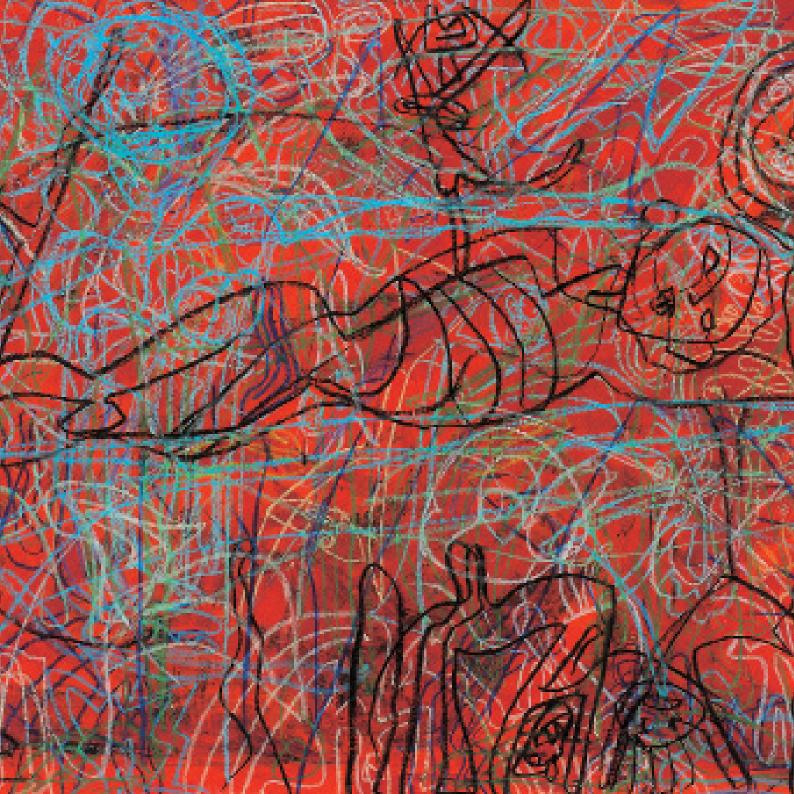Introduction

Paul Brühwiler. The running man. For six decades Paul Brühwiler has been drawing, painting, designing, thinking, commenting and observing. The depth and range of his graphic design, paintings and drawings are such that there are a multitude of narratives to draw upon as we pay homage to his work. It has been thoroughly animating to discover so much of his prodigious output, to find something new every day. We appreciated his posters and paintings as pictures that spring into the eye. They all have immediate surface appeal, but offer so much for further exploration too. These essays, a compilation of re-printed texts and new writing offer a look beneath the surface.

Poster Designer Paul Brühwiler and the Myth of Swiss Design.

Paul Brühwiler's graphic design is personal, provocative, polychromatic, witty, sexual, critical, humanitarian and visibly hand-made. It is everything that the internationally celebrated "Swiss style" was not supposed to be. Brühwiler's professional life was divided between Switzerland and California, which may partially explain this. However, his work cannot be situated either within the deconstruction or New Wave promoted by the hybrid influences of Basel (Armin Hofmann, Wolfgang Weingart, April Greiman) and the United States. Brühwiler did not belong to any "school of design", indeed he describes himself as an *Einzelgänger*. Whilst he forged highly successful professional path both in the USA and Switzerland, his place in design history is on the periphery of Swiss design.

"Swiss design", as any established canon, creates a stereotype which has hindered an appreciation of work falling outside that norm. Typically, a "stereotype" is a negative assignment, but there is much that would be considered positive about the stereotype of Swiss design. Anglo American design historians have sought to explain "Swissness" as a set of design characteristics in relation to "Swiss" as a geopolitical cultural condition. Patrick Cramsie, for example, uses the terms "impersonal", "rational" "clarity" "minimal" and "abstract" to describe Swiss Style. He makes a link between Switzerland's system of direct democracy, its geographical position, the four languages and the "onus on designers to present information clearly and impartially."[1] The new compilation "100 Years of Swiss Graphic Design"[2] seeks to diversify the canon, but still wants to retain "something autonomous that can be described as Swiss graphic design." Asking the perennial question, "What makes it Swiss?", it nonetheless falters, referring back to those qualities perceived from abroad of formalism and the commercial recognition of the benefit of quality design. In this book, there is one work of Brühwiler's featured, and it is one which he made in California.

This acclaim is indicative of Brühwiler's place in design history – he is present in major collections, but not internationally known. The aesthetic and methodological characteristics of his work are neither obviously Swiss or Californian, neither typically modernist or postmodernist.

