern typography and a tradition they could fit into; on the other hand, it also enabled British readers to come into contact with a selection of graphic design from Switzerland that was dominated by a group of Swiss graphic designers who were particularly good at promoting their personal theories in appropriately modern, high-quality design publications.¹⁷

An important factor for the reach of Swiss design was that many of these publications appeared in English, in addition to other languages. Meanwhile, the professional magazine, *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue suisse de l’imprimerie/Swiss Typographic Magazine* (1933–2014), played a less important role because it was published only in German and French at that time and available only by subscription, making access to it more complicated.¹⁸ In contrast, the magazine *Neue Grafik/New Graphic Design/Graphisme Actuel* was available “as soon as it was launched,” according to Hollis, “in the London artists’ bookshop Tiranti.”¹⁹ Availability clearly was just as relevant in determining the influence of the books and magazines as their language was.²⁰ In addition to the migration of media from Switzerland to England, the travel experiences of British graphic designers also were relevant for the dissemination of Swiss graphic design in their homeland. They set off for Switzerland to see firsthand what they had discovered in the magazines and books.²¹ This tradition can be traced back to the period before the World War II, when Ruari McLean traveled to Switzerland to exchange ideas with Jan Tschichold and other colleagues and to initiate collaborations; he was followed by Herbert Spencer after the war.²² However, in the 1950s, British graphic

12 Richard Hollis, “Neue Grafik and British Designers,” in *Neue Grafik/New Graphic Design/Graphisme Actuel 1958–1965*, ed. Lars Müller (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), n.p.

13 Ibid.

14 Richard Hollis, “Emil Ruder: Craftsman with Words,” *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue suisse de l’imprimerie/Swiss Typographic Magazine*, no. 4 (2014): 13.

15 Kinross, *Modern Typography*, 125. Josef Müller-Brockmann, *Gestaltungsprobleme des Grafikers/The Graphic Artist and his Design Problems/Les problèmes d’un artiste graphique* (Teufen: Niggli, 1961).

16 Richard Hollis, “Josef Müller-Brockmann,” in *About Graphic Design*, ed. Richard Hollis (London: Occasional Papers, 2012), 98.

17 For an investigation of the contribution of the design of publications and exhibitions to the historiography of Swiss graphic design, see Robert Lzicar and Amanda Unger, “Designed Histories: Visual Historiography and Canonization in Swiss Graphic Design History,” in *Mapping Graphic Design History in Switzerland*, ed. Davide Fornari and Robert Lzicar (Zürich: Triest Verlag, 2016), 249–76.

18 James Mosley, conversation with Peter J. Schneemann, Roland Früh, Ueli Kaufmann, Robert Lzicar, and Sara Zeller, London, October 18, 2017.

19 Hollis, “Neue Grafik and British Designers.”

20 The four national languages of Switzerland are German, French, Italian and Romansh, with most publications in graphic design being published trilingually in German, French and English, reflecting the editors’ awareness for the international dissemination of their ideas.

21 Richard Hollis, conversation with Peter J. Schneemann, Roland Früh, Ueli Kaufmann, Robert Lzicar, and Sara Zeller, London October 21, 2017.

designers were also driven abroad by “austerity and optimism” because the advertising economy in print media in Britain had suffered massively from the damage caused by the World War II.²³ Some of these designers stayed to work in Switzerland, while others went on a “grand tour” to visit various studios and schools, especially in the German-speaking part of the country. In strong contrast to Britain, Switzerland survived the war without significant damage. It also had accepted several graphic designers as refugees who brought their own knowledge and skills with them, and it had learned to recognize the potential of printed matter both for its “geistige Landesverteidigung” [spiritual national defense] during the war and for its economic development in the years thereafter. Furthermore, Switzerland had a well-established professional design culture, including schools, associations, and regular publications devoted to design.²⁴ Graphic designers from Britain thus experienced Switzerland as a place with an “extraordinary visual culture,” according to Hollis.²⁵ It seems to have provided some comfort in the face of their own country’s plight and, at the same time, provided a model for the future development of graphic design as a modern practice.

