PROFESSIONAL SHIFT: THE ARRIVAL OF THE "NEW SCHOOL"

4.1 Beyond the profession

4.1.1 Young unprofessionals

When Cornel Windlin won the SDA in 1995, he chose a surprising artefact to illustrate his mention in the publication commemorating the winners. It was a business card claiming, "I'M YOUNG NAUGHTY AND NEED TO BE PUNISHED" (Fig. 4.1).[1] Those who already knew about Windlin's past projects would not have been much surprised by this risqué calling card that reads like it was made for a sex worker. From early on in his career, Windlin had been finessing a reputation as the enfant terrible of Swiss design: someone who rejected the "establishment".[2] He was no stranger to the use of shock, humour and sarcasm, and often made references to vernacular culture in his work. It would be tempting to dismiss the card as a joke; however, it symbolised a wider professional shift that was taking place in the 1990s. This was a time of rupture.[3] Graphic designers were moving away from hitherto definitions of their discipline and embracing supposedly "unprofessional" attitudes that would henceforth influence their image, work and networks, and eventually also the SDA.

1 FOC 1996, n.p.
2 Clavadetscher 2003; Poynor 1996.
3 Hepworth 2014, 4.

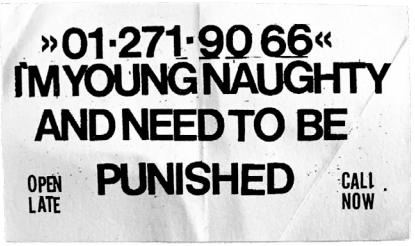


Fig. 4.1 Windlin's illustration in the 1995 SDA catalogue. Design: Cornel Windlin.

Though he had applied to participate in the awards, had won and cashed in his prize (somewhere between CHF 16'000 and CHF 25'000), Windlin was simultaneously positioning himself in opposition to the SDA. By emphasising his youth, he was placing himself in the age-old, ongoing struggle that newcomers wage against established generations.[4] The creative sector especially experiences these dynamic cycles in which new ideas are

subsequently transformed into hegemony.[5] In this context, the provocative calling card was a textbook example of the subversive strategies used by new entrants in the cultural field in an attempt to overthrow existing values and to devalue those who are more established.[6] Windlin might well have modelled his attitude on that of Neville Brody, for whom he had worked in London and who led the way for a new generation using graphic design as a creative tool to communicate to those "in the know" while excluding others, including mainstream designers.[7]

4 Bourdieu 1993, 40–42; 2016 (1992), n.p., part 1, chapter 1, section 2–4.
5 Steinmetz 2018, 612.
6 Bourdieu 2002 (1974), 198.
7 Poynor 1996, 60; 2003, 33.

Whether or not he was emulating Brody, Windlin rejected the opportunity offered by the SDA to attract new clients and used it to reinforce his subcultural capital instead. His position was thus in line with those actors in the cultural field who invert the common-or-garden principles of economics and reject the power associated with honours.[8] His call to be punished jokingly signalled that he was not averse to the controversies that had surrounded his previous commissions.[9] He delighted in stating he was naughty, thumbing his nose at his clients' adversity to risk-taking[10] and simultaneously proving his unruliness by managing to include the illustration in the catalogue. In any case, the discrepancy between receiving the highest design distinction of the country and commemorating it with a saucy visiting card was a clear strategy of condescension dismissing the gravitas that winning may have conferred on him.[11]

8 Bourdieu 1993, 39.
9 Poynor 1996; Settele 1997.
10 Curiger, Hug & Windlin 2002.
11 Bourdieu 1991a, 68–69.

Windlin's calling card was unprofessional in both the everyday and sociological senses. Professionals usually conduct themselves "in an appropriate manner", but his behaviour showed disregard for the autonomy, power, status and prestige associated with a profession.[12] The sociologist of professions Magali Sarfatti Larson has provided a possible explanation for Windlin's stance. While professionalisation is a standardisation process required by the market, Larson writes that individuals

counteract it with principles of "destandardisation" stemming from their desire for social ascension and a special status.[13] With his outrageous attitude, Windlin made the other winners look conventional, and cast doubt over their status. By extension, he questioned the type of work promoted by the SDA and rejected any reputation potentially bestowed by the awards. The sociologist Valérie Fournier offers us another reason for his behaviour: professionalism "inscribes 'autonomous' professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance",[14] and with his card Windlin rejected these controlling mechanisms. The awards' audience was mostly composed of other designers; thus his gesture was also a provocation aimed at the discipline.

12 Fournier 1999, 287; Larson 1977, X–XI.
13 Larson 1979, 610.
14 Fournier 1999, 280.

For Windlin, graphic design no longer existed as it had been defined thus far.[15] Nor was he alone in questioning the profession. The 1990s and 2000s were a period of historic transformation for graphic design in terms of practices and technology.[16] In the 1990s, some went so far as to assert that they were witnessing a "death of the designer" in a crisis inherited from the Italian Radical Movement of the 1960s, in which designers had lost control over their design process.[17] For Margolin, this crisis was still not over in the 2010s.[18] Designers were moving beyond the hegemonic definition of their discipline, which may explain the feeling of anarchy that was in the air and was encapsulated in the foundation of a studio called Destruct Agentur (1992) in Bern. This studio became well known under its second name, from 1995 onwards: büro destruct. Both names epitomised its iconoclastic programme, namely the demolition of Swiss design.[19]

15 Curiger, Hug & Windlin 2002.
16 Friedman 1994; Jubert 2005, 403.
17 Richardson 1993.
18 Margolin 2013, 404–405.
19 Ernst 1999.

Windlin's card was thus not just a joke or an irreverent gesture, nor was it simply a stab at the previous generation. It was indicative of a wider professional shift in the

1990s. This remodelling influenced not only what graphic designers produced, but also how they organised, represented and sustained themselves financially. They replaced previous professional structures with their own, put their personalities at the centre of their practices and embraced a financially unstable career model that would allow them to develop a personal language.

4.1.2 A profession undone

As design historians have argued, the status of design has never been clear-cut or secure: the discipline is undergoing continuous modifications and has long adapted to changes in the market and in technology.[20] It would therefore be tempting to classify the professional shift as another of these developments. However, there were pointers suggesting that a wider reconfiguration was under way. After the progressive professionalisation of graphic design during the 20th century, this process had taken a different direction.[21] According to the design historian Penny Sparke, from 2000 onwards designers were forced to "jettison the past and to create new roles and identities for themselves" because of a crisis of consumption and the rise of digital culture.[22] I argue that this turn began already in the 1990s. In Switzerland, a new generation of designers – the newcomers – rejected traditional models and their modes of organisation. This went against what generations had done before them to professionalise graphic design and indicated an undoing of professionalisation.

20 Armstrong 2014, 289; Julier 2014; 2017, 6.

21 The literature on the professionalisation of design is fragmented across disciplines, time periods and locations. For graphic design, see Barbieri 2017 (early 20th-century Italy); Kennedy 2010 (21st-century web design); Souza Dias 2019 (mid to late-20th-century Latin America); Thomson 1997 (late 19th to early 20th-century United States); Yagou 2005 (early 20th-century Greece). For industrial design, see Armstrong 2014; 2016; 2019; Messell 2018; 2019; Sparke 1983; Thompson 2011; Valtonen & Ainamo 2008; Woodham 1983. For interior design, see Guerin & Martin 2004; Lees-Maffei 2008; Taylor & Haskell 2019; Whitney 2008. For the role of gender on professionalisation, see Clegg & Mayfield 1999; Seddon 2000.