Born in 1939 in Luzern, Switzerland, Paul Brühwiler assembled his own design education comprising a *Vorkurs* at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, evening classes in drawing and an apprenticeship with Atelier Edgar Küng. The Luzern *Kunstgewerbeschule* was not oriented to the concrete art inspired by pre-war Modernism that was developing in the mid to late 1950s in Basel (Armin Hofmann, Emil Ruder) and Zürich (Josef Müller Brockmann); the major teachers in Luzern were the surrealist painter, Max von Moos and Werner Andermatt who favoured expressive forms of design. Students were expected to find their own personal language of design through drawing, painting and woodcuts.

The International Swiss Style was undoubtedly pioneering and radical, but not typical of most graphic design at the time. The success of the ideas promoted in innovative texts such as *Typografische Monatsblätter* and *Neue Grafik*, has tended to eclipse other interesting streams of design in Switzerland, including those from the French speaking part of the country.

Even as late as 1972, it was internationally recognised that there were two opposite directions even within Basel, the "illusionists", and the "rationalists".[3] Today, Swiss modernism is barely associated with the "illusionist" Herbert Leupin whose lyrical, colourful drawing and typography won international acclaim at the time. It was Leupin who inspired Brühwiler. When I asked Brühwiler if he was interested in or aware of the ideas of Swiss Modernism at that time, he replied, "*I am sure I would have been interested, but nobody told me about it*."

In the late 1950s, Brühwiler's talent for both drawing and poster design brought commercial success for Atelier Kung, but by 1960, Brühwiler was already finding Luzern too provincial, and left for Paris where he hoped to work in film design. It was only in Paris, that he learnt that his Swiss nationality opened doors, and here, working with Albert Hollenstein, he first encountered designers from Basel and Zürich.

1   Patrick Cramsie, The Story of Graphic Design. p.244. The British Library, 2010.
2   Christian Brändle (Ed), 100 Years of Swiss Graphic Design. Lars Müller, 2014.
3   Henri Hillebrand, Graphic Designers in Europe. Thames and Hudson, 1972.

By 1965, Brühwiler wanted to expand his horizons further and emigrated to Los Angeles. Here again he found that his Swiss nationality brought with it a certain cache, whilst at the same time there was little evidence of the "Swiss style" in his portfolio. He got his first job with Saul Bass and then moved on in 1967 to work with Charles and Ray Eames, an immersive experience he describes as "like going to university", with scientists and mathematicians as much a part of the operation as designers. The Eames admired Swiss design. They even had a poster from Armin Hofmann hanging by the kitchen in the studio. But, as Brühwiler relates, their modernism embraced tradition. Rather than banishing the hand-made, they drew inspiration from crafts from Africa, India, Poland and Russia.

Brühwiler contributed to several of Eames' major multi-disciplinary works and went on to become art director at Carson Roberts. By 1969 he had enough experience to set up his own studio with Rod Dyer in 1969, and then with Teruko Ohkagawa.

Brühwiler's approach was based on his training in drawing and typography. His drawing and sensitivity to the direct human mark runs throughout all of his work. By the time he set up his own studio this sensibility allowed him to develop his own style which was a brilliant hybrid of this technical skill and aliveness to the real world, the whole diversity of graphic expression, and with it the pains and pleasures of human relations and emotions. This was not a rhetorical approach to design, but an instinctive and responsive approach. Brühwiler photographed every kind of graphic surface in Los Angeles, from the shiny facades of corporate America, to the hand painted parking sign. All of these observations fed into Brühwiler's work. As consumer culture accelerated, so did its corollary, in Brühwiler's words, "sexual liberation, make love not war, and swimming pools." Music, drugs and sex "became the new religion" and it was in the new genres of graphic design which came with music that Brühwiler began to make his own name as a designer. Together with Rod Dyer he entered the fast-moving world edged with the glamour of show biz, designing LP covers and posters for big names such as Capitol, Warner, Universal, A+M Records. He described the extraordinary tempo of their work lives:

Sometimes we had three to four jobs to do in a day. Early morning we took in the finished work and designed two or three more – maybe an LP cover, or the back of one which had to be changed, maybe a poster for an LP. On the return trip in the car we discussed what had to be done, then got on to the phone, ordered the type, a still life, or, like the bubblegum picture, we photographed, and then sent the film into the lab by express courier […]. If the image worked out then we scaled it to the right size, put the type on an overlay and mounted on card, that was it, and the next day it was delivered. For a while it was very exciting, but after a few months I was burnt out. And the money which came in just went out again at the weekend – super meals in expensive restaurants… then after the meal into the Daisy, a private club in Beverly Hills with a disco and billiards and starlets[4], and here and there a famous face from film. It all went on the tab….