British graphic designers were fascinated not only by the visual culture in Switzerland but also by its significance. Dennis Bailey had trained at the Royal College of Art (RCA) before moving to Switzerland in 1956 to accept a position as assistant editor of *Graphis* magazine in Zurich.²⁶ For him, “Swiss graphic design appeared to reconcile fine art and commercial design because ‘it was based on rational structures, it was abstract.’”²⁷ Like Bailey, Hollis also noticed differences between Swiss and British graphic design during his journey through Switzerland in 1958, when he visited Richard Paul-Lohse, Josef Müller-Brockmann, and others. At the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich [Zurich School of Arts and Crafts], Hollis noticed the “strict discipline” in contrast “to the casually bohemian atmosphere of an English art school.”²⁸ These British designers let themselves be guided by their fascination for a visual language that was little known to them; the people and places they chose to visit and the statements they have made about their time there altogether imply that their reception of Swiss graphic design did not engage with the plurality of its visual manifestations in everyday Swiss life. Instead, they were focused on the characteristics and actors of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik.” Afterward, the British practitioners who had gotten to know Switzerland personally went about spreading their interpretation of it through conversations, reports, interviews, and books and, above all, through their own designs that reflected their experiences. That Bailey, after his return to London, “became one of the first foreign designers to work in the Swiss Style” seems

22 Paul Stiff, “Austerity, Optimism: Modern Typography in Britain after the War,” in *Modern Typography in Britain: Graphic Design, Politics and Society*, ed. Paul Stiff, *Typography Papers* 8 (London: Hyphen Press, 2009), 40.

23 For a description of the conditions in Britain at that time, see, e.g., Stiff, “Austerity, Optimism.”

24 For a description of the conditions in Switzerland at that time, see, e.g., Kinross, *Modern Typography*, 123–24; and Tan Wälchli, “The Afterlife of Swiss Style: An Experiment in Political Economy,” in *Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher: The present issue*, ed. Bundesamt für Kultur et al. (Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur, 2008), 73–75.

25 Hollis, conversation with Schneemann, Früh, Kaufmann, Lzicar, and Zeller, October 21, 2017.

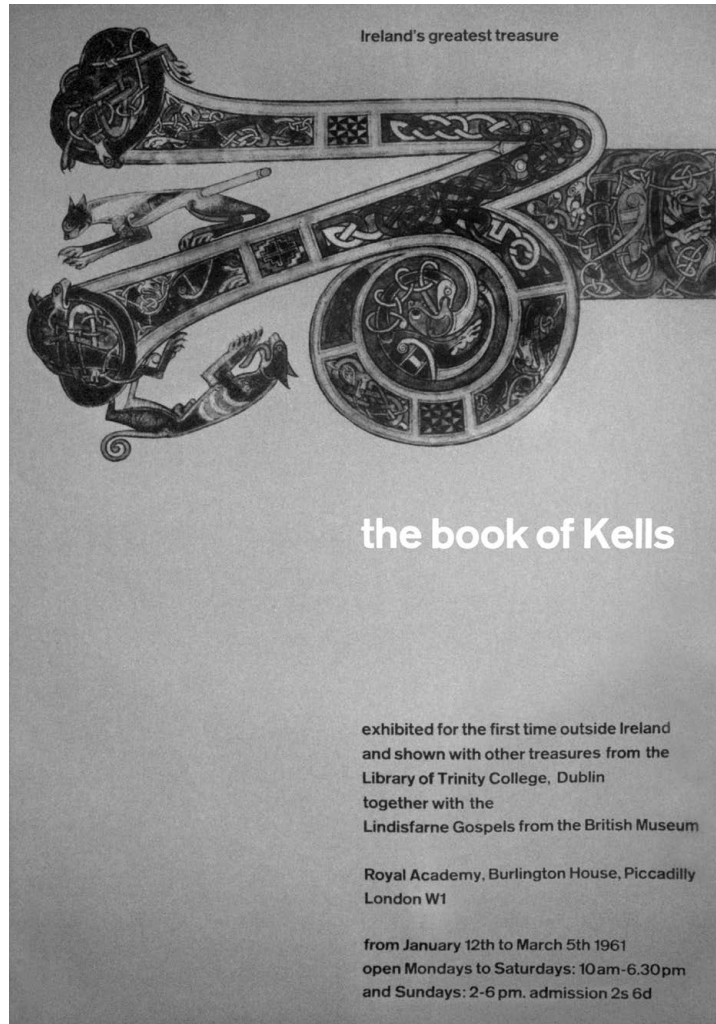
26 Patrick Argent, “Remembering Dennis Bailey – Design’s Unassuming Statesman,” in *Design Week* (blog), July 29, 2016, <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/25-31-july-2016/remembering-dennis-bailey-designs-unassuming-statesman/> (accessed April 9, 2020).