22 Sparke 2020, n.p. (introduction).

The dissolution of profession – we could also say it was a dissolution of "discipline" in both senses of the term – was symptomatic of a much broader shift described by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. According to Deleuze, the 1990s were showing indications of a move away from a disciplinary society towards a control society. The former was conceptualised by Foucault to describe societies in

the 18th, 19th and early 20th century in which discipline is a form of power subjugating bodies, organising them in space and controlling their activities.[23] This power is exerted in heterotopic structures, that is closed spaces which are partially open to the outside world but submitted to their own sets of conditions, as are the school, the barracks, the factory and the prison.[24] With the notion of control societies, Deleuze predicted that the disciplinary society had been replaced by a much less defined social constitution of power.[25] The enclosures of disciplinary societies where disciplinary control was exerted had now been replaced: instead of the perpetual beginnings of the school, barracks and prison, ruled a constant, dynamic flux of control.[26] Unlike the disciplinary "mould", control is a "modulation" which changes continuously.[27] In the case of our newcomers, this was literally exemplified in their once clearly delimited professional identities, which now abandoned to replace with a modular (that is, flexible) identity that was no less subjected to power; one where self-determination and self-improvement were, in fact, part and parcel with and recuperated by the logic of capitalist production, as described by the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello.[28]

23 Foucault 1975, 137–158.
24 Foucault 1984 (1967).
25 Deleuze 2018 (1990).
26 Ottaviani 2014.
27 Deleuze 2018 (1990), 7.
28 Boltanski and Chiapello 2011 (1999), 460–462.

The specialists of professions initially referred to this process as de-professionalisation, and then as post-professionalisation.[29] For scholars of de-professionalisation, professions in general were losing control over a monopoly of knowledge due to new technologies, greater specialisation in labour and an increasingly educated public refusing to submit to the "expert knowledge" of professionals.[30] The proponents of post-professionalisation opened up the notion to a more complex interpretation.[31] For some, the term also reflected how professions have evolved in the era of post-modernity which is characterised by major developments in economics and communication, and whose consequences included "a set of assaults on professionalism".[32] Forces which weakened

the professions included the alignment of nations and their policies with market principles, the globalisation of corporate and commercial power, increasing uncertainty, unstable workplaces and the revolution in digital communications,[33] and aligned with the shift evoked by Deleuze towards societies of control.

29 Demailly & de la Broise 2009; Haug 1975; Kritzer 1999; Randall & Kindiak 2008; Toren 1975; Weeks 1988.
30 Haug 1975, 198–211.
31 Kritzer 1999, 720–721.
32 Hargreaves 2000, 167–168.
33 *Ibid.*

The characteristics of de- and post-professionalisation were prevalent in graphic design, beginning with the fragmentation of control afforded by new technologies. This profession was one of the first to be disrupted by the introduction of the personal computer in the 1980s.[34] Practitioners were not unanimous in welcoming these technologies, which stoked both ambition and fear.[35] The democratisation of technology led to an increasing popularity of the field. Anyone equipped with a computer became able to make design choices that were previously exclusive to professionals.[36] This eroded the monopolisation of knowledge that produced the autonomy characteristic of a profession[37] and made redundant many of the roles previously performed by the graphic designer.[38] The profession's exclusivity was eroded[39] and designers accordingly lost any pretence to an elite status.[40]

34 Blauvelt 2011, 23.
35 Licko & VanderLans 1989.
36 Jubert 2005, 406–407.
37 Haug 1975, 198.
38 Sparke 2020, n.p. (chapter 7).
39 Atkinson 2010; Beegan & Atkinson 2008; Blauvelt 2011.
40 Lupton & Heller 2006.

The second factor in post-professionalisation was the specialisation of labour.[41] Until the middle of the of the 20th century, design activities had been fragmented across several occupations broadly defined as "commercial artists", such as typographers, illustrators, layout artists, touching-up artists and so on. From there, they converged to become the profession of graphic designer.[42] However, at the end of the century, the process reversed. The field's disciplines were blurring and their boundaries rupturing.[43] Activities such as type design were redefined,[44]

while others proliferated, including "service design, interaction design, human-computer interface, universal design, participatory design, ecological design, social design, feminist design, medical design, organisation design and numerous others".[45] These all contributed to specialising and dividing the field.[46]

41 Haug 1975; Kritzer 1999.
42 Hollis 2005 (2001), 11, 112; 2006, 11.
43 Bremner & Rodgers 2013, 6.
44 Kinross 1992; Rappo 2014a.
45 Julier 2017, 5; Margolin 2013, 403.
46 Kennedy 2010; Sparke 2020, n.p. (chapter 7).

The third factor, and – in the case of the newcomers – the most influential, was the loss of creative independence experienced by designers. Autonomy is one of the defining markers of a profession.[47] Conversely, its loss leads to post-professionalisation.[48] The weakening of creative independence was caused by the increased power of the market over professionals.[49] From the 1980s onwards, corporations focused primarily on producing brands rather than objects, and marketing accordingly took precedence over production.[50] In the 1980s, being an art director was the most desirable career,[51] notably because the product being sold in this new market was no longer an object but an image.[52] This was a consequence of a merger between marketing and culture, due to the implementation of neoliberal policies that had a direct impact on graphic design.[53] Starting in the 1960s and culminating in the 1980s and 1990s, many sections of the discipline were progressively reduced from independent creative activities to components of branding.[54] Large agencies took over, and graphic designers lost their autonomy as their creative leeway shrank in the face of the importance taken by commerce.[55] By the 2000s, this struggle was shared with most other creative industries.[56] Designers were reduced to image-makers subordinated to the marketing department, a position which many rejected.[57]

47 Larson 1977, 30.
48 Demailly & de la Broise 2009, n.p.
49 Haug 1975, 198–199; Kritzer 1999, 749.
50 Klein 2002 (1999), 3–26.
51 Rappo 2021.
52 Foster 2002, 3–5; Klein 2002 (1999), 4; McRobbie 2005 (1998), 4; Sparke 2020, n.p. (part 2, chapter 6, section 2).
53 Foster 2002, 4; Wilson 2018.
54 Bruinsma & Keulemans 2000, n.p.; Sparke 2020, n.p. (part 2, chapter 6).
55 Berthod 2015; Foster 2002, 23; van der Velden 2011 (2006).
56 Eikhof & Haunschild 2006.
57 Barnes 2012, n.p.; Curiger, Hug & Windlin 2002.

From the 1990s onwards, designers increasingly resented being "called in at the end of the process to make things look good".[58] A section of the profession thus set out to define their discipline differently, by embracing experimentation and rejecting commerce. This did not go unnoticed. In a book celebrating young European graphic designers in the early 2000s, the Dutch curator Rein Wolfs remarked that

The young members of the guild don't want to be servants anymore; they don't want to bow exclusively to the wishes of their clients. Commissioned work can also be a field of exploration, of charting the potential of the graphic arts and interrogating its "philosophical" underpinnings.[59]

58 Lupton 2011, 59.
59 Wolfs 2003, 28.

Adding to Wolf's remark, Rappo similarly explained that the young designers in the 1990s left a "permanent mark" on the landscape which paved the way for "digital culture, experimentation and innovation".[60] He was conscious of a clash between what he and others dubbed the "old school" and a disruptive "new school" composed of young designers embracing new aesthetic paradigms.[61] The latter rejected the profession as it had been practised so far.

