


Global Villages in the Alps: Internationalization and

Swiss Design

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QUINTUS MASIVUS

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“Auch ich schimpfe auf die Schweiz und meine die Welt - aber nicht so!”

In the article *Madness in the max* that was published in the Bezin¹ *max* Bruinsma refers to the designer collective *Büro Destruct* as an emblematic example of actual Swiss graphic design nowadays. Bruinsma sees this leading Swiss design collective as a perfect synthesis between continuity of and rebellion against actual Swiss design. The name already indicates this dualistic tension; ‘Büro’ brings associations of order, precision and structure into account (the elements that gave the Schweizer Grafik its international allure) while the ‘Destruct’ element

indicates a rebellious, experimental side to it. The Swiss theory professor *Andreas Heide* writes in the preface of the book ‘Swiss Graphic Design’² that this dualism is immanent in the Swiss ‘Kunstgewerbeschulen’ where most Swiss designers came from. Talent and artistic flair are mandatory to be accepted at those schools while the training is mainly focused on functionality and application of design. This functionality is underlined by the immense success of their predecessors who were famous of their craftsmanship. According to both Bruinsma and Heiz, an element of temporarily Swiss design is therefore a rebellion (Destruct) with

respect for its tradition (Büro). According to Bruinsma, tongue in cheek amateur design which makes fun of the giants of the past (like some Dutch or American designers do), and therefore completely ignores the Büro aspect, is still a taboo in Switzerland. The big question therefore is if under the pressure of internationalization on this respect will crumble. Is there, what the Swiss design duo *Müller + Hess* call in their visual essay, an ‘impossibility of neutrality’³? Is the Swiss Büro style as mentioned above under pressure because of this international orientation? Both Heiz and Bruinsma see that the safe working environment in the Alps is attacked

by the forces of globalisation. Heiz sees this in a way in the Swiss educational system. There is a retour of *Kunstgewerbeschulen* and the rise of more internationally oriented design schools. Heiz thinks therefore that Swiss design will change. Bruinsma still thinks that the traditional Büro attitude stays and will be immanent in Swiss design. He notions some kind of changes but those fit more in the Swiss tradition where a typical Swiss ‘reduce to the max’ element is reinvented.

7 years further we see a more artistic and experimental Swiss design arise. Bruinsma was too strict in his hypothesis. New Swiss design collectives like *happyfists* are really experimental [f] without respecting the professional tradition. The only thing Swiss Design is missing is a good support system for it.⁴

¹ *benzin: young swiss graphic design*, Fries, M.; bruggisser, f.leds., lars müller (2001).

² *swiss graphic design*, Klanten, r.; heilise, n.; mischler, m.leds., gestalten verlag (2000).

³ *eye magazine: the international review of graphic design*, nr. 32 (summer 1999), h&m&h Publishing, london.

[a] <http://www.typedifferent.com/>

[b] <http://www.xs4all.nl/~maxb/benzin/index.html>

[c] <http://www.burodestruct.net/>

[d] <http://www.n-n.ch/>

[e] <http://www.muellerhess.ch/>

[f] <http://www.happypets.ch/>

⁴ *altitude*, Klanten, r.; bourquin, n.; mareis, c.; gestalten verlag berlin (2006)