27 Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things*, 200.

28 Richard Hollis, “The New Graphic Design: Views from Abroad,” in *100 Years of Swiss Graphic Design*, ed. Museum für Gestaltung Zürich (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), 124.

Figure 1

Dennis Bailey's cover of the catalog for the exhibition, *The Book of Kells*, at the Royal Academy, 1961. Courtesy of Royal Academy of Arts Archive.



apt (see Figure 1). This interpretation of graphic design from Switzerland subsequently became the mainstream in Britain.²⁹

Style of the Moment

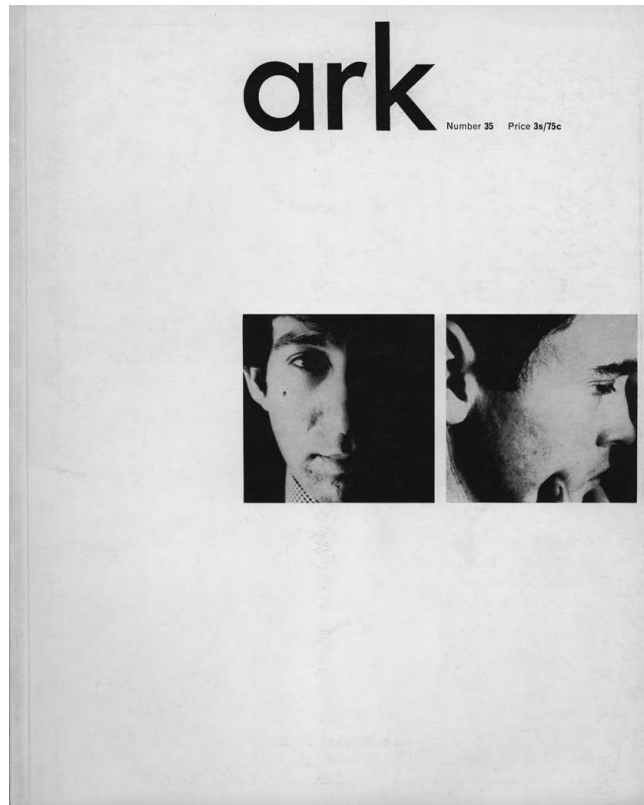
So far, we have followed how British graphic designers learned about graphic design from Switzerland, both as recipients of imported Swiss trade magazines and books and as travelers to Switzerland who saw designed objects with their own eyes and were given first-hand knowledge of the design concepts and methods by Swiss graphic designers themselves. But how did British graphic designers interpret graphic design from Switzerland in their designs and writings? And how did those objects and texts influence the understanding of Swiss graphic design in Britain and elsewhere?

Graphic design from Switzerland as a short-term fashion became obvious in the design of *ARK magazine*, published by the RCA. Students in its graphic design program became designers

29 Richard Hollis, *Swiss Graphic Design: The Origins and Growth of an International Style, 1920–1965* (London: Laurence King, 2006), 255.