60 Rappo 2014a, n.p.
61 Rappo 2021.

As members of the new school began their professional careers, they experienced first-hand the gap between what they wanted to do and what the job market had to offer. Shortly after graduating in 1996, Krebs and Bruni began working in advertising agencies in Geneva and Zurich but were disappointed by the work they did there.[62] They resented being "always last in line, after the art director, creative director, head of the studio, and the client had had their say".[63] Similarly, when Gavillet began working after graduating in 1998, he rejected

commercial work as it constrained his creativity. Conversely, commercial clients were not interested in what he had to offer.[64] This was true for Megi Zumstein as well. While she did not reject commercial clients – one of her studio's first commissions was for a gas pipe company – commercial clients were not interested in the type of design that she offered.[65] After graduating, she was not happy with her first job either, which she found so dull that she almost changed careers.[66] She explained that the position was limited to making formal choices and left no room for a conceptual approach:

I was a bit bored. I thought — OK, is this really what I studied for? Coming back to the [job] market, and discussing with people about [colourway options] red and green?[67]

62 NORM 2017.
63 Farrelly 2008.
64 Gavillet 2017; 2018.
65 Zumstein & Barandun 2017a; 2017b.
66 Zumstein & Barandun 2017b.
67 Berthod 2021c, 43.

The increasing importance of marketing and commercial requirements took away creative power from designers. The newcomers yearned to regain their creative independence, which they could only secure if their voices were recognised and valued. The more dissatisfied they grew with the "job description" of graphic designer, the more they rejected previous definitions of designers as service providers. They reacted to the situation by adopting "unprofessional" models. If this was taken literally in the case of Windlin's business card, for most designers it meant moving beyond the definition of their profession to try and carve out their own. To determine their new practices, designers adopted models and embraced behaviours, modes of representation and organisation systems that set them apart from the previous generation. One of the indicators of this turn was the replacement of traditional modes of professional organisation by informal networks.

4.2 The self-determined practitioner

4.2.1 Rewired networks and design communities

From the 1990s onwards, the newcomers reinvented themselves. This exercise in self-determination also transformed their profession. They adopted new modes of organisation, embraced a new lifestyle, and placed attitudes drawn from subculture at the centre of their identity. While notions of profession and professionalisation are useful in describing the process undergone by the discipline in the early and mid-20th century, the activities of these newcomers are better framed with the notion of practice. The sociologist Andreas Reckwitz used practice theory to try and solve a "blind spot" in social theory; it explains people's actions either from the perspective of the individual purpose or collective norms, but dismisses implicit, tacit or unconscious knowledge.[68] Reckwitz proposed doing away with purpose-oriented models and focusing instead on practice, which he defined as a routinised behaviour consisting of bodily and mental activities, objects and knowledge.[69] This broader concept offers a more accurate description of the newcomers' activities, which encompassed patterns of behaviour, understanding, "knowing how" and desiring.[70] The first change in practice that they brought about was related to their professional organisation. In the early 2000s, the Czech designer and curator Adam Macháček organised an exhibition on Swiss graphic design as part of the 21st Biennial of Graphic Design in Brno. As part of his preliminary research, he met with a series of practitioners and was surprised enough by his encounters to remark that:

To meet multiple designers at once in Switzerland is not very difficult. Their studios are often found under a single roof […]. Designers, photographers and architects […] work right behind the corner. They play foosball [table football]

together, organize exhibitions and parties with their own video presentations, publish their own books and magazines, compose music, teach lessons, and open shops where they sell their own fashion and toys.[71]

68 Reckwitz 2002, 245–246.
69 Reckwitz 2002, 246–254.
70 Reckwitz 2002, 250.
71 Macháček 2004.

Had he been curating an exhibition a few decades earlier, Macháček would have relied on associations to connect with local designers. Such professional associations organise, structure and define their professions.[72] As normative institutions, they contribute to creating a consensus about conventions and the social organisation of work.[73] In Switzerland, these organisations existed under different categories.[74] Some, like the Swiss Graphic Designers (SGD), were concerned with the day-to-day problems of the profession, while others, like the AGI, were exclusive members' clubs that aimed to set their members apart from the general population of designers. Yet others, like the SWB, defined themselves as umbrella groups for the design professions in general. The new generation rejected them all, regardless.

72 Millerson 1998 (1964), 13–15.
73 Hodson & Sullivan 2008, 265; Halliday, Powell & Granfors 1993, 515.
74 For Switzerland, see Barbieri 2021a; Delamadeleine 2016; Gnägi, Nicolai & Wohlwend Piai 2013. For other national and international organisations, see Armstrong 2014; 2016; 2019; Barbieri 2017; Hasdoğan 2009; Lees-Maffei 2008; Messell 2019; Souza Dias 2019; Sparke 1983; Thompson 2011; Thomson 1997; Yagou 2005.

The number of graphic designers in the SWB declined steadily from the 1990s onwards.[75] The SWB attributed that decline to the increased number of trade-specific associations such as the SGD. Accordingly, in 2003, it attempted to reposition itself as a cultural rather than a trade association.[76] In fact, the new generation was not interested in the SGD either. Newcomers did not identify with what Windlin called "bread-and-butter" designers but preferred a stronger authorial position that set them apart from the mainstream.[77] Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum of professional associations, the elite members' club of the AGI "repelled" members of the new school.[78] Windlin explained:

When they invited me to join, I told them I could only join if they expelled Roger Pfund, because his work was so vile. I said: "It would depress me to realise that in the end, I'm just a member of the same tribe. I just can't."[79]

75 Gnägi, Nicolai & Wohlwend Piai 2013, 445.
76 Imboden & Raschle 2013, 98–100.
77 Barbieri 2021a; Heller 1993, 29; Wolfs 2003, 28.
78 Barbieri 2021a, 18.
79 *Ibid.*

Windlin's strong reaction and specific naming of Pfund could be dismissed as a conscious attempt at framing himself as anti-establishment. However, the rejection of the AGI was not limited to Windlin: NORM echoed his sentiment. For the newcomers, the AGI was synonymous with the old school. They argued that the association's members were unwilling to update their worldview and embrace the new school. Krebs expressed that they "were all old people [for whom nothing exists] next to them."[80] Bruni agreed:

The problem is […] this relationship of past generations […] with respect to the younger generation […]. With a few exceptions, they reject it completely. [They say] "it's over, the chapter is closed. Swiss design is complete". […] And there is a contempt that we feel, a *contempt* – an ignorance! – they don't know anyone else except first, their own work – it's always self-referential – and second, maybe, the few friends they've had, or with whom they've collaborated.[81]

80 NORM 2017.
81 "Le problème c'est […] cette relation des générations passées […] par rapport aux jeunes […]. A quelques exceptions près ils font un refus complet. [Ils disent] c'est clos, le chapitre est clos. Le design suisse est clos. […] Et il y a un mépris qu'on sent, un mépris – une ignorance! – ils ne connaissent personne d'autre que un, déjà, leurs travaux à eux – c'est toujours autoréférentiel – et deux, à la limite, le peu de potes qu'ils ont eu, ou avec qui ils ont collaboré". NORM 2017.

