PROMO-TIONAL SHIFT: THE SWISS DESIGN AWARDS' 2002 RELAUNCH

3.1 Exhibiting to convince

3.1.1 Please come to the show

Exhibitions are instruments of power and representations of institutional identity; they are narrative devices that present a certain story to the audience.[1] This was particularly obvious in the 2002 SDA, which aimed both to introduce the FOC's new approach to design promotion and to convince the audience – designers and the press – that the awards were still relevant. In this chapter, I focus on the FOC's manoeuvre to reposition the SDA at the centre of the design scene. The FOC used a variety of channels and artefacts to convince its audience of the awards' pertinence. The first was visual: it consisted of the ephemera announcing the show, namely the invitation and poster. The second was the oral and written discourse surrounding the exhibition opening, that is speeches and press releases. The third was the exhibition itself, its curation, set design and events programme. The fourth, finally, was the publication. These four channels used a variety of visual and textual languages that together conveyed a complex message.

1 Bennett 2005, 59; Ferguson 1996, 126–128; Hepworth 2014.

To map out these four sites of discourse, I needed an analytical framework that would encompass different modes of communication and representation – images, writing, typography and layouts – and the relationships between them. I therefore relied on a multimodal approach to critical discourse analysis that was grounded in a social semiotic theory of communication.[2] As the scholars of multimodal analysis David Machin and Andrew Mayr have proposed, this framework is useful to "draw out ideologies [and show] where they might be buried".[3] The semiotician Van Leeuwen has explained that social semiotics puts an emphasis on "the way people use semiotic 'resources' both to produce communicative artefacts and events and to interpret them".[4] Social semioticians use the term "resource" as an alternative to "sign" to avoid giving the impression that its meaning is pre-given. Instead, this method focuses on the potential of these resources to create meaning.[5] As I will discuss in due course, the designers behind the

SDA's exhibition and catalogue used this potential extensively. Focusing on how resources were used rather than attempting to discover pre-defined meaning has helped me to uncover power relationships. As the social semiotician Gunther Kress has explained,

A *social semiotic* approach asks: "*Whose interest* and *agency* is at work here in the making of meaning?", "*What meaning* is being made here?", "*How* is meaning being made?", "With what *resources*, in what *social environment*?" and "What are the *meaning potentials* of the *resources* that have been used?" [6]

2 Kress 2010; Kress 2011; Machin & Mayr 2012, 1.
3 Machin & Mayr 2012, 25.
4 Van Leeuwen 2005, XI.
5 Van Leeuwen 2005, 3–4.
6 Kress 2010, 57.

The four sites of discourse used in 2002 made use of different modes of communication and semiotic re sources, and I had to consider the intertextuality of the material used. In the words of Gillian Rose, a scholar of visual cultures, intertextuality refers to how "the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts".[7] A multimodal approach enabled me to analyse these interrelationships, because it allows the different modes of communication to be analysed jointly. It explicitly encompasses such diverse modes as gesture, speech, image, writing and so on.[8] Taken together, these materially diverse sources accordingly provide varied entry points to an investigation of the 2002 relaunch.[9] They form a discourse that represents the SDA's creation of meaning.[10] It was not neutral: the FOC, its authors and designers drew from a repertoire of signs "to *create* society", that is, to help "realise their interests".[11] To conclude, multimodal discourse analysis grounded in social semiotics enabled me uncover how the FOC's semiotic choices allowed the construction of a discourse, with its hidden ideologies, politics and meaning, to achieve its aims.[12]

7 Rose 2016, 187–188.
8 Kress 2011, 36–38.
9 Phillips & Hardy 2002, 83–85; Rose 2016, 216.
10 Kress 2011, 38. Emphasis in the original.
11 Machin & Mayr 2012, 17–19. Emphasis in the original.
12 Machin & Mayr 2012, 17–19; Van Leeuwen 2005, 5.

Before the public even reached the exhibition, the graphic language and the complexity of the invitation communicated that a new era of the SDA was about to begin. The first visual artefacts to be seen by the public were the poster (Fig. 3.1) and, for those who received it, the invitation to the opening (Fig. 3.2).[13] Both announced the relaunch via discursive means including choice of words, text, image and layout. The title of the competition already signalled a redirection and an attempt to change the public's perception of the award. In the past, the exhibition was advertised in national languages – a mix of German, French and Italian – and always made use of the word "federal" to underline the competition as a national endeavour under the patronage of the Confederation. In 2002, the official languages were replaced by an overarching title in English: *Swiss Design 2002*. A short historical overview of the vocabulary surrounding the SDA – the denomination of the award, the title of competition and the catalogue titles – gives a compelling insight into the way their role was perceived and presented by the FOC.

13 Unfortunately, the 2002 address list could not be located in the FOC archives. It is unlikely that it was kept.

Fig. 3.1 Poster for the 2002 SDA exhibition (2002). Design: Elektrosmog featuring a photograph by Uta Eisenreich.
Fig. 3.2 Invitation to the 2002 SDA ceremony (2002). Design: Elektrosmog.

In use since the inception of the competition in 1917, the denominations *Stipendium/bourses/borse* suggested a benevolent form of state support to those in need of help

to study. From 1995, the word "bursary" was replaced by "prize". This reflected the true nature of the SDA as a competition that awarded finished projects rather than prospective funding applications. The name of the competition on the catalogues from 1993 to 1997, *Wettbewerb/concours/concorso*, implied that designers had to compete against one another to merit the state's support. The title changed again in 1998 to *Preise/prix/premi*, which was the official title until 2000. This softened the competitive tone and replaced it instead with the idea that the state was recognising the "best of the best" amongst practitioners. By contrast, the English title *Swiss Design 2002* was vaguer about the competition. It made no reference to a federal award but suggested a curated exhibition about the national design scene rather than a simple presentation of winners. It also made the title international. The single English word "design" replaced the different multilingual denominations which had been in use since the beginning of the competition, *Angewandte Kunst* (*Gestaltung* from 1993), *arts appliqués* and *arti applicate*. The adoption of the term "design" was perhaps overdue, since it had appeared in Switzerland towards the end of the 1960s.[14] While replacing the federal languages with English could seem like a simple change reflecting the adoption of the term "design", it was also a strategy to heighten the awards' visibility on the international scene.[15]

14 Lichtenstein 1997.
15 Crivelli & Michel n.d. [2002], 18.

The subtitle of the exhibition, *Netzwerke / Réseaux / Networks* – dropping Italian for English in its aspiration to address an international audience – introduced another novelty: a theme for the exhibition. In line with its subtitle, *Swiss Design 2002* aimed to make design networks visible. These included connections that took place via jobs, schools, institutions or personal connections. The exhibition also announced its aim to reclaim networks that were usually perceived as negative, such as *Filz*, a term that can be translated as "old boys' club" and that refers to exclusive, elitist networks. Ironically, these networks would rule over design promotion for the next two decades, as I argue below in my fifth chapter. Unusually for the SDA posters, whose textual content in

previous years had been limited to announcing the name of the awards and the location of the exhibition, the 2002 poster introduced the curatorial concept of the exhibition in a whole paragraph:

Using the works of the prize-winners of the Swiss Design Awards 2002 as examples, the exhibition makes a network of Swiss design visible; in addition, it becomes a place where networking takes place: the Design Salon invites visitors to lectures and debates on current design issues.[16]

16 **"Anhand der Werke der Preisträgerinnen und Preisträger des Eidgenössischen Wettbewerbs für Design 2002 macht die Ausstellung exemplarisch ein Netz Schweizer Design sichtbar; zudem wird sie zum Ort, an dem 'networking' betrieben wird: Der Design Salon lädt ein zu Vorträgen und Debatten rund um aktuelle Fragen des Designs." Poster for the 2002 SDA exhibition, Plakatsammlung, Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich, M-0685.**

In line with the new title, this theme illustrated the FOC's desire to establish the SDA as an institution producing a discourse – something it had not embraced in its history to date.

The visual communication for the exhibition was designed by the young Zurich-based studio Elektrosmog, which was formed by Valentin Hindermann and Marco Walser in 1995 while they were still students. They graduated in 1998. Walser was selected in the first round of the SDA in 1999 but did not win; in 2001, both designers won the awards.[17] Their previous clients included institutions such as the MfGZ, the Migros Kulturprozent and the Migros Museum, clients for whom they had developed critically recognised work.[18] They had also secured a previous commission for the FOC that had been well-received (see Fig. 3.7).[19] They were thus ideal candidates to communicate the new direction adopted by the SDA. They were a relatively young studio whose presence in the acclaimed publication *Benzin*, to which I shall return in the next section, attested to their degree of recognition amongst peers and critics; they had previously won the SDA, which meant that their practice was in line with the FOC's idea of "good design"; their

commissions for large institutions gave them the professional credentials that the FOC needed for the delivery of an ambitious catalogue; and last but not least, they were part of Lineto, an influential community of designers that would come to define design promotion in the ensuing years, as I discuss extensively in the fourth and fifth chapters below.

17 In 2001, they were awarded as a group together with Franziska Born and Andrea Roca (Crivelli 2001).
18 Ernst 2000b.
19 Locher 2002, 18.

The design language adopted by Elektrosmog in their poster alluded to an email print-out. It made references to "default" design choices which contrasted with previous layouts, including the polemical series of images used by Cornel Windlin between 1997 and 1999, or the custom typeface developed for the 2000 poster and invitation (see Fig. 2.3, Fig. 2.4, and Fig. 2.5). In 2002, the title was set in so-called default typefaces which were prevalent in most email software, namely Times New Roman and Helvetica. The underlined text echoed hyperlinked email addresses, the body was typeset in a monospace typeface, and the text at the bottom looked like an automatic signature. Further references to default digital communication included the layout of the text, ranged on the left like in the body of an email, and the photograph, which was placed at the bottom of the poster like an attachment, its width not quite aligned to the main text. The image showed children holding pieces of string between each other. These evidently referred to networks, but the caption gave no further explanation: it consisted only of the image's cryptic file name – "6_net blau.jpg" – which reiterated the allusion to email attachments.