Figure 2

Derek Coutts's cover of ARK 35, 22x27 cm, Spring 1964. Courtesy of Royal College of Art archive.



for a single issue. The covers of the magazine thus offered constantly changing layouts based on individual preferences, while also “captur[ing] changing ideas about the nature of communication design” in the time when they were designed.³⁰ Here, the shift of cover design “toward modernist, abstract, geometric image-making” also represented a shift “from crafts-based specialism of drawing to printing, to a modern graphic discipline at the RCA.”³¹ The increasing aesthetic appeal in Britain of modernist graphic design from Switzerland is clearly revealed in the layout for ARK 35 in Spring 1964, designed by Derek Coutts (see Figure 2). Its three-column grid, the generous use of white space, the grotesque typeface in lowercase letters, and the black-and-white photographs in the aesthetic of “*Neue Sachlichkeit*” [New Objectivity] are reminiscent of publications, such as *Die neue Graphik/The new graphic art/Le nouvel art graphique* (1959) designed by Karl Gerstner. Seen in the context of previous and subsequent issues, ARK’s excursion here into Swiss graphic design remains an isolated case. When understood as Swiss Style and applied to editorial design, Swiss graphic design was just one of many styles, a trend of the time, and correspondingly ephemeral.

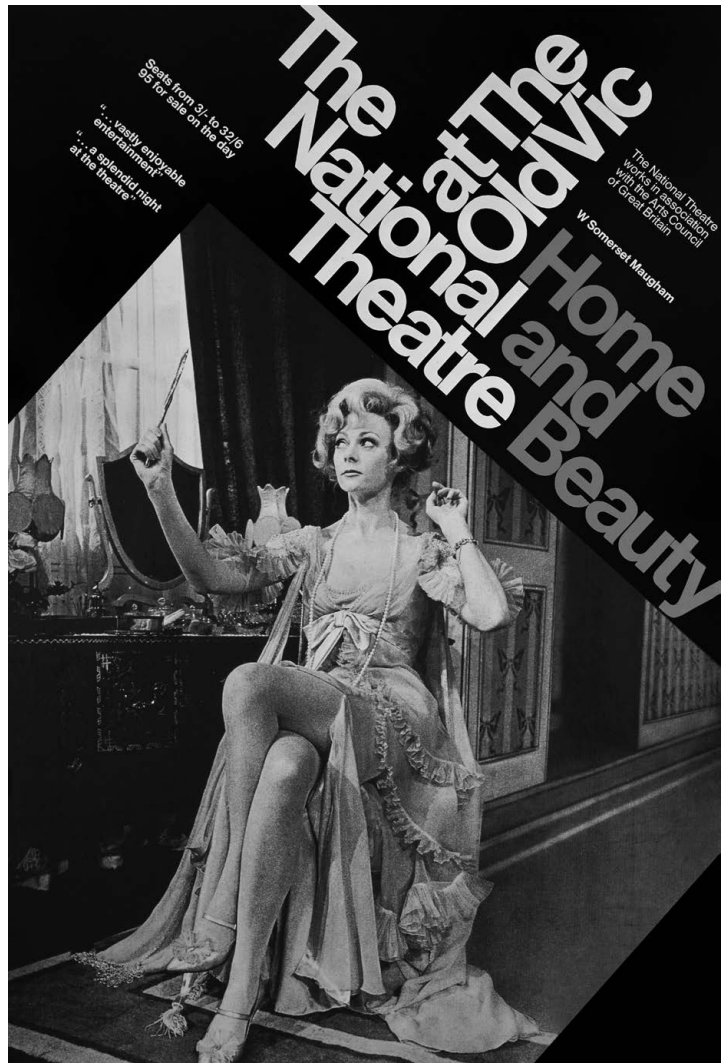
A more long-term, frequently mentioned example of the application of elements and methods of “*konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik*” in Britain is the visual identity of the National Theatre,

30 Ibid.

31 Bowstead, “Ark Magazine from Cover to Cover,” 5–6.

Figure 3

Ken Briggs's poster for "Home and Beauty" at the National Theatre, 1968. Courtesy of National Theatre Archive/Reg Wilson.