The generational divide and the associations' inability to adapt contributed to their demise. The newcomers felt constrained by the old guard who refused to acknowledge new practices.[82] As Margolin underlined, this conservative attitude was not limited to Switzerland, but was also prevalent in international associations such as ICOGRADA and ICSID,[83] most of whose membership understood design "in terms of what it [had] been rather than what it might be".[84] By rejecting professional organisations, the newcomers also dismissed their definition of the discipline. Nevertheless, as the sociologists Harrison and Cynthia White have argued, "no institutional system, however beset with contradictions, expires until successors emerge".[85] This disjunction between what the new generation wanted to do, and what the existing organisations expected, thus led the newcomers to rely on different modes of organisation. They replaced them with informal communities.

82 Barbieri 2021a.
83 ICOGRADA: International Council of Design, founded in 1963, renamed ico-D in 2014 and ICoD in 2020. ICSID: International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, founded in 1957 and renamed WDO (World Design Organization) in 2015.
84 Margolin 2013, 403.
85 White & White 1993 (1965), 2.

In the mid-1990s, design communities superseded professional associations in Swiss cities. Amongst others, Lucerne, Bern, Biel/Benne and Zurich had distinct scenes, each with their own design language and acting like small centres of gravity.[86] Within the scenes themselves, there were also specific areas or buildings which were particularly significant, as Macháček discovered when he was organising his exhibition. The designers' new networks were highly informal and grounded in their daily lives, social activities and work. The notion of communities of practice, which was coined by the social anthropologist Jean Lave and the educational theorist Etienne Wenger in 1991, provides a useful framework to understand this mode of organisation.[87] Though it was primarily concerned with learning theory, the notion was later expanded and has come to define "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly".[88] The term "practice" does not refer solely to the opposite of "theory", but includes acting and

knowing.[89] While communities exist everywhere, not all are communities of practice. The latter are characterised by a shared domain of interest, social interaction and a form of practice, three criteria which the design communities met.[90] They were organised around explicit aspects (language, tools, documents, images and so on) and tacit elements (relations, subtle cues, untold rules, shared world views).[91] "Practice" is thus helpful in addressing not only what designers did, and with whom, but also how they behaved, the image they projected, and the way they learned or networked.

86 NORM 2017; Macháček 2004; Zumstein & Barandun 2017a.
87 Lave & Wenger 1991, 29.
88 Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner 2015, 1.
89 Wenger 1998, 47–48.
90 Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner 2015, 2.
91 Wenger 1998, 47.

Although design communities were often related to the networks developed during their studies, the newcomers did not rely solely on such connections when forming or joining a community.[92] Even as students, they readily identified existing scenes in Switzerland which led them to move to places to which they had little connection, but where they could join close-knit communities.[93] A passion for design brought them together and led them to merge personal and professional networks.[94] Isabel Truniger, the Zurich-based photographer who was part of an informal community built around the type foundry Lineto, highlighted how important the scene was for NORM's Bruni. She recalled: "Dimitri's friends were all designers, and they talked about design all the time".[95] This proximity encouraged a sense of challenge between designers. As Krebs explained:

It was very motivating [in Zurich]. You'd exchange [ideas with other designers], then you'd think: "Ah fuck, he did this job, but hey… we'll do another one even [better]". It's […] constructive.[96]

92 Zumstein & Barandun 2017b.
93 Lehni 2018; NORM 2017; Zumstein & Barandun 2017a.
94 NORM 2017; Zumstein & Barandun 2017a.
95 Truniger 2018.
96 "C'était hyper motivant [à Zurich]. Tu échangeais, c'est clair après tu te disais 'ah putain il a fait ce job, mais bon… on va faire un autre encore plus…' C'est […] constructif". NORM 2017.

Design was not the only impulse behind joining a particular scene. Many newcomers connected with specific cities because of techno nights, underground parties or concerts.[97] This was especially the case in Zurich, which offered a wider cultural spectrum than any other city in Switzerland. Such events were advertised by means of flyers or posters on a national, sometimes even international basis, and attracted newcomers from different areas of the country as much through their design as through the events they advertised.

97 Gavillet 2017; 2018: NORM 2017; 2018.

As a graphic design student at ECAL in Lausanne, Gilles Gavillet was dissatisfied with the design and music scenes in Western Switzerland.[98] Upon encountering posters in record shops for concerts at the Rote Fabrik in Zurich, he discovered the city's music scene before connecting with its designers. Already as students in Biel/Bienne, NORM's Manuel Krebs and Dimitri Bruni were also attracted to Zurich because of both its techno and its design scene.[99] Conversely, they had no interest in Bern, Geneva or Basel. For them, Geneva offered no interesting clients, while Bern and Basel were dominated by formal trends rather than a concept-led approach. They disliked the post-modernist heritage of Weingart in Basel and the aesthetic in Bern, where büro destruct prevailed. They preferred Zurich, where a new generation of designers was setting up studios near the Pfingstweidstrasse, in an industrial district that offered ateliers at affordable prices. In 1999, NORM decided to set up their office in the area. The job market allegedly played no role in their rationale for choosing Zurich. Instead, the main reason was the presence of a design community with whom they felt a kinship:

Dimitri had met all the people who were at the Pfingstweidstrasse, everyone was more or less there. Cornel [Windlin], Elektrosmog, there was almost everyone who was in their 30s. And it was really this thing about coming here.[100]

98 Gavillet 2017.
99 NORM 2017.
100 "Dimitri avait rencontré tous les gens qui étaient à la Pfingstweidstrasse, tout le monde était un peu là. Cornel, Elektrosmog, il y avait un peu tous les gens qui avaient autour de 30 ans. et c'était vraiment ce truc de venir ici." NORM 2017.

Obviously, not *everyone* was established in Zurich: other cities also had thriving scenes. Lucerne, for example, had a distinct design discourse and did not feel a need to look up to Zurich.[101] Yet for NORM, the designers who mattered were on the Pfingstweidstrasse, and their explanation is revealing of the specificity of each design community with its own, distinct visual discourse.

101 Zumstein & Barandun 2017a; Rappo 2021.

In Zurich, as NORM explained, the design discourse was dominated by designers from the Lineto network such as Windlin or Elektrosmog. Windlin had designed much of the visual material for the events attracting the new generation to Zurich, including a series of posters for the Rote Fabrik which experimented with vernacular references or varied artefacts for the underground party "Reefer Madness" which he co-organised.[102] According to Gavillet, who was then studying in Lausanne, Windlin's designs presented a ground-breaking language not only in terms of what they looked like, but also how they were conceptualised as objects that allowed self-referentiality or a strong commentary.[103] Amongst the most iconic examples was a poster advertising a concert by the Wu-Tang Clan rapper Method Man which had an Uzi as its main feature (Fig. 4.2). Such artefacts contributed to creating an aura around the design community in Zurich, especially around Windlin, who became particularly influential with his "unprofessional" attitude.

102 Grand 2015, 368–395.
103 Gavillet 2018.

Fig. 4.2 Windlin's poster for Die Rote Fabrik (ca 1995), which featured an Uzi as the sole illustration for a series of concerts including Method Man, PJ Harvey, NTM and Les Reines Prochaines.