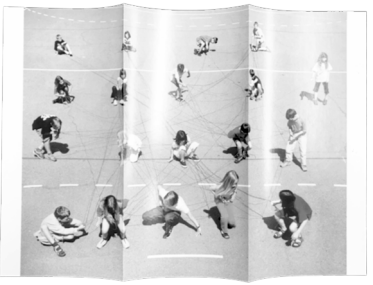
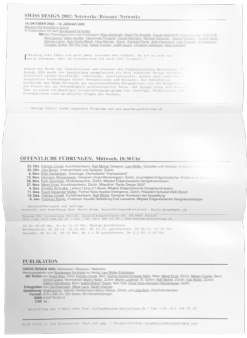


Fig. 3.3 Small format poster in the invitation to the 2002 SDA ceremony (2002). Design: Elektrosmog featuring a photograph by Uta Eisenreich.



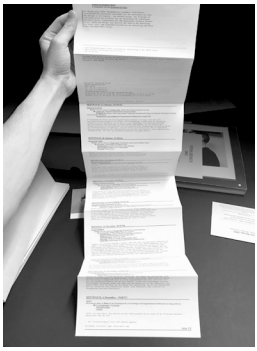


Fig. 3.4 The reverse of Fig. 3.3
Fig. 3.5 The programme of the 2002 exhibition (2002). Design: Elektrosmog.

The 2002 invitation (Fig. 3.2) quoted a similar visual universe. Rather than the simple postcard format mostly associated with invitations, it was a complex object made of two folded leaflets bound together by a bellyband.[20] This complexity was fitting for a show designed to trigger expectations, and to position the FOC and heighten its desirability, but it also created a contrast with the "default" typefaces. Once opened, the blue bellyband revealed two folded documents. The first, a letter-folded poster with a photograph of children creating a web of connections with pieces of string (Fig. 3.3), which was similar to that of Fig. 3.1, provided a playful take on the topic of networks. The reverse of the invite's poster contained general information on the exhibition, tours and the book of the exhibition (Fig. 3.4). In stark contrast with the playfulness of the photograph on the recto, the verso was a clear reference to the professional world. Like the poster, it was typeset to look like a printed email chain with headers, addressees and monospaced text. It also used Times New Roman and Helvetica. The second document included in the invitation, the full programme of events, went a step further in its format: it was designed as an unusually long, stern, double-sided 8-page concertina fold (Fig. 3.5). Unfolding the document reinforced references to endless email chains or the computer listing paper used for faxes. Details such as captions alluding to the "conversion" of "attachments" (JPEG images and Microsoft Word documents) – in fact, their re-moval by the designers, who instead wrote their filenames as placeholders (Fig. 3.6) – contributed to creating the appearance of a mundane professional communication.

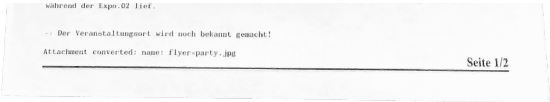


Fig. 3.6 Detail of the programme of the 2002 exhibition (2002). In a playful reference to email chains, the caption reads "Attachment converted: name: flyer-party.jpg". Design: Elektrosmog.

How did this visual universe, which was at first sight mundane and unrelated to design awards, communicate the new direction taken by the SDA? Rose stressed the importance of analysing the sites of the "audiencing" of visual material, a term which describes how visual images have their meaning renegotiated by specific audiences.[21] In this case, the artefacts promoting the 2002 exhibition would have been received very differently by different viewers. To the public, some aspects of the invitation and poster – for instance the use of default typefaces or the reference to "converted attachments" – might have appeared unprepossessing. They seemingly displayed an absence of design, or even showed mistakes. In fact, the awards were intended for a knowing audience, one well versed in design who would have possessed the cultural capital to understand the visual communication.[22] The posters were knowingly unfashionable. By ironically appropriating the visual language of mundane office communications, Elektrosmog demonstrated how strategies of condescension could be used to gain recognition in the design world. They consciously rejected a "try-hard" attitude and successfully conveyed that the SDA were not a dusty institution: on the contrary, they were aware of the latest trends. The self-deprecatory tone was addressed to a younger, more experimentally versed section of the design scene. The SDA were communicating their relaunch textually as well as visually.

21 Rose 2016, 38. The term "audiencing" was coined in Fiske 1994, 189–98.
22 Bourdieu 2016 (1979); Crivelli n.d. [2002?], 3.

3.1.2 Announcements, discourses and strategies

In the two addresses Crivelli gave to introduce the exhibition, at a press conference and on opening night, she

expressed a desire to position the FOC as a discourse-producing institution with a proactive attitude to promotion and networking.[23] She outlined a series of administrative changes that would help the SDA to achieve that goal. For instance, the awards would collaborate with two design museums, the mudac in Lausanne and the MfGZ in Zurich, which would take turns to host a yearly exhibition. This would replace the ad-hoc travelling exhibition that had been hosted by various museums, applied art schools and galleries in the past decade. The former approach offered a broader geographical reach but failed to offer a specific discourse. The new strategy not only enlisted the patronage of two recognised institutions, but also introduced a thematic, curatorial approach. By institutionalising the exhibition, the FOC secured its place on the cultural agenda and increased the relevance of the SDA on the Swiss design scene.[24]

23 Crivelli 2002b; Crivelli & Michel n.d. [2002].
24 Berthod 2021e, 104.

Another change contributed to the creation of a more complex discourse in the selection process. The categories hitherto in use by the applicants – such as fashion, jewellery, industrial design and so on – were replaced by two broad groups. Group A comprised objects produced in a single edition or in small series, while group B encompassed industrially or serially produced objects. Although this may seem like a simple administrative reorganisation, it had a series of repercussions for the competition. First, it created a category specifically for self-authored design projects, which gave unprecedented room for these often-experimental works. Then, it forced the jury to assess submissions from across the spectrum of disciplines rather than compare like-for-like. The new criterion led to increased jury debates, but was deemed necessary to assess the interdisciplinary practices which the FDC felt were increasingly becoming the norm (this did not last – in 2005, the FDC realised the tendency had already reversed).[25] It also required designers to take a specific stance, and this encouraged more professional submissions compared to those of the past, which had been perceived as too vague.[26] From here on, the jury would assess dossiers as a whole rather than focus solely on the

artefact submitted to the awards.[27] This holistic approach contributed to creating a more complete picture of the design scene rather than a disparate display of objects. In the past, the assessment of projects within the same discipline emphasised "know-how" such as technical skills, craft and the limitations of the field. The mixed categories rendered such criteria obsolete and focus instead on relevance, quality and originality of concepts, and research.[28] For graphic design, this approach favoured commissions for the cultural sector, whose clients were often more open to original, experimental and even critical projects.

25 Coen 2005; Crivelli *et al.* 2002, 209; *Kult* 2002; Michel 2001.
26 Crivelli 1998b; Locher 2002, 19.
27 Coen & Crivelli 2003, 9; Crivelli 2000f; Locher 2002.
28 Cerf 2002b.

The FOC's desire to play a more extensive role on the scene was supported by two further changes. Firstly, the SDA began offering internships as an alternative to the prize money. The Design Service contacted recognised international studios to arrange those for designers. In 2002, it offered placements in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. In the field of graphic design, they were at Graphic Thought Facility in London and at *Visionaire* magazine in New York. The FOC hoped it would help designers to create a professional network, which it perceived was as pressing as financial support.[29] It was also a bid to position the FOC within the design scene. More active than a distant grant-giving institution, it connected people to promote designers.[30]

29 Münch & Staub 2005.
30 Crivelli 2002a, 170–71.

Secondly, the FOC started giving an increasing number of commissions to up-and-coming designers to help them launch their career. This strategy began in 1999 when the FOC commissioned Windlin and Gilles Gavillet for a series of catalogues for the MBSB competition. Other commissions included the yearly SDA catalogue, their exhibition design and ephemera that were published by the FOC. Instead of an open call, the Design Service contacted specific designers to ask for proposals. The criterion for selecting these designers was not made explicit – Crivelli indicated that the FOC had "noticed their work" – but most had won one of the competitions organised by the FOC in

the past and were thus part of the institution's network.[31] The designers selected revealed the FOC's choice to use a specific kind of design to communicate their new position, one that privileged an experimental language and visual research over design as a "problem-solving" approach.

31 Crivelli & Michel n.d. [2002?].

This type of design language was notably adopted for material published by the FOC at the beginning of 2002 which advertised the six areas of design promotion[32] (Fig. 3.7).[33] Based on a concept developed by Elektrosmog, this series consisted of transparent plastic envelopes containing material composed by other designers. This visually reflected the variety of design promotion. The designers invited by Elektrosmog to contribute were Julia Born, Aus dem Hause Rüegger und Albisetti, Happypets Products, Laurent Benner and NORM. Many of these would become household names not just on the design scene, but also within the networks of design promotion.

Fig. 3.7 Promotional material published by the FOC announcing the different venues of design promotion. Transparent pockets designed by Elektrosmog; contents designed by various designers. Photograph by FOC/Tobias Madörin.