as developed and maintained by Ken Briggs from 1963 to 1974 (see Figure 3).³² Briggs got to know Swiss graphic design before starting to work for the National Theatre. Once again, the source of his knowledge was the magazine *Neue Grafik/New Graphic Design/Graphisme Actuel*, to which Briggs was introduced by Germano Facetti "during a stint working at Rathbone Books."³³ Apart from the fact that Briggs used Helvetica for the title and text, which was rarely used by graphic designers in Switzerland, his designs were clearly similar to the products of "konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik." It is therefore understandable that Briggs's programs and posters for the National Theatre were retrospectively claimed to exhibit a "Swiss-influenced austerity" and were compared with "Josef Müller-Brockmann's works for the Opera House in Zurich or Massimo Vignelli's for the Piccolo Theatre in Milan."³⁴ But why were Briggs and his colleagues fascinated with this style of modern typography? Rick Poynor has suggested in retrospect that it

32 Hollis, *Swiss Graphic Design*.

33 Fraser Muggeridge, "Ken Briggs: 1931–2013," in *Eye Magazine* (blog), January 24, 2014, <http://www.eyemagazine.com/blog/post/ken-briggs-1931-2013> (accessed April 9, 2020).

“offered a highly persuasive model of rigorous professional practice,” in that “Swiss posters and publications were composed with an almost scientific sense of precision and control, yet at the same time they often possessed enormous graphic force.”³⁵

Another British graphic designer who traveled through Switzerland was Ken Garland. In 1960 he was the art director of the British magazine *Design* and was sent to Switzerland by his employer to report on “how periodicals [in Switzerland] came to be so well produced and printed.”³⁶ That same year, he published the article, “Structure and Substance” in *The Penrose Annual*, in which he situates contemporary tendencies in graphic design in Switzerland and the United States within the history of modern art. In so doing, Garland created a long-lasting narrative that put Swiss graphic design—without providing a label for it—into the historical succession of the Bauhaus and the New Typography of England. This perspective became the template for subsequent historical narratives, including Hollis’s *Swiss Graphic Design: The Origins and Growth of an International Style, 1920–1965*, published some forty years later.³⁷ Like Garland’s article, Hollis “tracks the development of *das* [sic] *neue Grafik* from its roots in Henry van de Velde’s ‘rational style’ and the ‘tradition’ of German New Typography to its exportation to the United States.”³⁸ Hollis tries to define these tendencies from his perspective as a foreigner:

The two years 1958 and 1950 saw the Modernists realize their ambitions: they established a style and a point of view which they labeled “Constructive,” or “neue Grafik” (new graphic design), and this was now identified abroad as “Swiss Graphic Design.”³⁹

Hollis’s book, *Swiss Graphic Design*, has since become a reference work; it was published in a German translation funded by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia as it relaunched the international discourse on graphic design from Switzerland. The success of this book has been attributed to its form “as a catalogue of the ‘objective, rational manner’ and in its strong sense of the cultural determinism of its universal applications.”⁴⁰ Rather like the Swiss designer-authors of the 1950s and 1960s, the “sense of intimate acquaintance with the development and practice of graphic design” can be traced back to Hollis’s many years of practice as a graphic designer.⁴¹ As a widespread, frequently discussed phenomenon in graphic design history, practitioner-historians themselves obviously “played a significant role in helping to establish what a graphic design history might be,” and in doing so also promoted the identification of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” with “Swiss graphic design” and its international dissemination.⁴²

We have thus reconstructed how an “emerging generation of graphic designers” developed their interpretations of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” to promote a “Swiss Style” with

34 Simon Esterson, “Inspiration,” *Eye Magazine* 15, no. 58 (2005): 73.

35 Rick Poynor, *National Theater Posters: A Design History* (London: Unit Editions, 2017), 20.

36 Anne Odling-Smee, “Reputations/Ken Garland,” *Eye Magazine* 17, no. 66 (2007): 62.

37 Hollis, *Swiss Graphic Design*.

38 Michael J. Golec, “A Review Essay,” *Design Issues* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 86.

39 Hollis, *Swiss Graphic Design*, 205.

40 Golec, “A Review Essay,” 86.

41 Rick Poynor, “The Enduring Influence of Richard Hollis,” *Design Observer*, <http://designobserver.com/feature/the-enduring-influence-of-richard-hollis/33398> (accessed April 9, 2020).