Windlin's visual language and the new professional attitude he had honed since the 1990s resonated with other designers, who now formed a community of practice with him as its centre of gravity. He became a tutelary figure to whom many newcomers looked up and whose professional model they followed. The recurring presence of Windlin in my interviews with NORM, but also among other newcomers of the 1990s and 2000s such as Gavillet or Jürg Lehni, shows how central a figure he was in Zurich and beyond. Many designers rallied around the type foundry and community of practice Lineto, which Windlin co-founded with Stephan "Pronto" Müller and to which I shall return again below. These networks and communities of practice brought an additional dimension to the newcomers' professional shift. Unlike their predecessors, they were not interested in design as a service, neither did they try to cater to the needs of specific clients. More than anything else, they wanted to be near like-minded people who were passionate about their practice. They had little consideration for the commercial job market, privileging instead a flexible organisation in design communities that shared an understanding of what design should be. Their organisation in communities of practice led to the embodiment of design as a way of life which designers used to redefine their profession.

4.2.2 Self-actualisation through the design lifestyle

In addition to changing their modes of organisation, the newcomers used their lifestyles to actualise their practices. They communicated them through a new type of image. A series of designer portraits published in Benzin (2000), the influential book which the FOC used as reference point for the 2002 reorganisation, demonstrated how the newcomers consciously played with their representation to imply that their practice was a way of life.

According to the sociologist of professions Geoffrey Millerson, the image of a profession is composed of three layers. First, there is the representation that an occupation offers of itself (the self-image). Then there is

Fig. 4.3 Elektrosmog portrayed in their studio. The photograph was commissioned for Benzin (2000) Photograph: Peter Tillessen.

the image seen by other professionals. Finally, there is the image that the public has of the profession.[104] This image is not just visual, but includes "perceptions, attitudes and beliefs" about every aspect of a professional's identity, such as education, background, income and lifestyle.[105] The self-image of professionals (or their group-image) predetermines and reinforces expectations of conduct and thus offers a particularly rich source for understanding the professional shift.[106] Moreover, as an "image industry", design is particularly concerned with the "aesthetics of professionalism".[107]

104 Millerson 1998 (1964), 158.
105 Millerson 1998 (1964), 159.
106 *Ibid.*
107 Armstrong 2019, 108.

Designers have accordingly long paid attention to their professional image. Young ambitious designers in the 1920s, such as Jan Tschichold, chose to be photographed wearing a draughtsman's coat and carrying tools in their hands in order to convey an impression of craft and precision.[108] By contrast, in 1950s Britain, they favoured jacket and tie.[109] Their performed gentlemanliness was a bid to distance themselves from artists and to enhance their status by imitating more established professions such as law and architecture.[110] In 1960s Switzerland, the modes of representation varied.[111] Some designers still referenced cleanliness and precision, while others presented themselves like artists or well-travelled cosmopolitans.[112] By the 1990s and 2000s, the newcomers had adopted the "no-collar" uniform of the creative class: jeans, sneakers and the occasional caps.[113] Elektrosmog's portrait in *Benzin* went further. Not only were the designers portrayed in the standard uniform of the creative class, but they also crafted their representation to imply that design was a way of life (Fig. 4.3).

108 Früh 2021.
109 Nixon 2016, 377–378.
110 Armstrong 2019, 108; Nixon 2000, 68–69.
111 Verband Schweizerischer Grafiker 1960.
112 Kaufmann, Schneemann & Zeller 2021.
113 Florida 2012, 100–121.

There are four interlinking sites at which an image's meaning are made, namely production (where the image is made), the image itself (its content), the site of its circulation (where it travels) and that of its audiencing

(where it meets its spectators), which I shall map successively here.[114] On Fig. 4.3, two people are watching football on a small TV screen. They are visibly relaxed: feet are up, flip-flops thrown to the side, beer is flowing. There must have been pivotal action on the field, for the man on the left angrily clutches his head, while the person on the right is blurry – they have stood up jubilantly to celebrate, arms above head. Reduced to these elements, the situation describes a perfectly banal moment of leisure, with two friends watching a match and supporting opposite teams. However, the photograph represents an entirely different story.

114 Rose 2016, 24–25.

The duo is not sitting in a sports bar or a living room. The concrete floor with yellow painted lines suggests they could be in a former garage or factory, though it is obvious that manual work is no longer taking place in this room, whose shelves are laden with books, binders, archival boxes and so on. This is no artist's studio either: on the desk, computers, phones, a fax and rubber stamps suggest some kind of clerical activity. At the same time, the furnishings are not completely office-like and imply creative endeavours. Besides the TV, a decent sound system indicates that the duo enjoys playing music. The impression of creative work is compounded by the posters on the wall, a carefully curated collection of typographic posters, vernacular artefacts, abstract shapes and test print sheets. In the corner, a drinks crate and a bag of coal show that the pair enjoy hosting barbecues with their friends and colleagues, who are often the same thing in design communities. To summarise, the image shows elements of the universes of leisure and work, but also of industry and creativity, all blending seamlessly. If we now consider the context of its circulation and audiencing, this image takes on yet another dimension. The photograph was commissioned for *Benzin*, which showed work by up-and-coming young Swiss graphic designers and was aimed at a knowing audience. In the book, it was clear that this image portrayed Elektrosmog's Marco Walser and Valentin Hindermann in their workspace. According to *Benzin*, the designers were part of a new generation of Swiss designers who were "fighting

for recognition".[115] Evidently, one of the weapons they had chosen in this fight for actualisation was the design lifestyle. Although the image appears like a candid behind-the-scenes snapshot, it was carefully constructed. The photographer Peter Tillessen used a cumbersome large format camera for the shoot, which did not lend itself to quick-fire photography. He carefully framed the scene by standing on a ladder behind the designers, who were aware of the image they were composing.[116] Though the photograph created the impression of a carefree profession in which the personal and professional, leisure and work, creativity and industry were blending naturally, this design lifestyle was in fact carefully staged.

115 Heller 2000.
116 The photographer confirmed that Elektrosmog were indeed cheering for two opposing football teams. Peter Tillessen, email correspondence with the present writer, 2 July 2020 and 3 July 2023.

Naturally, the newcomers were not the first creatives to experience the struggle between art and commerce. When they adopted design as a "way of life", they were repeating a pattern that up-and-coming artists in 19th-century France had adopted – the bohemian lifestyle. For Boltanski and Chiapello, artists embraced that lifestyle after becoming disillusioned with bourgeois values and the oppression exerted by capitalism through market domination, which had led to a reduction in freedom, autonomy and authenticity.[117] This created a tension between economic viability and their desire to make art for art's sake. These artists reacted to the loss of meaning resulting from a merchandising of culture by adjusting their lifestyles, which is defined as "collectively shared patterns of perception, taste and behaviour".[118] They adopted a bohemian lifestyle which not only became central to their identity, but also made their occupation attractive to others.[119] Their lifestyle was characterised by

spontaneity, sporadic employment, lack of income, continuous improvisation, by living from hand to mouth and by trying to enjoy life from day to day instead of subordinating to fixed (work) schedules.[120]

Fig. 4.4 A portrait of Remo Stoller published in Benzin (2000). The setting suggested both independence and impermanence. It gave the impression that Stoller had just sat down to do a short burst of work before moving onto other activities. Photograph: Peter Tillessen.

Fig. 4.5 A portrait of François Chalet in his studio published in Benzin (2000). The studio was filled with Japanese toys, a stuffed caterpillar, a pool floating device in the shape of a cell phone and DJ vinyl turntables. Photograph: Peter Tillessen.

117 Boltanski & Chiapello 2011 (1999), 86–88.
118 Eikhof & Haunschild 2006, 236.
119 Bourdieu 2016 (1992), n.p. (part 1, chapter 1, section 2); 1993, 66; Seigel 1999 (1986), 5.
120 Eikhof & Haunschild 2006, 236.