Though not recent graduates, they were all in the early stages of their careers. Almost all had either already won an SDA or would soon win one.[34] The FOC planned to set an example by commissioning less-established designers and supporting a generation at the beginning of its professional life; the critics welcomed the move for sustaining design practice.[35]

32 These six areas were: the SDA, ateliers (in Berlin, Cracow, New York and Rome), purchases by the state, exhibitions, financial support on a project basis, and the MBSB competition/Jan Tschichold Prize.
33 Locher 2002, 19.
34 The only exception was Judith Rüegger. Moreover, Born also collaborated with Elektrosmog on the design of the 2002 SDA catalogue.
35 Locher 2002, 19.

3.1.3 Curated meanings and interpretations

In the past, the SDA exhibitions had offered little context and their exhibition design was minimal.[36] Basic furniture was provided, such as shelves and pedestals, but it did not play a fundamental story-telling role; instead, the designers all installed their work independently (Fig. 3.8). Curation was negligible and there was no explanation for the works. This type of exhibition implied that the work was supposed to speak for itself.[37] The lack of context had led critics to ask for more material accompanying the pieces that were exhibited.[38] By contrast, the 2002 exhibition provided a complex, layered setup that made full use of semiotic resources to communicate a discourse to the audience.

36 Jaunin 2001. Some earlier findings of this subsection were partially published in Berthod 2021e.
37 O'Doherty 1986, 9.
38 Jaunin 2001.

Fig. 3.8 View of the 2000 SDA exhibition, here showing the work of the graphic designer Mathias Schweizer. Photographer unknown.

For the SDA, the idea of providing a discourse through curation was new. The Design Service appointed three curators for the show: Crivelli, Michel and Lars Müller. Crivelli represented the FOC and took the lead in the project. Michel had worked on the 2002 relaunch and was in the process of launching the Swiss Design Network. He had worked as design editor at *Hochparterre* and therefore provided a link to the media. The FOC also appointed him to support an up-and-coming design curator.[39] Finally, the nomination of the graphic designer and publisher Lars Müller was a strategic move by the FOC on many levels. After founding his first publishing house in 1983, he had gradually become a key actor on the scene.[40] He won a "Design Preis Schweiz" in 1999 and had just been awarded a Jan Tschichold

Prize at the beginning of 2002. Müller specialised in architecture, design, photography, contemporary art and society, and had been chosen to produce that year's publication. More importantly, he was also hired because he had contacts with the staff at the MfGZ. His network proved invaluable after the surprise resignation in October 2001 of both the MfGZ's director, Erika Keil, and all the curators, on account of disagreements with the rector of the HGKZ.[41] Crivelli had originally planned to co-curate the exhibition with Keil, but the block resignation meant that the FOC lost their direct contact with the MfGZ. Since Müller was known and appreciated by both the FOC and the MfGZ, he was able to be a connecting point between the two institutions.[42]

39 Crivelli 2002c.
40 Locher 2001.
41 Crivelli 2002c; Steiner 2001.
42 Crivelli 2002c.

From the beginning, the intention of using the exhibition as a device to explore a theme had been clear. During one of the first preparatory meetings in 2001, Crivelli, Michel and Müller had created the exhibition's concept around the hypothesis that informal creative centres existed in Switzerland.[43] They set out to research these networks and render them visible, explicitly understanding them in the Bourdieusian sense as not just professional but also extending into personal life.[44] By making these networks visible, they were simultaneously aiming to position themselves as an important node within them. This symbolised a change of mindset at the FOC, which would from now on take a proactive approach to design promotion by sharing its networks with designers to support their careers.[45] Unwittingly, the curators' desire to merge professional and institutional networks would become the defining feature of design promotion for most of the next couple of decades, as I will argue later in this book.

43 Müller, Michel, & Crivelli 2001.
44 Bourdieu 1980.
45 Crivelli & Michel n.d. [2002]; Meier 2002.

The curators' concept was successfully conveyed by the exhibition design. On approaching the show, the visitors were greeted by a large title inscribed on glass (Fig. 3.9).

Unexpectedly, the typeface used for the title, the exhibition signage and the ephemera was not the same as on the invitation. In contrast to the "default" typefaces Times or Helvetica, Elektrosmog used Simple. This "deceptively simple" font developed by NORM in 1999–2000 displayed an idiosyncratic personality that was in line with the new approach of the FOC.[46] In a series of connections that would increasingly define design promotion over the next decades, NORM were among the 2002 awardees and had published Simple on Lineto, the foundry and informal network in which Elektrosmog also took part.[47] These many layers were already a demonstration of the networks of design and promotion.

46 Farrelly 2008.
47 Berthod 2019a.

Fig. 3.9 The entrance of the 2002 exhibition, with the back of the terraces (in green) and the staircase just visible in the background. Exhibition design: Gabrielle Schmid and Cornelia Staffelbach. Photographer unknown.

Once inside the show, a series of themes was visually explored through the exhibition design, which had been developed by Gabrielle Schmid and Cornelia Staffelbach and mixed references from the world of sports and that of networks. Upon entry, the visitors were prevented from seeing the exhibition by a green wall (Fig. 3.9) and had to climb a few steps leading to a bird's eye view (Fig. 3.10). Once there, it became clear to the visitors that the platform on which they were standing was in fact the back of a row of seats that would have not looked out of place in a gym hall (Fig. 3.11). By hiding the exhibition before giving it a full reveal, the exhibition design had a double effect. On the one hand, it created a dramatic reveal of the new SDA. On the other hand, by leading the public up to the top of seating terraces, they were inviting the audience to assume both a physical and a metaphorical position while attending the competition taking place in front of

them. The display mixed further references to sports and to networks. The floor was covered in a blue material which recalled a sports hall. A set of lines created diagrams: one was a basketball court, another the strategy board game Nine men's morris, complete with black-and-white pieces ready to be played by the audience (Fig. 3.11). Other lines joined the nominees' displays to demonstrate the networks linking them: education, awards, museums, foundations, professional associations, internships, the FOC and "who knows who" amongst the winners. On the back of the exhibition ephemera, a plan of the space visualised all these connections and provided a clear interpretation of the topic through a series of symbols (Fig. 3.12). The nodes of the networks were listed with their contact details. The exhibition material went further than simply giving every visitor the opportunity to analyse the networks: it also provided a valuable resource list for designers.

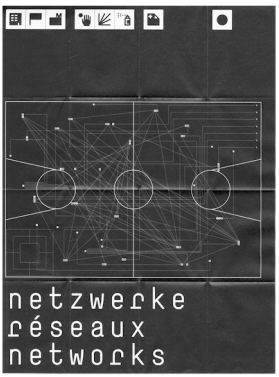


Fig. 3.12 **Exhibition map. The plan shows the "basketball court" shape in bolder lines and the "nine men's morris" game at the bottom left. The diagonal lines represent the networks. The small white squares are symbols signifying the relationships between awardees.**

The exhibition display was in line with the theme of sports. A series of colourful structures evoking gym-hall furniture, with wheels and handles, resembled coffers and gym espaliers. High and low tables accommodated the variety of artefacts awarded, and large captions on the floor provided additional information about the pieces. In a corner, a series of screens showed short documentaries about the internships offered that year (Fig. 3.13 and Fig. 3.14), linked by floor lines to the designers who had chosen these placements.

Fig. 3.10 The view from the top of the terraces. Photographer unknown.

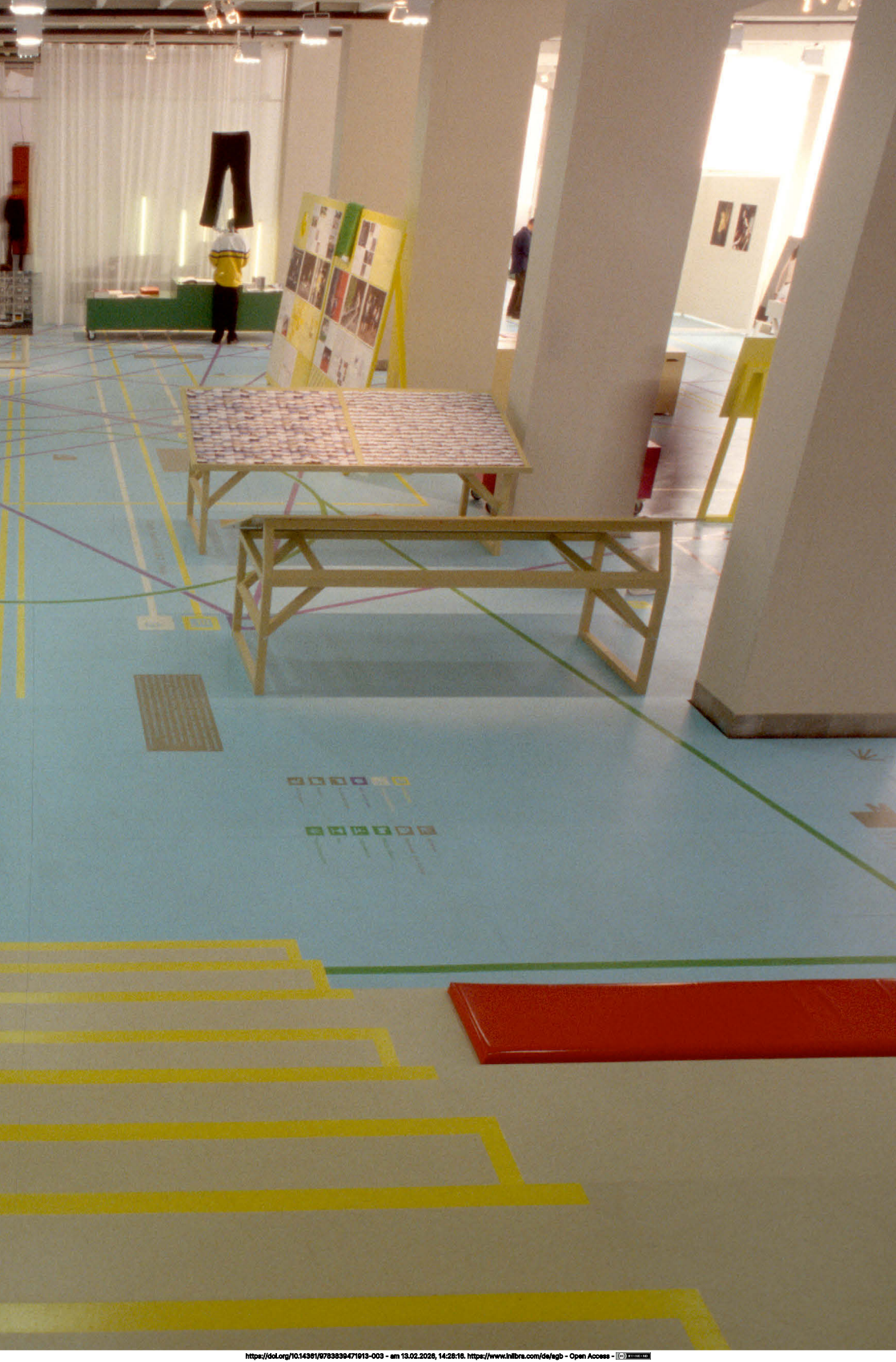


Fig. 3.11 The terraces of the 2002 exhibition. Photographer unknown.