42 Teal Triggs, “Graphic Design History: Past, Present, and Future,” *Design Issues* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 4.

clearly defined formal characteristics, making it the “style of the moment” in England at that time, as Kinross has put it.⁴³ We also have observed how the same generation expanded this style into Swiss graphic design and provided it with a history.

So is “Swiss graphic design” actually a British invention? No, of course not. However, on several levels of the discourse, British actors contributed both to the construction of Swiss graphic design and to our current understanding of it.⁴⁴ First, British graphic designers reported on graphic design from Switzerland and thus disseminated their experiences and their interpretation of that design in and according to the British design discourse. Second, graphic designers incorporated the stylistic characteristics and methods of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” in their design of objects and thus into British visual culture. And third, practitioner-historians contributed in retrospect to the construction of the labels “Swiss graphic design” and “Swiss typography” to signify an epoch of graphic design history. These narratives were subsequently disseminated in publications on the international market. It is probably to these practitioner-historians that Swiss graphic design owes its reputation and status, which remain considerable to this day. However, beyond the Brits’ appreciation of the formal qualities of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik,” there was also an exchange between British and Swiss graphic designers that thus far has been given less attention in historiography.

Approach to Design Problems

Although Kinross claims that the “functional aspirations [of Swiss typography] might be further doubted,” Swiss graphic designers have disavowed “style”—and not without reason.⁴⁵ “Konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” can also be understood as an approach to the problems of modern society and therefore as a contribution to the development of “visual communication” and “design” as scholarly fields. We have encountered this notion in discussions with British experts, and I investigate it here using the example of Anthony Froshaug as a mediator between British and continental graphic design.

After his training, Froshaug worked as a freelance graphic designer and typographer in Britain. In 1945 he tried to publish in English Jan Tschichold’s, “Typografische Entwurfstechnik” of 1932, along with other texts; one year later, he contacted Max Bill with a view to publishing texts of his in English translation through Iso-morph Ltd., a small publishing company that he had co-founded. Both efforts failed: Tschichold withdrew because of differences of opinion with Froshaug, while Bill proposed the publication of “something that would give insights into the methods of design: within particular areas... and these areas in connection with other fields and in relation to each other.”⁴⁶ This interdisciplinary notion

43 Kinross, *Modern Typography*, 123.

44 See John A. Walker, *Design History and the History of Design* (London: Pluto, 1990), 15.

45 Kinross, *Modern Typography*, 132.

of a kind of “design primer” was not pursued beyond an exchange of ideas. However, what becomes apparent here is Froshaug’s interest in the exchange of theories beyond cultural traditions and his interest in an international discourse on modern design.

Froshaug’s teaching activities were more successful than his ambitions as a publisher. As a lecturer in the foundation course at the Ulm School of Design from 1957 to 1961, he experimented with scientific approaches to visual communication and imported them into Britain. In his course titled “Visual Methodology,” he “introduced students to mathematical theories of graphs and lattices” and to how these “could be applied to real-life problems.”⁴⁷ In addition, he designed the first five issues of the school’s journal, *Ulm*. In this process, he examined the “Swiss-German typography of formal order,” but instead of copying its methods or stylistic elements, he combined them with traditional typesetting techniques to create a pragmatic editorial system.⁴⁸ After his return to Britain in 1961, Froshaug disseminated his approach to design at the RCA, both through his teaching job at the graphic design department and in a cross-departmental course in sign systems.⁴⁹ In a letter to the college, he explained his idea of a contemporary postgraduate design education based on an “attempt to teach each discipline and technique in terms of design problems,” as opposed to “typo for typo’s sake.”⁵⁰ He was discouraged by the hostility to theory at the RCA at that time, so he developed a more “Ulm-like” diploma course in visual communication at Watford College of Technology, School of Art, which opened in 1965. In describing the aim of this course, Froshaug explained that he sought to train designers who have “the ability to move freely and with assurance outside the complex of craft skills,” based on a recognition of the “rapidly-increasing complexity, scale and importance of visual communication in society, and the opportunities it offers.”⁵¹ His teaching activities thus reflected an attitude that can be traced back to the basics of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik,” but without being restricted to its formal-aesthetic elements.