Although the design newcomers belonged to a creative industry rather than to "pure art" – in other words, their artistic integrity overlapped with business demands – they adapted their lifestyle just as 19th-century artists French artists had done.[121] They were not alone to do so in the late 1990s and 2000s. For the journalist David Brooks, even the bourgeoisie was adopting codes that had thus far been reserved for bohemian counterculture.[122] The sociologist Andrew Ross has argued that companies "industrialised" bohemia, in other words capitalism absorbed counterculture and profited from it.[123] However, in Switzerland, none of the newcomers worked in the Silicon Valley-style companies featured in Ross's study. On the contrary: most of them were self-employed. The urban studies theorist Richard Florida has offered a more compelling explanation for the development of the design lifestyle. For him, a wider structural change was taking place. This led to the emergence of a new socio-economic class: the "creative class".[124] The newcomers were part of this class, and it influenced their social identities, preferences, values and lifestyles.

121 Eikhof & Haunschild 2007, 526.
122 Brooks 2004 (2000), 10.
123 Ross 2004, 123–160.
124 Florida 2012, 36–37.

In many of Tillessen's studio portraits published in *Benzin*, the newcomers staged strong indicators of the design lifestyle that often recalled improvised, unstructured bohemianism. On these images, they emphasised a post-professional attitude which put forward their personalities as central to their practice. Remo Stoller, who had graduated in 1998, was photographed working on his laptop by a river (Fig. 4.4), personifying the flexible work conditions described by the sociologist Richard Sennett.[125] Perhaps he could not afford a studio, or maybe he did not even need one – all he required was a laptop. Conversely, François Chalet, who had launched his studio in 1997, emphasised a very personal visual universe. His workspace recalled a teenager's bedroom (Fig. 4.5). These younger designers' studios contrasted strongly

with more established ones, such as Müller+Hess, who had begun working in 1993. Their office was closer to that of an architect, though the two designers still eschewed professional conventions: they were photographed barefoot in their studio (Fig. 4.6).

125 Sennett 2011 (1998), n.p. (chapter 3).

Conversely, designers knowingly played with the conventional aesthetics of professionalism and industry. The photograph supposedly showing Lineto's office depicted a lonely worker sat under a large-scale Lineto logo in a drab room filled with data servers (Fig. 4.7). This corporate, ultra-technical universe was staged. It was far from the human-centred, collaborative setup of the foundry described in the interview accompanying the photograph.[126] Just like with his business card (Fig. 4.11), Windlin was playing with expectations of professional behaviour. No matter how left-field *Benzin* was, the designer refused to be pigeonholed.[127] He was playing to the gallery too. Both the portrait and his reaction a year later – when he theatrically set fire to his copy of *Benzin*[128] – illustrated his desire to be portrayed as an outsider even within the community, an attitude which remained when he became part of the design establishment that I discuss in the next chapter.

126 Ernst 2000a. For a discussion of the informal, collaborative setup of Lineto, see Berthod 2019a.
127 Kaufmann, Schneemann & Zeller 2021.
128 Früh 2021a.

By contrast, NORM carefully set up their studio to look professional, albeit on their own terms: they privileged a highly technological, futuristic environment (Fig. 4.8) over the more personable ateliers that Elektrosmog or Chalet had created. They explained:

[For] us, it was [a] gesture to come to Zurich. [*Pointing at the studio*] This was the space we rented with a wall that was there, on the ground there. But it was big, and it was expensive […] We also wanted to be in Zurich to "represent". You had the computers, you could have

maximum "representation". You wanted the office to look like a thing, a control centre in a spaceship. With as many drives as possible. Then we painted [the floor] sky blue, we put a mobile phone in, so it was a little bit to [say] – OK, you had a space. People would come, and they'd say "ah, they're serious".[129]

129 "[Pour] nous c'était [un] geste de venir à Zurich. Ça c'était le local qu'on a loué avec le mur qui était là, par terre là. Mais c'était grand, et c'était cher [...] Nous on voulait aussi être à Zurich pour représenter. T'avais les ordinateurs, tu pouvais avoir un max de 'represent'. Tu voulais que le bureau ait l'air comme d'un truc, une centrale de commande dans un spaceship. Avec un maximum de lecteurs. Après on a peint en bleu ciel, on a mis un téléphone portable, comme ça, c'était un peu pour – OK, tu as un espace. Les gens ils viennent, ils disent 'ah, c'est sérieux.'" Berthod 2021d, 121–122.

Their use of the word "represent", which NORM borrowed from hip-hop culture, was telling for the role played by their studio image in bringing up to date their definition of their profession. "Representing" means using communication and cultural practices to articulate identities and to situate oneself.[130] Put plainly, the term is a rallying cry to speak up and show who you are.[131] This was indeed what NORM were doing. In their work, they played with what the art and design historian Catherine de Smet has described as an "aesthetic of organisation" which was translated here into an aesthetic of professionalism rather than a desire to behave as professionals.[132] Their sleek image implied that they were at the forefront of design.

130 Forman 2000, 89.
131 Kline 2007, 171.
132 de Smet 2012, 99–100.

By carefully staging how they were represented and how they self-promoted, the newcomers were adopting a non-conformist attitude that rejected previous professional models. Becker provided an extensive analysis of the social category of outsiders, and many of his remarks on jazz musicians can be applied to the new generation of designers.[133] They refused to "bow to the wishes of clients", which they described as "dictates" interfering with their work.[134] They argued that what they had to say through their design was at least as valuable as fulfilling the client's brief.[135] They saw their work as an "art" that merged the client's needs with their own interests to

create something "uniquely vibrant".[136] They perceived a clear hierarchy between themselves, who were upholding artistic standards, and those who chose a commercial route.[137] But whether they put forward their outsider attitudes through aesthetics of anti-professionalism, nonchalance or sleek technology, the newcomers were not only showing they were different from "bread-and-butter" designers, but were also turning their identities into a selling point. The work of the sociologists Sarah Thornton and Angela McRobbie can provide us with a series of concepts to analyse how these designers proceeded. In her research into club cultures, Thornton built on the notions of cultural capital and subculture to develop the concept of "subcultural capital", which operates like the former but within the latter.[138] In a nutshell,

just as cultural capital is personified in "good" manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being "in the know".[139]

133 Becker 1963, 79–83.
134 Curiger, Hug & Windlin 2002; Wolfs 2003, 28.
135 Curiger, Hug & Windlin 2002.
136 Ibid.
137 Barbieri 2021a.
138 Cultural capital has its roots in Bourdieu & Passeron 1970. For an overview of the concept, see Champagne & Christin 2012, 93–146. For overviews of the notion of subculture, see Gelder 2007 and Jenks 2005.
139 Thornton 2003 (1995), n.p. (chapter 1, section 1).

Thornton used the term to describe how younger generations used their "hipness" to their advantage, and this applied directly to these newcomers on the design scene. Such a strategy was analysed further in McRobbie's work on the British creative industries. She argued that consumers of a subculture often become its producers, and so clubbing and rave cultures provided a template for their participants' work identities.[140] In the creative sector specifically, it meant that elements of youth culture were not passive indicators of "hipness" but were actively used by protagonists to create and attract work. The newcomers cultivated their subcultural capital and put their personalities forward to attract commissions and promote their definition of the profession.