Fig. 3.13 Screens showing short documentaries about the internships offered to the awardees. Photographer unknown.

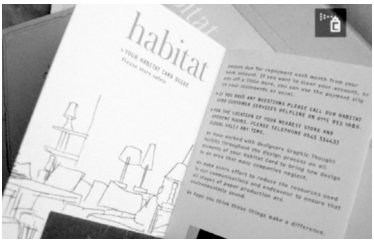


Fig. 3.14 Still image from the documentary on Graphic Thought Facility (GTF), here showing an artefact from their portfolio. Filmmaker unknown.

At the centre of the space, a room furnished with comfortable seating and separated by floor-to-ceiling curtains offered a different typology: the sitting room (Fig. 3.15). This was the Design Salon, a space used to host a series of events throughout the exhibition. The name, which was also used to promote the exhibition online, not only evoked the living room but also larger international design exhibitions such as the Salone del Mobile in Milan.

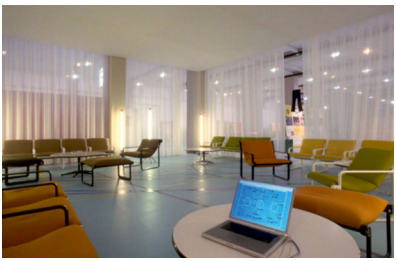


Fig. 3.15 The seating space offered in the Design Salon, at the centre of the exhibition. At the forefront, a laptop displays the plan of the space. Photographer unknown.

An extensive events programme was organised by the curators in close collaboration with the HGKZ, and involved the Department of Cultural Studies in Art, Media and Design, the Institute for Design and Art Theory, the study area Design and Art Theory and the Design Department.[48] The important role played by the HGKZ in defining the discourse and the high number of events (reflected in the length of the invitation on Fig. 3.5) indicated how design was seen equally as an academic and a professional discipline. The programme assembled a broad selection of participants from the scene: not only designers, but also representatives of the FOC, academics, teachers, museum and gallery directors. Collectors, curators, journalists and even a psychoanalyst were also invited. They came not only from all over Switzerland but also from Germany, France and the

United States. The events covered topics as varied as gender issues, marketing and design as development aid. The Design Salon contributed extensively to the production of a discourse while also offering an opportunity to extend social networks.

48 Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich, M-2002-1/1-015 1 and GBA-2002-D09-004.

The exhibition and its allied series of events successfully created and mediated a rich discourse around the awardees and, by extension, the Swiss design scene. By providing a playful, transparent context, it gave the audience an opportunity to make up its own mind and judge the influence of networks on the works displayed. It also succeeded in creating a renewed sense of excitement about the awards. Even in the mainstream press, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive on a national level. The press welcomed the theme and the intentions of the reorganisation, the exhibition and the programme of events, and noted the awardees' interest in the internship.[49] One review prophesied that the "revolution" represented by the reorganisation of the SDA would have long-term consequences.[50] This journalist would turn out to be correct, though perhaps not in the sense that he had expected. The positive reviews were certainly helped in no small part by the creation of a discourse around the exhibition, rather than simply having the winners' work displayed without context as had previously been the norm. The accompanying catalogue went even further.

49 Beck 2002; Bergflödt 2002; Eschbach 2002; Gasser 2002; Schneider 2002; Zürcher 2002.
50 Cerf 2002b.

3.2 A publication as a court case

3.2.1 A new discussion platform

Catalogues are peculiar publications.[51] They are "'orthopaedic' devices for memory" that are routinely used as sources of knowledge on exhibitions.[52] They are archival devices, though they participate in the production of an event while recording it.[53] Furthermore, most exhibition catalogues are made before the show has opened that they are documenting, and therefore cannot tell us much about what really took place.[54] They are thus "multi-layered documents" in which facts are "embroidered with

ideological or situated views".[55] In 2002, those views were especially strong. The eponymous publication accompanying *Swiss Design 2002* aimed to create a layer of reflection on the theme of networks. If an exhibition catalogue can be an orthopaedic device for memory, *Swiss Design 2002* was closer to a prosthetic attachment. It was an additional, multi-layered form of design promotion that had never been conceived as a record or a documentation of the exhibition. In fact, not a single photograph of the show was reproduced in the book, which was imagined instead as an independent space to disseminate the winners' work and develop a critical discourse on contemporary Swiss design.

51 A summary of selected findings from this section was published in Berthod 2021a.
52 Falguières 1996, 5; Joyeux-Prunel & Marcel 2015, 81–84.
53 Derrida 1995, 17.
54 Barok 2018, 48.
55 Joyeux-Prunel & Marcel 2015, 84.

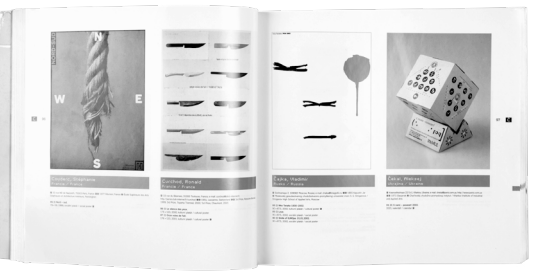


Fig. 3.16 Maria Arnold's spread in the 1989 SDA catalogue (1989). Design: Atelier Jeker (Sandra Binder). Photograph: Swiss National Library, Bern.
Fig. 3.17 The catalogue of the 2002 International Biennale of Graphic Design Brno. Photograph: ECAL/ Jimmy Rachez.

Swiss Design 2002 was the SDA's first publication which attempted to control the discourse around the competition: not only through texts, but also through graphic design and art direction. It was nuanced and playful, creating a visual meta-narrative that benefitted both the awardees and the SDA. Previous years had adopted a much simpler approach. The very first SDA catalogue in 1989 had been a straightforward publication listing the winners, with one or two photographs of their work, a tabular curriculum vitae, and occasionally a brief description written by the winners themselves (Fig. 3.16). This publication and the SDA's subsequent annuals over the next decade did not project any specific editorial direction, nor were they designed or produced in an overly elaborate manner. Their somewhat lackadaisical approach might

seem to have been counterintuitive for what was after all a design competition, but it was in line with many other catalogues for international design competitions in the 1990s and early 2000s (Fig. 3.17).

Fig. 3.18 **A selection of SDA catalogues. Their relative scale is approximate. Left to right: 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 2000. The catalogues had the same design between 1995 and 2000. Composite: Jonas Berthod.**

Fig. 3.19 **A spread of the 2002 SDA catalogue reproducing excerpts of interviews with designers. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.**

Apart from some playful elements on the covers (Fig. 3.18), the SDA's catalogue layout was relatively restrained. Between 1989 and 1994, the inner pages were printed in black and white, and the series between 1995 and 2000 featured the same layout on the cover and in the inside. A single image of each winning project was shown, flanked by a succinct caption and biographical notes. There were no accompanying essays or interviews. The only other written material comprised between one and three short, introductory texts that were usually written by the secretary of the FCAA, a representative of the FOC and the director of the institution hosting the exhibition. The texts were factual – describing that year's budget, how many awards were given out, or the stance of the Confederation towards promoting design – with some sections even reproduced verbatim two years in a row. The catalogues' role was to offer a simple, commemorative record of the exhibition and the winners, rather than to foster any kind of discourse or critical dialogue.

The publication *Swiss Design 2002: Netzwerke / Réseaux / Networks* could not have been more different (Fig. 3.19).[56] From the outset, the FOC had a much more ambitious scope than in previous years. Besides recording the winners, it aimed to comment, debate and participate in the discourse surrounding the awards.[57] In fact, for the FOC this was not an exhibition catalogue at all, but rather an independent publication, sometimes described as a yearbook, that both presented the designers' work and made a comment on the current state of the design scene.[58] The difference from previous editions was not just editorial; it was immediately perceptible through its design. Between 1995 and 2000, the catalogue was a slim hardcover volume, but *Swiss Design 2002* was a softcover publication of 226 pages. This was more than double the length of previous catalogues. The new editorial direction had been carefully orchestrated by the FOC, starting in the early days of the reorganisation. In her briefing to Elektrosmog, Crivelli was determined to conceive it as an object that would play a new, more significant role than it had done so far:

Up to now, there has been no yearly publication that gives a full overview and allows a critical discussion of the questions, focus points and specific themes of design in Switzerland. The FOC wants to fill that gap [...].[59]

56 Crivelli *et al.* 2002.
57 Crivelli n.d. [2002?], 2; G. A. 2001; Müller, Michel, & Crivelli, 2001.
58 Crivelli 2000e; Fischer 2002; G. A. 2001.
59 "Es gibt in der Schweiz bisher keine Publikation, die jährlich umfassend zu Fragen, Schwerpunkten und spezifischen Themenbereichen des Designs informiert und auch eine kritische Diskussion ermöglicht. Diese Lücke will das BAK (...) schliessen". Crivelli n.d. [2002], 2.