This methodological approach became clearer in Froshaug’s contribution to the first Conference on Design Methods in London, which he presented a few days before the conference in Switzerland.⁵² This conference, held at Imperial College in London, September 19–21, 1962, is considered now to be the origin of the Design Methods Movement. Its members shared the aim of finding rational, repeatable, predictable methods for design processes that had previously been more or less intuitive.⁵³ Froshaug was part of the organizing committee, along with Bruce Archer, a teaching colleague at the RCA who had also occasionally taught at the Ulm

46 Anthony Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Documents of a Life*, vol. 2, ed. Robin Kinross (London: Hyphen Press, 2000), 144.

47 Victor Margolin, “Anthony Froshaug: Typography and Texts/Documents of a Life,” *Journal of Design History* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 122.

48 Anthony Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Typography & Texts*, vol. 1, ed. Robin Kinross (London: Hyphen Press, 2000), 27.

49 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Typography & Texts*, 30–31.

50 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Documents of a Life*, 196.

51 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Typography & Texts*, 185.

52 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Documents of a Life*, 204.

53 Claudia Mareis, *Theorien des Designs zur Einführung: Zur Einführung* [An Introduction to Theories of Design] (Hamburg: Junius, 2014), 163.

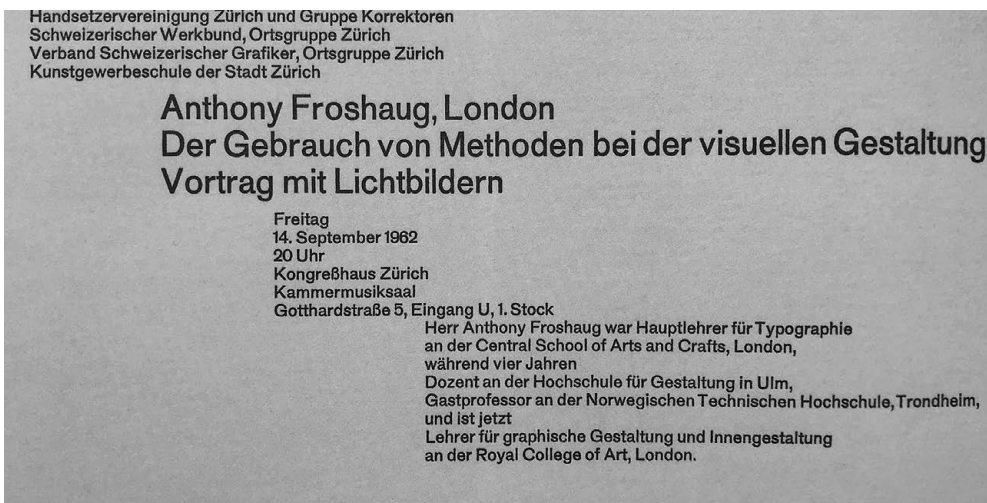


Figure 4
Announcement card for Anthony Froshaug's lecture, "Der Gebrauch von Methoden bei der visuellen Gestaltung" [The Use of Methods in Visual Design], 10.5x21.5 cm, 1962 (designer unknown). Courtesy of Anthony Froshaug Archive, University of Brighton Archives.

School of Design. He also designed the letterhead for the conference and presented a paper but decided against publishing it in the proceedings.⁵⁴ As a result, the lecture can only be partially reconstructed from his incomplete notes. Although Froshaug questions the universal applicability of the terms "method" and "system"—and thus also the beliefs of various other lecturers—his contribution concretizes his pragmatic understanding of how to approach design problems. Refuting the opposition of systematic and intuitive methods seems important to him, and instead, he stresses that both have their own momentum at certain stages of the process.⁵⁵ Froshaug thus addresses issues similar to the issues raised by Donald Schön in his 1984 publication, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*.⁵⁶ Both can be read as an argument for visual communication to position itself between craftsmanship and science—a perspective that is still understood and taught by many practitioners and theoreticians today.