140 McRobbie 2005 (1998), 9; 2016, n.p. (chapter 1, section 1).

Fig. 4.6 A portrait of Müller+Hess's in their studio published in Berlin (2000). Their light-filled, spacious studio recalled an architect's office. Photograph: Peter Tillessen.

Fig. 4.7 The photograph published in Benzin (2000) which implied it was showing Lineto's workspace – in fact, it was a mise en scène. Photograph: Peter Tillessen.

Fig. 4.8 NORM's workspace as published in Benzin (2000). The blue floor, futuristic looking hard plastic sofa and technical setup suggested cutting-edge design services. Photograph: Peter Tillessen.

Fig. 4.9 Urs Lehni's portrait which was published in the 2005 SDA catalogue. From the uniform of canvas trainers, nice jeans (possibly from French ready-to-wear brand A.P.C.), crisp double-layered t-shirts and red caps to the bicycles – in the style of beach cruisers from the 1980s – the image conveyed coolness, self-assurance and membership of a series of communities including graphic design, but also BMX or skateboarding. Photograph: Körner Union.

In this respect, the newcomers differed from the previous generations of designers and from practitioners in other countries who extensively used public events, articles and books to debate their profession.[141] Instead, their new model was promoted almost exclusively through their image and their commissions. The importance of crafting an image has been addressed in the sociologist Elizabeth Wissinger's work on fashion. She coined the term "glamour labour" to describe how models toil to "create and maintain one's 'cool' quotient", which "involves all aspects of one's image, from physical presentation, to personal connections, to friendships and fun."[142] While the newcomers were certainly not operating within the universe of glamour, they nevertheless carefully crafted an image encompassing cultu ral attributes of "cool" which supported their positive self-image and conferred on them a special status within the industry.[143] They controlled the representation of their appearance to improve their hipness, thereby ensuring commissions and renewing definitions of their profession.

141 See for instance Bill 2008 (1945–1988); Bosshard 2012; De Bondt & Muggeridge 2020 (2009); Crouwel et al 2015; Pater 2016; Rock 2013; Tschichold 1928; 1949; van der Velden 2011 (2006). For overviews and literature on the topic, see Armstrong 2009; Lupton 2011; McCarthy 2011; 2013; Triggs 2009.

142 Wissinger 2015, 3.

143 Neff, Wissinger & Zukin 2005, 314 and 328.

As I explained in the third chapter above, the SDA relied on the newcomers' "hip" image to reposition the awards at the centre of the scene. Unsurprisingly, the design lifestyle soon made its way into the SDA catalogues, thereby amplifying and promoting it. For instance, the 2005 catalogue featured a series of portraits by the photography trio Körner Union which were sometimes literal representations of the design lifestyle. The designer Urs Lehni's portrait communicated spontaneity, enjoyment and irony (Fig. 4.9). His image shows two people dressed identically in his studio. Lehni himself is on the right of the image while a doppelgänger – visibly performed by Körner Union's Tarik Hayward – executes a figure on a bicycle. The image exudes the era's effortless cool. McRobbie outlined how elements of youth culture were directly imported into the creative sector, and here they were. [144] Apart from these appurtenances, even the

photograph's harsh flash lighting style, then in vogue in fashion photography, conveyed coolness.[145]

144 McRobbie 2016, n.p. (chapter 1, section 1).
145 See for instance Terry Richardson's 2004 book *Terryworld* (Cologne: Taschen).

Although the newcomers' image seemed informal, offhand even, it was just as calculated as that of the previous generations. The new school's behaviour reflected the desire of the creative class to free themselves from professional hierarchies and their valorisation of personality over strict codes.[146] The newcomers' self-image not only reflected the design lifestyle, but also promoted it and, by extension, their profession itself, by producing and broadcasting material which featured experimental design languages.

146 Florida 2012, 36, 69–78.

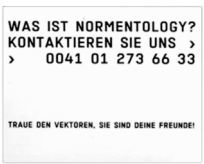
4.2.3 Going public: promoting the new profession

Besides their new modes of organisation and careful staging of their image, the new generation relied on self-promotional material to "go public" and introduce their new practices to the world.[147] When the newcomers launched their studios in the 1990s and 2000s, they had plenty of self-confidence but much fewer commissions. This gave them time to work for themselves.[148] They published self-promotional materials including business cards, postcards and compliment slips, often produced at no cost by using any space left on their clients' print sheets.[149] In itself, this strategy was not new. Designers have long relied on ephemera and advertisements in trade journals to market their services to clients and expand their business.[150] However, the new generation treated this material with an ironic distance. They also adopted a wider range of promotional media such as posters, self-published books and collaborative platforms. Furthermore, the newcomers took full advantage of digital formats and published typefaces, developed websites and produced animations. All of these contributed to promoting and normalising the new profession.

147 Mareis 2006, 9.
148 NORM 2017; Zumstein & Barandun 2017a.
149 Hares 2018; NORM 2018.
150 Aynsley 1995, 61. See overviews in Lambert 2001; Thun-Hohenstein & Pokorny-Nagel 2017.

When they worked on self-initiated projects, designers were their own clients. The control they maintained over form, content and distribution allowed them to regain the autonomy they had lost to commercial logic. Rather than relying on these objects to advertise their businesses or attract new clients, the newcomers used them as space to develop their language. Their audience included other practitioners as much as, if not more than potential customers, and these artefacts became a site for experimentation contributing to what the design scholar Teal Triggs has described as an "alternative view of history" bringing together form and content.[151] The self-promotional material retraced the development of their language, documents how they positioned their studio within the scene, and gives insight into their definition of the profession.

151 Triggs 2009, 326.



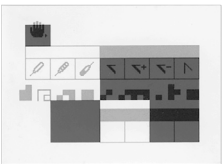


Fig. 4.10 NORM's humorous business card introducing "Normentology" (2000).
Fig. 4.11 Dimitri Bruni's business card in 2000.

When Bruni and Krebs launched NORM in 1999, they not only wanted to announce that they were open for business, but also that they had taken a new creative direction. They were previously known as members of the well-known illustration collective Silex, which published eponymous underground zines featuring a hand-made aesthetic (see Fig. 5.1).[152] After founding their studio, however, NORM never used hand-drawn elements again.

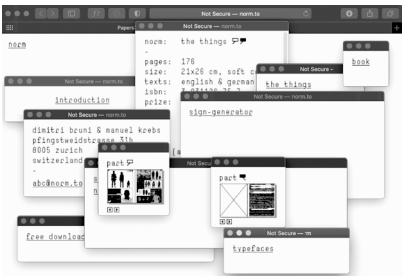


Fig. 4.12 NORM's website as it appeared in the early 2000s. Design: NORM.

Their self-promotional material echoed a digital universe using a language grounded in technology, which they sometimes referred to directly. In 2000, a card announced: "trust the vectors, they are your friends" (Fig. 4.10). It portrayed the two designers as illuminati who practiced "Normentology", a humorous spin on their design philosophy presented as a cult. Another example was Bruni's 2000 business card featured tool icons from a design software's interface (Fig. 4.11). His email address was typeset in a barely legible custom pixel font, showing that the business cards were more graphic playgrounds than communication supports. This cryptic digital language privileging form over function extended to much of their self-promotional material. Their statement-like website embraced the possibilities offered by the medium and played with legibility and accessibility. It was a "playful anarchy" in which "all hell [broke] loose" when you clicked a link (Fig. 4.12).[153] A compliment slip from the same year showed complex drawings (Fig. 4.13). Its aesthetic referred to the punched cards used by early computers, printed circuit boards and technical diagrams. Yet there is no real meaning to these drawings. These compliment slips could not be used in traditional office correspondence either since they left no space to add a note. The artefact was purely self-referential: for NORM, form was the message.