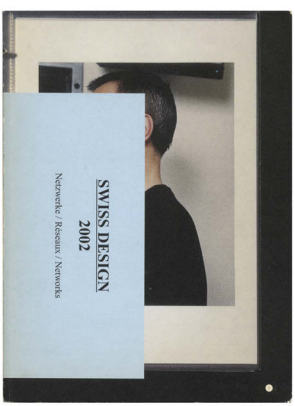
By not limiting itself to listing the winners and showing the works of the awardees, *Swiss Design 2002* aimed to create a further layer of reflexion on the theme of networks. The FOC's intention to create an overarching publication discussing the entire design scene was a shrewd move. Since the SDA were based on an open call and only winners were featured in the publication, the latter could not give a "full overview" of the design scene.

However, by presenting it as such – going as far as giving it the title *Swiss Design 2002* – the FOC positioned the SDA as the place to be.

3.2.2 Meta-narratives of visual formality

The editorial concept of *Swiss Design 2002* was developed by the exhibition curators Crivelli, Michel and Müller, along with the graphic designers Elektrosmog and Julia Born.[60] For the curators, this was not an exhibition catalogue but a book in its own right,[61] though their ambitious product remained a catalogue in all but name. The structures employed to organise content in publications, especially in catalogues, have an impact on their meaning. This "order of order" was particularly telling in *Swiss Design 2002*.[62] Rather than documenting the exhibition, the catalogue focused on the competition itself.[63] It offered a complex, multi-layered approach that provided a meta-narrative of the judging process. The book was divided into eight, formally varied sections that offered different entry points into the theme of networks, while reflecting the stages of the jury process from the submission of portfolios to awarding the prizes.

60 Born was brought in by Elektrosmog to help specifically on that project.
61 Fischer 2002.
62 Falguières 1996, 17.
63 Fischer & Stirnemann 2002.



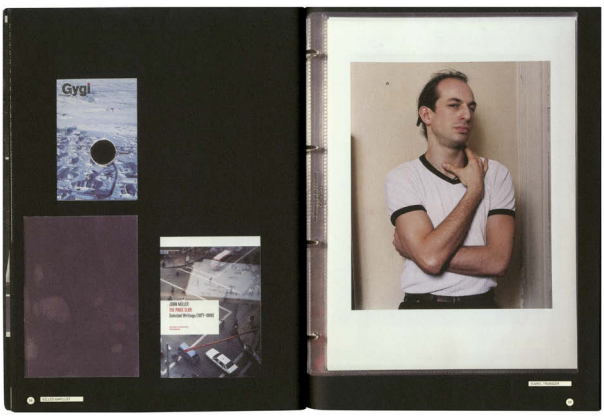


Fig. 3.20 The cover of the 2002 SDA catalogue showing an excerpt of awardee Isabel Truniger's portfolio on the cover. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.
Fig. 3.21 Pages 28–29 of the catalogue showing an excerpt of the portfolios of Gilles Gavillet on the left and Isabel Truniger on the right. The projects are reproduced like pieces of evidence, and the layout reflects the judging process. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.

The first part, which began with the cover, was a long series of full-page photographs showing the winners' portfolios (Fig. 3.20). Taking up a quarter of the book, this series provided no information besides the names of the awardees, typeset like a label. The images were neither sourced from the designers' original digital files, nor were they flat reproductions of the projects. Instead, they reflected the materiality of the dossiers: paper wrinkles, piles of documents and binding methods were revealed. The photos played on the notion of the documentary by reproducing the dossiers just as they had been submitted, albeit placed on a black background like pieces of evidence (Fig. 3.21). The meta-narrative play on the photographs, which as social semantics explain are often thought of as "images of the real", was recurrent throughout *Swiss Design 2002*. It conveyed a sense of closeness to the material and gave an impression of transparency.[64]

64 Jewitt & Oyama 2004, 151.

The opening pages were reminiscent of pieces of evidence being presented to a tribunal. In both formal and conceptual terms, this reflected the selection process during which the portfolios were placed on tables to be assessed by the jury (Fig. 3.22 and Fig. 3.23). This impression was reinforced by the last image of the series, a "behind-the-scenes" photograph of the final judging round that took place in Bern (Fig. 3.24). By opening with these images, the catalogue echoed the judging process, but also invited readers to "become" jury members themselves. It provided a meta-narrative of the judging process. On the one hand, the images re-enacted the proceedings of the jury; on the other, it allowed the audience to be part of a metaphorical "court-like" procedure by presenting various pieces of evidence. As scholars of critical discourse analysis have argued, metaphors simultaneously reveal and conceal meaning. They are thus one way of "hiding underlying power relations".[65] While the reader was invited to the tribunal's public gallery, they were simultaneously reminded that the SDA were confident in their decisions.

65 Machin & Mayr 2012, 164.

Fig. 3.22 Documentation photographs of the judging process in Bern showing Gilles Gavillet's portfolio. The portfolios were laid out on tables to be assessed by the jury. The three books reproduced in Fig. 3.21 are visible at the bottom left. Photographer unknown.

Fig. 3.23 Isabel Truniger's portfolio. The binder on the table (top right of the photograph above) was reproduced in Fig 3.21. Photographer unknown.

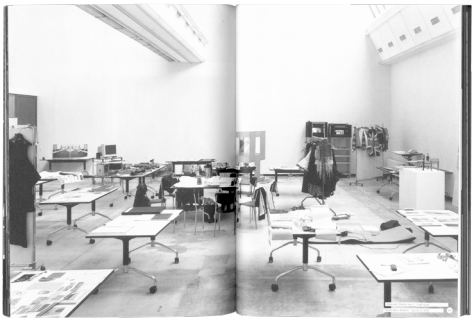


Fig. 3.24 A photograph from behind the scenes of the final round of the judging process in Bern, reproduced in the 2002 SDA catalogue. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.

Only after its long opening section did the book reveal its structure, thus hiding its own classification system until page 65. The contents page listed the seven other sections of the book: "questions and answers," "CVs," "diagrams and statistics", "visual essay", "texts", "practical placements/studio" and "jury report". "Questions and answers" were a collage of texts composed based on interviews conducted with the interviewees by Meret Ernst. To extend the judicial metaphor, these texts were like witnesses' accounts. This section is over 30 pages long and graphically diverse: a few pages were laid out like a classic essay, while others were presented like an index or a list of names (Fig. 3.25). A sub-table of contents mapped a series of themes and provided a key to these collages: "thanks", "models", "tools" and so on. Since it was organised by themes instead of by interviewees, the layout allowed readers to compare answers and offers space for interpretation. But the design also took precedence over legibility. Some texts were obscured or hard to follow. For example, "statements" consisted of sentences running

in the gutter and across the following spread, creating line lengths of more than 80cm with the words partially obscured by the binding or cut in half by the trim (Fig. 3.26).

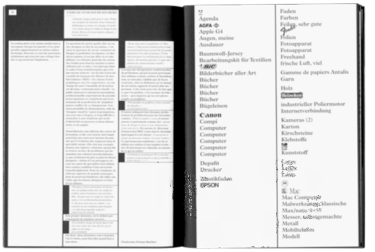


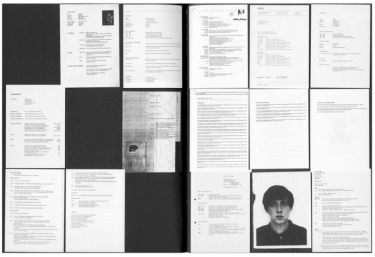
Fig. 3.25 The varied text layouts. Left: "self-perception". Right: "tools". Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.

Fig. 3.26 "Statements" running across two consecutive spreads in the 2002 catalogue. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born. Composite: Jonas Berthod.

The third section was a composite of the awardees' CVs, reproduced on a small scale but still fully legible (Fig. 3.27). Just like in the first section, this one played with notions of reproduction, neutrality and transparency. The CVs had obviously been scanned directly from the dossiers. They included handwritten notes, staples or black margins left by the printer or copy machine. The material reflected the evidence received by the jury during the competition. Furthermore, by publishing the awardees' accounts of their professional experience, the FOC invited the reader to decide for themselves if the winners were deserving.

The following section offered a completely different graphic language. Its "diagrams and statistics", drawn by Bastien Aubry, provided a light-hearted take on data visualisation to show the awardees' networks or their places of life and work. For instance, the "Flashback" diagram, which provided an overview of prize distribution between 1923 and 2002, was made of wobbly columns in a comic take on the classic bar chart (Fig. 3.28). The deadpan delivery of the data provided a moment of humorous relief in the catalogue. More than a critical comment on the part of the designers, it was a way to "play it cool" by taking distance with information which they may have perceived as dull or earnest. Rather like "questions and answers", this design set up a distance to the content, while the offhand tone allowed the reader to focus on the graphic language rather than on administrative facts.