Brühwiler soon became adept at manipulating graphic techniques and visual characteristics in order to signify meaning. His emerging auteurship as a poster designer embraced both the taboo-breaking of the era, but compositionally remained disciplined and consciously aesthetic. His promotional design was rich in cultural signification, but it was not a kind of loose, hippyish psychedelia nor a punk trash aesthetic. His works are highly constructed, aesthetic and harmonious.

In 1972 Brühwiler returned to Switzerland on a visit, and found that for the first time he really appreciated it and wanted to return.

The beautiful new municipal baths…everything seemed to be somehow better than in LA: the cafes on the Reuss, everything was so clean, the mountains, the lake, above all the air.

Brühwiler wanted to introduce Switzerland to what he called the "anti-design design" he had experienced in California. Hans Rudolph Lutz, who was then director of the school at Lucerne invited Brühwiler to share his images of Californian music industry design with the students there. Walter Herdeg, editor of Graphis then published an article using Bruhwiler's image material on the emergent scene of LP cover design on the West Coast[5].

4   See: http://alisonmartino.blog/2014/08/29/the-daisy-in-beverly-hills/
5   Tony Cohan, "West Coast faces the Music", Graphis 161.

This "anti-design" retrospectively falling into the category 'postmodern' was an explosion of imagery, juxtapositions, irreverent pastiche. It must have been a delight to students to see this anything goes aesthetic, an anti-intellectualism, sticking up two fingers at what was allowed. Brühwiler was in fact bringing back to the Luzern students some ideas that were analogue to those being exported to the USA from Basel at the same time in the sense of the breaking away from strictures of European post war Modernism. The music design nonetheless had a rhythm, a sense of dynamism, of change, of the creation of new meanings through the sourcing of references which was driven by the tempo of idea generation, and thus the need to bring together existing images in order to create the new. This is an externally reflective rather than internally reflective form of design practice, and has at its foundation an aliveness to the external environment. The construction does not lie within internally reflective formalism but with the juxtaposition of existing projections of meaning.

Brühwiler's design is highly engaged with existing visual cultures. A key feature of his design approach is the aspiration that each design has its own answer; there is no system or singular visual language which can be applied to each job. Yet Brühwiler's work is not a kind of postmodern pastiche, nor is it pop graphics. Throughout his work there is an evident anti-perfectionism, narrative, and personal statement which distinguishes it from formalism or preoccupation with style.

Returning to Switzerland, Brühwiler was able to attract new clients fairly quickly, first working for Swiss television, and winning contracts from major Swiss companies such as SBB, Swiss Air, and Sandoz. Most importantly for him, he began to establish his name as a poster designer. He proved himself to be an extraordinary versatile designer, equally at home art directing, or using his own photography, typography, lettering and illustration and particularly developing montage techniques which served his interest in multiple and contrasting narratives.

Whilst Bruhwiler's work was highly present in the Zürich and Basel cultural institutions in the 1980s and 1990s up to the end of the 20th century – Hans Rudolph Lutz claimed that he more than any other designer influenced the Zürich poster scene in this period – he neither represents the stereotype of Swiss design, nor does he reproduce his own ideas in stereotypical fashion.

A design canon must inevitably create an "Other" to the Subject, that which lies outside the norm. This reading is supported by the fact that Brühwiler has been included in exhibitions in Switzerland such as *Breaking the Rules, Plakate der bewegten 80er Jahre in der Schweiz*, 2007, and as a post-script in Meggs' Graphic design in 2012.

Whilst the term Swiss style was, according to Lars Müller and others, not coined by the Swiss but by the Americans, perhaps the Swiss, at least those in the vanguard were happy to embrace it as reflecting a coherent idea of Swissness which could be identified with the myths of technological and economic success, precision and craftsmanship, and a faux neutrality which affirmed Switzerland's place in the post-world order.

The twenty-first century reassertion of modernist aesthetics if not principles evident in design and architecture in Switzerland seems to act as a bulwark against new influences, an assertion of not of a universality but of a Western-oriented myth which seeks perfection, excludes disruption, and ultimately can only reproduce and caricature itself.

In his excellent essay on the visual reproduction of the Swiss myth in the poster collection *Paradise Switzerland*[6], David Signer suggests that a critique of the Swiss myth prolongs its existence. In which case, perhaps the concept of national stereotype is more useful, for its negative connotations are more likely to encounter resistance and push for openness and diversification to that which does not fit in to the stereotype. I hope this exposé of the work of Paul Brühwiler makes a contribution to that process.

6   David Signer, Paradise Switzerland, Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich, Cynthia Gavranic (Ed), Lars Müller Publishers, 2010.

DR. JESSICA JENKINS