Scholars have paid less attention thus far to Froshaug's contribution in spreading his understanding of a methodical approach to visual communication in Switzerland. At the invitation of the typographer, Hans Rudolf Bosshard, Froshaug gave a lecture titled "Der Gebrauch von Methoden bei der visuellen Gestaltung" [The Use of Methods in Visual Design] at the Kongresshaus Zürich on September 14, 1962 (see Figure 4). Lucius Burckhardt, a friend of Froshaug from his days at the Ulm School of Design, reported on this lecture in *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst/L'oeuvre: architecture et art* [The Oeuvre: Architecture and Art], the journal of the Schweizer Werkbund [Swiss Werkbund].⁵⁷ Burckhardt wrote that Froshaug had presented a playful, problem-solving approach in his teaching method that was not reduced to

54 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Typography & Texts*, 32. See also John Chris Jones, "Conference on Design Methods, 1962," Softopia: my public writing place (website), 2002, <http://www.publicwriting.net/2.2/dmconference1962.html> (accessed April 9, 2020).

55 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Typography & Texts*, 131.

56 Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

57 Lucius Burckhardt, "Mathematik als Designaufgabe" [Mathematics as a Design Task], *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst/L'oeuvre: architecture et art* 49, Nr. 11 (1962): 258–59.

graphic design but “could in fact be employed... in strategy or in economic planning.”⁵⁸ In doing so, Froshaug opposed craft-based graphic designers who “have employed ‘off the cuff’ methods to solve their problems.”⁵⁹ This accusation might well have found open ears among Swiss graphic designers. But Froshaug went much further, aiming for a “general methodology of the territory of visual communication and design.”⁶⁰ This scope of his concern seems to have gone beyond the reach of the numerous Swiss graphic designers who were present. Looking back, Bosshard claims that “everybody was there—Bill, Lohse—but nobody understood what Froshaug said.”⁶¹ Froshaug’s lecture thus revealed the limits of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik,” which appeared to be functional and problem-oriented but limited to the organization of information on printed matter.

Toward a Transnational Discourse

To conclude, I want to draw attention to the complex international interaction of design discourses—namely, to how reduction, organization, and systematization as methods connected to “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” developed into theories of visual communication in Britain and elsewhere; and upon being re-imported into Switzerland, these methods and theories contributed to the establishment of a new scholarly field. As with the invention of “Swiss graphic design,” these processes and developments cannot be attributed solely to Swiss and British actors. However, while the formal interpretation of “konstruktive Gebrauchsgrafik” as the Swiss Style is obvious, we are here dealing with theoretical contributions to a transnational discourse that no longer allows for national attributions. Accordingly, in contrast to the Swiss Style, visual communication as a modern approach has never been and cannot be traced back historically to a single cultural origin. The historiography of visual communication can instead be understood as a constant process of exchange, representing an alternative to the history of style in which it still seemed like one thing led to another.

By investigating the migration of ideas, objects, and people in connection with design, this article, and the research project from which it emerged, can be understood as a contribution to a post-national design historiography that seeks to expand the discourse on Swiss graphic design and other national design narratives beyond its own borders. As an emigrant German and now a German-Swiss citizen, I belong to a generation of practitioner-historians—along with many of my colleagues—who belong

58 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Documents of a Life*, 205.

59 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Typography & Texts*, 131.

60 Froshaug, *Anthony Froshaug: Documents of a Life*, 206.

61 Louise Paradis and Roland Früh, “Interview: Hans Rudolf Bosshard,” TM RSI SGM 1960–90: Research Archive, 2012, <http://www.tm-research-archive.ch/interviews/hans-rudolf-bosshard/> (accessed April 9, 2020).

to more than one world, and whose understanding of history is shaped by cultural hybridity.⁶² Not only does this hybridity dissolve any clear attributions, but what is understood as local also now “depends on context: on the relationship between a particular social space and the larger matrix of power and cultural relations in which it is embedded, whether it is the more normative system of a ‘nation’ or another post-national form of imagined community.”⁶³ Seen in this light, Swiss graphic design is also transforming itself from a local tradition to a globally applicable, negotiable form of cultural identity.

62 Karen Fiss, “Design in a Global Context: Envisioning Postcolonial and Transnational Possibilities,” *Design Issues* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 4.

63 *Ibid.*, 5.