The fifth section was a visual essay by the photographer and artist Uta Eisenreich. It represented a diagonal approach to the theme of networks by providing "sociograms" – images exploring notions of network and teamwork amongst children of a primary school. This approach provided yet another take on the theme. By using field research, it echoed the process of reorganisation of the SDA, which relied on the same approach to gather data on the needs of designers. The sixth section, simply called "texts", presented essays by various contributors: Crivelli, Martin Heller, Sabine Dreher and Christian Muhr, Ruedi Baur, Simon Grand, Tobi Müller and Ralf Michel. Every contributor offered a completely different approach to the topic of networks. This section was where the "barristers" were making their case. Their texts were interspersed with a series of photographs by Sarah Infanger. These were another humorous interjection in the self-deprecatory tone found in previous sections, showing homemade trophies made of a broken cup, a coffee pot and a pile of apples.



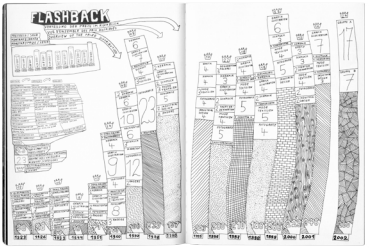


Fig. 3.27 The awardees' CVs, reproduced "as is", with handwritten notes, staples and so on. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.

Fig. 3.28 "Flashback" in the 2002 catalogue showing the prize distribution from 1923 to 2002. Diagram by Bastien Aubry. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.

A tribunal would not be complete, of course, without a grand jury (Fig. 3.29). Towards the end of the book, there was a stern photograph of the people who decided who won the Swiss Federal Design Commission and experts. The reader was invited to examine the examiners in a manner that provided a fitting conclusion to the chronology of the judging process. In the pages following the photograph, the jury gave its verdict. An image of each winning dossier was accompanied by their comments. While these texts remained short and mostly descriptive, an attempt at justifying the choice of winners was here provided to the reader for the first-ever time in the history of the prize.

Fig. 3.29 A spread showing the Swiss Federal Design Commission, the "grand jury" of the SDA. Design: Elektrosmog and Julia Born.

3.2.3 Playing up the "hype"

In its briefing to its designers, the FOC had set an ambitious point of reference for the catalogue, their benchmark being the design books published on the international scene.[66] To achieve this aim, the FOC chose a new concept and design direction. It adopted a three-year format for the catalogue. Three successive volumes would be produced by the same design team to enable a complex graphic and editorial discourse to emerge. This serial format had been introduced for the MBSB catalogues in 1999 in a bid to turn them into a serious contribution to the field.[67] The catalogues were upgraded into "beautiful books" that would be desirable on their own terms. The public had hitherto remained unimpressed with the competition and its catalogues, and the daily press mostly published short notices on the MBSB competition, if anything at all. The little public commentary that was generated was rarely positive.[68] However, as of 1999, these publications became collectible items and an annual topic of debate for designers. This demonstrated both the real target audience of these competitions – the book designers – and their aim to be recognised as the leading awards on the scene.

66 Crivelli n.d. [2002?], 3.
67 Rappo & Coen 1999; Streiff 2000.
68 Fabre 2003.

Similarly, the target audience for *Swiss Design 2002* was not the public or the academic world. As the poster and invitation intimated, the catalogue itself was aimed at the design scene. This meant designers themselves (including the SDA participants, their networks and design schools),

followed by museums and design institutions on an international level, and finally laypeople with an interest in the topic.[69] There was no mention of promoting economic growth or convincing the public that good design was necessary.[70] Because the reorganisation aimed to renew the appeal of the SDA and attract stronger submissions, it strove to convince designers that the SDA were recognised amongst their peers. To achieve that, the FOC aimed to become "hip".[71] A parallel can be traced with certain businesses' desire to attain a "cool" image in order to create value, which has been explored in the literature.[72] In its briefing to Elektrosmog, the FOC mentioned a sense of "hype" as one criterion for the publication; the book had to be perceived as an excellent design object if it was to convince the scene of its appeal. Crivelli set the following aims for the 2002 catalogue:

The book should establish itself as a "must" on the Swiss design scene and beyond. It can also have a "hype" character. The "scene" must want to buy it. See "Benzin" as example.[73]

69 Crivelli n.d. [2002?].
70 Berthod 2018a.
71 Crivelli n.d. [2002?], 3.
72 Frank 1997; Nancarrow & Nancarrow 2007; Pountain & Robins 2000.
73 "Das Buch etabliert sich als ein 'Must' in der Designszene Schweiz und darüber hinaus. Es kann auch einen 'Hype'-Charakter haben. Die 'Szene' muss es haben. Siehe 'Benzin' als Beispiel". Crivelli n.d. [2002], 3.

The reference to *Benzin*, a book that had been supported financially by the FOC, was telling (Fig. 3.30).[74] It was edited and designed by the graphic designers Thomas Bruggisser and Michel Fries and published in 2000 by Lars Müller.[75] This book, whose audience was mainly other designers, showed the "state of the art of young Swiss Graphic Design" by featuring a selection of portfolios, essays and interviews.[76] It presented a cohort of graphic designers who rejected the tradition that came with the Swiss style.[77] For the publisher Lars Müller, the selection represented "new Swiss Graphic Design".[78] *Benzin* was thus a showcase for a new generation of designers who desired a rupture with their predecessors.

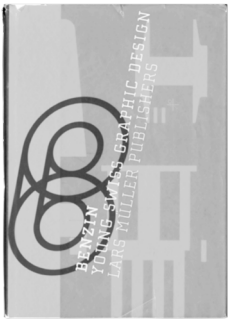


Fig. 3.30 *Benzin Young Swiss Graphic Design* (2000). Design: Thomas Bruggisser and Michel Fries.

This reflected the growing dichotomy between an "old school" and a "new school" of designers, according to observers of the design scene including the graphic designer François Rappo and Christina Reble, the person responsible for publications at the MfGZ.[79] *Benzin* was well-received nationally and internationally and was successful enough to be reprinted. This book outlines a whole scene, thereby simplifying it and making it more accessible to the public.[80] It had a big impact in Switzerland,[81] provided a mark of public recognition for those designers whose work was published in it, and became an influential reference work for the design scene overall.[82]

74 Crivelli 2000c.
75 Bruggisser & Fries 2000.
76 Kaneko 2000.
77 Locher 2001; Michel 2000b.
78 Locher 2001.
79 Rappo 2021.
80 Kaufmann, Schneemann & Zeller 2021.
81 Kaneko 2000; Michel 2000b.
82 Kaneko 2000; *Published Art* 2001; NORM 2017; Zumstein & Barandun 2017b.

As I mentioned above, it was no coincidence that the FOC chose Elektrosmog, which was featured extensively in *Benzin*, to design *Swiss Design 2002*. Coolness was something that they could offer, notably thanks to a casual studio model that blurred the boundaries between professional and personal lives. Thanks to the digital revolution in the early 1990s, designers worldwide were increasingly able to set up smaller businesses, and Switzerland followed suit in the late 1990s.[83] The FOC wanted to support these young, small studios, and Elektrosmog was exactly the type of practitioner that they were trying to attract through the relaunch of the SDA in 2002.

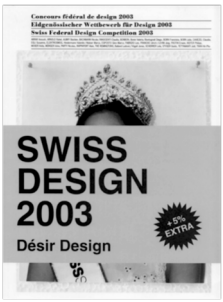
83 Berthod 2019a; Janser & Reble 2004, 47; Macháček 2004; Meggs & Purvis 2006, 488–489.

In the 2002 catalogue, Crivelli argued that the FOC needed to innovate and take risks.[84] This book itself exemplified this strategy. Its design was at least as important as the effective delivery of its content. The former was used to create metaphors through layout, illustrations and photographs. The FOC relied on design to create a "hip" image and thereby make the SDA more attractive to designers. By using a layered design and editorial concept, the catalogue provided a meta-narrative of the judging process that demonstrated an attempt at transparency. This partially addressed the criticism that had previously been expressed by the specialist press.[85] On the one hand, the layout reported on and re-enacted the proceedings of the jury; on the other, it allowed the audience to take part in a metaphorical, court-like procedure. At the same time, the metaphors used in the book served to assert the power of the FOC and to reposition it as the leading motor of discourse on the design scene.

84 Crivelli 2002a.
85 Gantenbein 1992; 1994.

The design fee of CHF 35'000 for the catalogue was generous at the time.[86] The same amount was allocated for its printing, which ensured that the result would be a well-produced object and provided leeway for technical exploration. The design brief itself left space for the designers to come up with a strong concept. The initial budget even earmarked funds for "experiments" by the designers and curators. It was thus a well-funded enterprise representing a specimen rarely seen in the wild: a design commission endowed with a healthy budget for both design and production, coupled with unparalleled artistic freedom for the designers. As often with these laboratory conditions, the outcome was design for designers. One could justifiably describe it as a vanity project providing what Karel Martens has called a "meta-language, deployed to amaze colleagues and please the parvenu".[87] However, such an outcome was not unexpected. In fact, it was desired to some extent. The catalogue aimed to further the design discourse on both a written and a visual level, and to prove to the scene that the SDA were the place to be.

86 Crivelli n.d. [2002?], 7.
87 Martens 2010 (1996), 186.



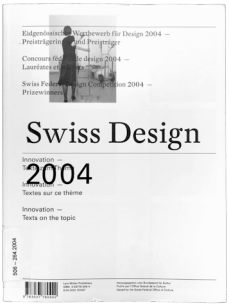


Fig. 3.31 The catalogue for the 2003 SDA. Design: Elektrosmog.
Fig. 3.32 The catalogue for the 2004 SDA. Design: Elektrosmog.

The SDA published yearly catalogues until 2011, when these were replaced by a website. In 2003, the publication questioned the relationship between desire and design, while in 2004 it focused on innovation. The catalogues in each case were well received – in fact, both were given awards in the MBSB competition (Fig. 3.31 and Fig. 3.32). In 2004, Elektrosmog won the Jan Tschichold prize for outstanding achievements in book design. This showed another example of the awards system as guarantors of success functioning as self-fulfilling prophecies. These prizes awarded designers, then commissioned them before awarding them again for that same commission.

From 2005, the SDA no longer adopted a yearly theme. Lorette Coen, the chair of the FDC, argued that the Commission's 2002 prediction – that design would become ever more interdisciplinary – was wrong.[88] Instead, disciplines fragmented further, which contributed to their unequal representation in the SDA. For instance, the number of graphic designers applying was much higher than that of product designers. Furthermore, Coen noted the increasing role played by higher education institutions. She notably singled out ECAL, who she argued had developed a teaching model that was disconnected from professional life and that privileged cultural design over any other type. Yet the SDA themselves contributed to the overrepresentation of cultural design; all the works presented in 2002, for example, belonged to that category.

88 Coen 2005.

3.3 Promoting niche design

3.3.1 Cultural work only

In a brief review of *Swiss Design 2002*, *Hochparterre* asked pointedly: "Why must the niche economy carry such weight?"[89] This question reflected the journalist's irritation at the fact that most winning projects were either from the cultural sector or highly experimental. There was not a single example of commercial design in the graphic design category. Anne Crausaz won with a self-initiated illustration piece; Gavillet's dossier comprised books and posters made for cultural clients; Happypets Products (Cédric Henny, Patrick Monnier and Violène Pont) submitted booklets and stickers reusing found logos; Rachel Imboden presented a newspaper reproducing a series of experimental objects exploring the notion of public and private (Fig. 3.33); NORM presented complex visual research; Schönwehrs (Gregor Schönborn and Niels Wehrspann) were awarded for an experimental interactive flyer generator; Judith Zaugg for an unusual children's book showing unconventional illustrations; and Megi Zumstein for a proposal for typefaces reflecting speech patterns. The paradigm shift in promotion was thus not limited to the SDA's exhibition and publication design, but also applied to the works that received awards.

89 "Weshalb muss die Ökonomie der Nische ein derartiges Gewicht haben?" *Hochparterre* 2002, 10.

Fig. 3.33 Rachel Imboden's newspaper *Public Privacy* showing experimental objects exploring privacy in public settings.

Commercial work had not always been absent. In the 1990s, it was not unusual for the SDA to award both commercial and cultural projects. For graphic design, this could be the corporate identity of a shoe shop or a TV station (Pascal Knoepfel in 1990 and 1997), an ad for a watch (Philippe Loup in 1995, Fig 3.34) or a commercial typeface for the foundry Berthold (Marco Ganz in 1996).

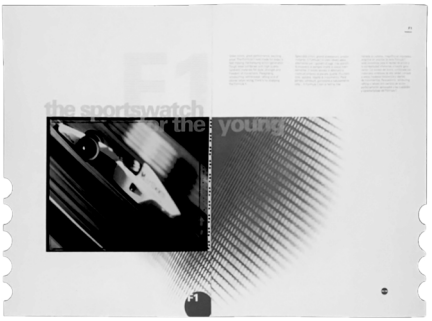
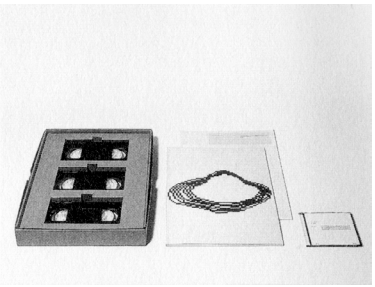


Fig. 3.34 Philippe Loup's ad for a sports watch as published in the 1995 SDA catalogue.

After 1997, commercial projects no longer appeared among the winning works in the graphic design category. 1997 was also the year that the MBSB competition changed its criteria. As already mentioned above, the jury henceforth focused not on the technical qualities of books, but on their conceptual merit.[90] While the FCAA did not express a similar position in public, the works it awarded showed that it had adopted a similar stance. It was thus not surprising that the 2002 catalogue, exhibition and the winning works all addressed the "niche economy", which really meant design from the so-called cultural sector.[91]

90 Guggenheimer 2004, 83.
91 As discussed above, this term includes authorial, self-initiated and/or experimental graphic design.



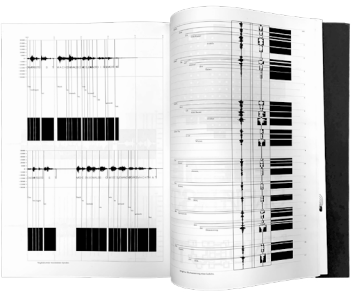


Fig. 3.35 The dossier submitted by Megi Zumstein to the 2002 SDA, published in Crivelli *et al.* 2002.
Fig. 3.36 The publication *Visualisierung der Sprache* (2001) showing an analysis of sound in relation to type. Design: Megi Zumstein.

Zumstein, NORM and Gavillet's submissions represented three distinct examples of this niche design. Zumstein had just graduated in 2001 from the HGKZ and was working for Format53, a small studio in Zurich. It was her first submission to the SDA. She went on to launch the studio Hi (2007–2019) with Claudio Barandun in Lucerne. Their work would regularly win awards in the MBSB competition. In 2002, she submitted her diploma project entitled *Visualisierung der Sprache* to the SDA (Fig. 3.35). It comprised a publication, three VHS tapes with short videos, and a compact disc containing Flash animations (Fig. 3.36 and Fig. 3.37). Her project was a highly conceptual deconstruction of language. It analysed phonetics and translated them into letterforms using criteria such as rhythm, tone, timbre and melody. Zumstein developed a series of experimental typefaces which she combined in animations. Her project bordered on illegibility, did not respond to any specific need, and could hardly have been imagined to be the result of a commission. It was an example of pure visual research that allowed the designer to come up with innovative forms. The SDA jury welcomed this "markedly experimental" approach, which pushed "the boundaries of typography and open[ed] up numerous visual possibilities".[92]

92 Crivelli *et al.* 2002, 219.

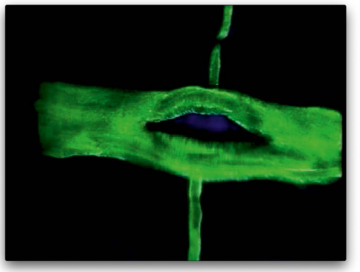
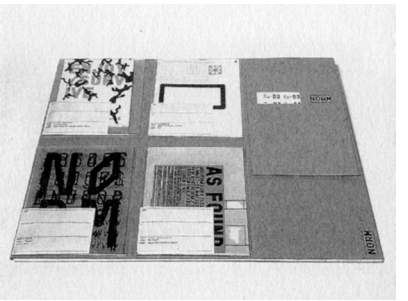


Fig. 3.37 One of the videos presented as part of *Visualisierung der Sprache* (2001), which analysed lip movements. Design: Megi Zumstein.

Fig. 3.38 Detail of one of the interactive animations presented as part of *Visualisierung der Sprache* (2001), showing the superimposition of the experimental typefaces. Design: Megi Zumstein.

NORM's Dimitri Bruni and Manuel Krebs had graduated in 1996 from the *Schule für Gestaltung* Biel/Bienne. They had worked in traditional, so-called commercial corporate identity and advertising agencies – Krebs in Geneva and Bruni in Zurich – before founding their studio in Zurich in 1999. 2002 saw them win their third SDA, after

1999 and 2000. NORM subsequently went on to win all the major Swiss awards and became one of the key players on the Swiss scene. In 2002, as in 1999 and 2000, they presented a self-initiated project to the SDA. The dossier they submitted was carefully organised and branded with their logo (Fig. 3.39). While the submission appeared exceedingly professional, its content was another example of niche design. It was entitled *The Things*, and they presented it as a book and a series of posters (Fig. 3.40).



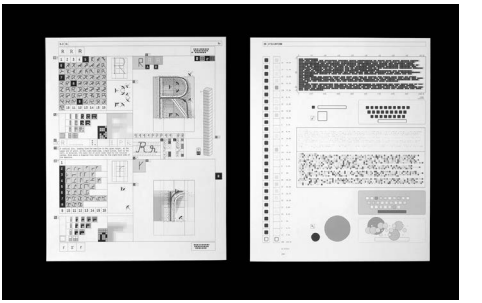


Fig. 3.39 The dossier submitted by NORM to the 2002 SDA, published in Crivelli *et al.* 2002.
Fig. 3.40 Posters from *The Things* (2002). Design: NORM.

This project was a follow-up to NORM's first book *Introduction* (1999, Fig. 4.18). As in their first volume, the designers composed, edited and published *The Things* themselves.[93] Another parallel with *Introduction* was the type of content created by the designers. It came across as exacting visual research into symbols, letterforms and language, displaying page after page of complex taxonomies, graphs and plates of mathematical combinations. The jury welcomed how NORM showed their font development principles with both meticulous precision and irony.[94] The designers readily admitted that the content was primarily visual and defied explanation.[95] Rather than promoting themselves as researchers, their publication primarily presented a consistent, rational and highly personal visual approach to the world. The book was a visual tour de force as much as an exercise in self-promotion.

93 *The Things* was distributed by Die Gestalten Verlag, unlike *Introduction*, which NORM self-distributed.
94 Crivelli *et al.* 2002, 216.
95 Farrelly 2008.

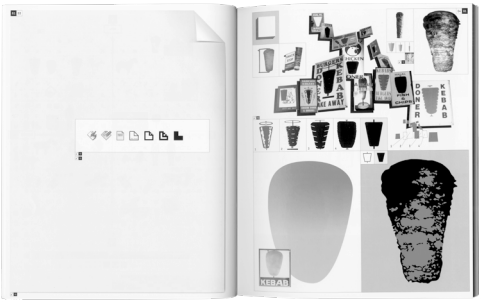


Fig. 3.41 A spread from *The Things* (2002) showing two symbolic taxonomies. On the left, icons representing a sheet of paper organised from the least to the most abstract. On the right, the same process applied to doner kebab signs. Design: NORM.

Finally, Gavillet won the SDA for the second time in 2002. He had graduated from ECAL in 1998 and worked at Windlin's studio in Zurich (1998–2001) before launching Gavillet & Rust in Geneva (2001–2014) with David Rust, with whom he went on to win all the federal design prizes. Gavillet submitted books and posters that he had made both while working for Windlin and as an independent designer (Fig. 3.42: The dossier submitted by Gilles Gavillet to the 2002 SDA, published in Crivelli *et al.* 2002.). These were all commissions for the cultural field, which illustrated the importance played by these clients and the unparalleled creative leeway that they afforded. For instance, Gavillet developed typefaces specifically for some of these publications, such as Index Bold for *Across/Art/Suisse/1975–2000* (2001, Fig. 3.43) and Politics for *Timewave Zero* (2001, Fig. 3.4). In a self-congratulatory twist, a couple of the most conceptual books that were given awards, such as *The Most Beautiful Swiss Books 2000* catalogue (2001) and *Gygi: Common Grounds* (2002, Fig. 3.45), had in fact been commissioned by the FOC.

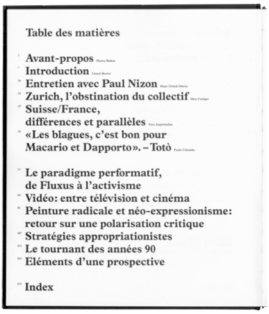


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Fig. 3.42 The dossier submitted by Gilles Gavillet to the 2002 SDA, published in Crivelli *et al.* 2002.
Fig. 3.43 The table of contents of *Across Art Suisse 1975-2000* (2001) featuring the typeface Index Bold, which was designed specifically for the book. Design: Gilles Gavillet.

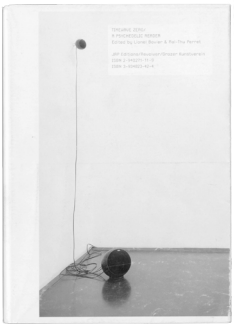

Fig. 3.44 The cover of *Timewave Zero* (2001) featuring the typeface Politics, which was designed specifically for the book. Design: Gilles Gavillet and David Rust.

Fig. 3.45 The cover of *Gygi: Common Grounds* (2002). Design: Gilles Gavillet, Optimo.

These projects allowed Gavillet to push the boundaries of the client-designer relationship to develop design concepts. *Gygi* had been commissioned by the FOC as a catalogue of the artist Fabrice Gygi's participation in the São Paulo Biennale. This book was supposed to show installation views and the making of the piece. However, and much to the FOC's dismay, the publication did not include any images of the installation in Brazil.[96] The only references to the Biennale were a paragraph in the colophon and a couple of preparatory digital sketches reprinted on the inside covers. This publication was really an artist's book created as a collaboration between Gavillet and Gygi. Most of the book was dedicated to a series of artworks created by Gygi in 1990–1991 and published for the first time here. It was a series of photographs taken in the northern circumpolar region that the artist subsequently pierced with a drill. The cover featured a typeface by Gavillet based on the now-defunct Agip logo. The reference to a petroleum company, the subtitle *Common Grounds* and the literal drilling through polar landscape and its indigenous people created a publication that demonstrated a holistic approach both from an artistic and a design perspective, while having nothing to do with the original brief.

96 Gavillet 2017; 2018.

The MBSB catalogue offered another example of work that was developed outside the usual client-designer relationship. It was subtly self-referential: the paper varied to match the awarded books, which were themselves barely shown. Melanie Hofmann's photographs

featured actors involved in the production of the books, such as clients or publishers, whom she often portrayed humorously (Fig. 3.46). It was a loose-leaved publication in black and white, using a large raster (the printed dots composing the image were visible) and was thus far from the high-end printing and binding traditionally associated with the best of book design. This was Gavillet's playful take on the brief. The local press was horrified – "are they the most beautiful books or the ugliest?" – and suggested binning the catalogue.[97] Gavillet explained that he often met similar difficulties with local clients. These were not interested in what his studio "had to offer", namely an authorial, subcultural attitude (described in greater detail in the next chapter here).[98] While these cultural commissions were not representative of usual client-designer relationships, they allowed Gavillet to develop work which was critically recognised by the SDA. The jury praised the publication's overall concepts, its skilful use of innovative typography and careful choice of materials.[99] Ironically, these were also the areas that Gavillet's clients and the general press had criticised. This demonstrated how cultural commissions were an arena for developing design languages that went beyond the expectations and wishes of the client – commissions that would then be recognised by the SDA.

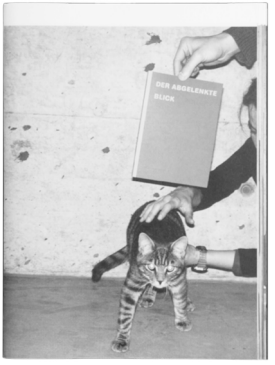

Fig. 3.46 The MBSB 2000 catalogue (2001) featuring Melanie Hofmann's photographs. Design: Gilles Gavillet and Cornel Windlin.

It also hinted at the double role played by the FOC, which supported the niche economy as both awarder and as client. By commissioning designers and then giving them awards, it contributed to the success of those

designers and created a closed circuit of promotion (whose implications I shall discuss in the fifth chapter below). By recognising niche design, design promotion had also aligned with its values. This contributed to making the SDA appealing to designers.

97 "Sont-ce les plus beaux livres ou les plus laids?" D. E. 2001.
98 Gavillet 2017; 2018.
99 Crivelli *et al.* 2002, 213.

3.3.2 Promoting the awards: a smooth manoeuvre

In 2002, the SDA exhibition and publication aimed to promote not just the designers, but also the awards themselves. The curation, scenography and catalogue of the SDA were used to secure a favourable reception on the niche design scene, both through their content as well as through the visual languages they used. This manoeuvre was given a different reception by the specialist press and the general press. The design press's response was measured. *Hochparterre* had voiced its critical opinions of the SDA several times.[100] The 2002 reorganisation was discussed extensively in the January/February issue of that year and welcomed as an overdue adaptation to new topics and forms of work.[101] A regular reader might thus have expected *Hochparterre* to offer an extensive review after the exhibition opened – or at least to show some images of it. However, it offered no feature on *Swiss Design 2002*. This might in fact have signalled its approval, since the specialist discourse surrounding cultural prizes is usually either negative or non-existent.[102] The only mention of the show in *Hochparterre* was a small, anonymous piece that appeared in the opening section of miscellaneous notices in the December 2002 issue.[103] Interrogatively titled "Networks?", this snippet recognised the high quality of the winning works and a positive opinion on the exhibition and events programme. However, *Hochparterre* did not respond as positively to the catalogue, exhibition design and thematic approach. Instead, it argued that the attempt to stimulate a discourse around the winning projects had been more of a shot in the dark.

100 Gantenbein 1992; 1993; 1994; 1995; Locher 1996; Michel 2000.
101 Locher 2002.
102 English 2005, 187.
103 *Hochparterre* 2002, 10.

By contrast, the general press gave a warm reception to the relaunch. In the past, journalists had not spared their disapproval of the FOC's expenditure or its choices in design promotion.[104] It had also argued that design promotion lacked visibility – that it "[did] good but [did] not talk about it".[105] However, in 2002, the comments were overwhelmingly positive.[106] This offers us with a means of measuring just how successful the manoeuvre had been. Many articles welcomed the curation and design of the exhibition and noted the quality of the works presented. They often gave detailed explanations of the reorganisation of the SDA and relayed the messages that the SDA had communicated in its exhibition, catalogue and press releases. The articles in the press agreed that this reorganisation was necessary to adapt to the contemporary needs of designers and communicated a "change of mentality" at the FOC, which would from this point onwards support designers not only with money but also with its own networks. Finally, the press agreed that the new approach taken by the SDA – both with its exhibition and its catalogue – were a good way to promote, communicate and reflect on design. The FOC had thus succeeded in addressing the criticism of the 1990s. Internally, it also saw the relaunch as a great success.[107] The reorganisation had succeeded in putting the SDA back in the spotlight and ushered in a new role for the FOC to be a leading voice on the design field. This also cemented the place of niche design in design promotion.

104 Crivelli 2017; D, E. 2001; Tobler 2017.
105 "Man tut Gutes und spricht nicht darüber." G. A. 2001.
106 Beck 2002; Bergflödt 2002; Cerf 2002a; Cerf 2002b; Eschbach 2002; F. B. 2002; Gasser 2002; *Kult* 2002; Meier 2002; Schneider 2002; *Schöner Wohnen* 2002; Z. Z. 2002; Zürcher 2002.
107 Crivelli 2002c.

The type of design promoted by the SDA positioned the awards in line with the experimental practices adopted by a new generation. Designers welcomed this new direction.[108] The modernisation of the SDA helped to legitimise them with a generation of designers that had hitherto preferred to distance themselves from what they perceived to be the design establishment. The SDA's

new manoeuvre had been a success in this regard, too. The place afforded to experimental works in the exhibition reflected the SDA's take on a "new" profession. By the mid-1990s, a "new school" of designers had emerged, whose practices were radically different from those of their predecessors. The overrepresentation of niche work in the SDA thus represented a shift that had already taken place in professional practice.