152 Berthod 2018b; Macháček 2004; Silex 2001.
153 Farrelly 2008.

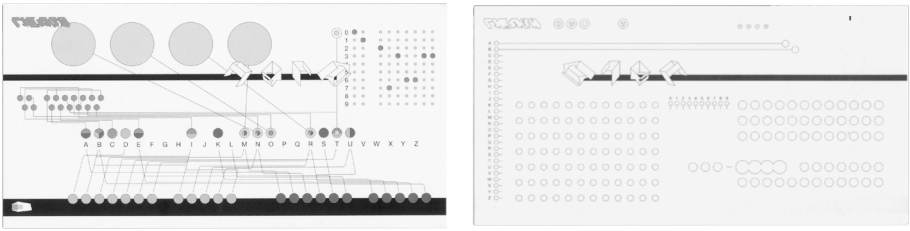


Fig. 4.13 The front and back of NORM's compliment slips (2000). Design: NORM.

Megi Zumstein won the SDA in 2002, but it was not until 2007 that she founded Hi, her studio with Claudio Barandun. As with NORM, Hi's self-promotional material straddled digital and analogue outputs. Unlike theirs, however, it did not place form completely above function.

For instance, Hi's website functioned like the digital equivalent of a traditional portfolio (Fig. 4.14). It featured easily accessible images and information on their projects. The printed material they produced was more unexpected. Hi printed a series of mailing cards, which they sent to about 100 potential clients. While these strategies were conventional, their content was not. The cards featured historical type specimens rather than Hi's work (Fig. 4.15). Although the campaign failed to bring in a single job,[154] it did not stop the designers from producing more material whose content was similarly untraditional.

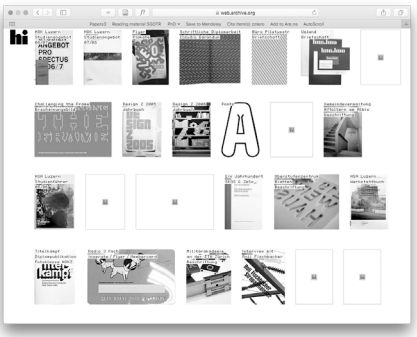


Fig. 4.14 Hi's website as it appeared on 8 April 2007. Design: Hi.
Fig. 4.15 Greeting card (2007). Design: Hi.

As Zumstein explained, Hi were also just "happy to print something for [them]selves".[155] Self-promotional material was thus more of an opportunity for professional actualisation than an attempt to lure potential clients.

154 Zumstein & Barandun 2017b.
155 Megi Zumstein, email conversation with the present writer, 2 May 2018.

In 2008, Hi made a series of postcards which put forward their personalities rather than their portfolio. One of them showed the designers in their studio wearing crudely constructed letter-shaped costumes made of cardboard. The three-dimensional letters form a sentence that playfully states: "typography is your friend" (Fig. 4.16). This was not a professional image; it showed humour, experimentation and fun. Adopting a self-indulgent tone, the designers promoted their personalities, tone of voice and attitudes rather than their work. Like NORM, Hi knowingly staged themselves to "represent" – to embody and project their identity. Zumstein reused this strategy much later. After she and Barandun dissolved their studio in

December 2019, the designer updated her website with a portrait that showed her sat in a field with her laptop, in front of her initials constructed with planks (Fig. 4.17). Almost two decades after entering professional life, Zumstein still used her personality as a means for self-determination.

Fig. 4.16 "Typo ist dein Freund", greeting card (2008). Design: Hi.
Fig. 4.17 Megi Zumstein's website (2020). The landing page shows the designer sat with a laptop in a field. Behind her, planks form her initials. Design: Megi Zumstein.

Through their design lifestyle, their modes of representation and the self-promotional material that they created, the designers enacted their new profession. They portrayed themselves as untraditional and free of commercial constraints. They valued humour and irony over earlier professional codes such as cleanliness and precision. This helped them to create a distance from the previous generation of designers and promote their new profession to regain a creative autonomy which they felt was impossible with commercial commissions. The lack of interest in the latter may explain why the newcomers' self-promotional material rarely – if ever – led to commissions.[156] Furthermore, the designers embraced a lifestyle that was flexible and non-institutionalised. While it functioned similarly to the archetypal lifestyle of an "artist", the designers' was not an "elegant life" that valued idleness as a form of work.[157] In fact, it was quite the opposite: producing work was central to the newcomers, since they needed commissions to finance their careers. They had to carefully balance their vanguard image and the need to secure clients. For most of them, this meant taking an increasingly authorial position and focusing their work in the cultural sector.

156 Barbieri 2021b; Gavillet 2017; 2018; Zumstein & Barandun 2017b.
157 Bourdieu 2016 (1992), n.p. (part 1, chapter 1, section 2).

4.3 Practices, attitudes and forms
4.3.1 Subcultural capital for cultural clients

In the deep shift that took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, the newcomers went beyond the profession defined by their predecessors. Instead, they adopted practices that came with their own networks, a new image for the profession and innovative design languages which they broadcast through self-promotional material. This shift can be replaced within a wider societal transformation in the second half of the 20th century which saw the relationship to economic activities evolve deeply.[158] As Boltanski and Chiapello explained, capitalism was criticised as the source of disenchantment and inauthenticity, oppression, misery and inequality, and opportunism and selfishness.[159] Artistic critique, which was notably adopted by the protests of May 1968, contested capitalism by demanding autonomy, creativity, authenticity and freedom.[160] However, it did not manage to escape capitalism, because the latter successfully reconciled these criticisms with the market. The radical nature of artistic critique was soon incorporated within a "new spirit of capitalism" and thereby silenced.[161]

158 Boltanski and Chiapello 2011 (1999), 33.
159 Ibid., 86–87.
160 Ibid., 460–462.
161 Ibid.

This shift was illustrated in the newcomers' new identity, which presented an appearance of autonomy, creativity, authenticity and freedom, but was simultaneously embedded in the market; in fact, these characteristics made them attractive on the market. The professional identity was objectified in the newcomers' work as much as in their studio environments and embodied in their design lifestyle. As radical as they may have appeared, they still relied on clients' "dependence and trust" to survive.[162] This was noted by Thornton and McRobbie, who departed from earlier literature for which a subculture's authenticity was antithetic to commerce and argued instead that the outsiders' attitude was "in reality less distant from the workings of commercial culture than their underground image suggested".[163] Put bluntly, subcultures could be absorbed directly by the market – for the newcomers, this meant clients in the cultural sector.[164]

162 Fournier 1999, 285–286.
163 McRobbie 2016, n.p. (chapter 2, section 4); Thornton 2003 (1995) (chapter 4, section 2).
164 McRobbie 2016, n.p. (introduction).

This sector relied on external funding and thus did not need to sell products or appeal to the masses. It was also the first to approach the newcomers. Gavillet explained:

The cultural field allows us to combine our interests in print and typography and offers us a real space for experimentation and development – since the role of an art catalogue is not going to contribute to the financing of an institution through its sales, it does indeed free the graphic designer from certain prerequisites.[165]

165 "Le domaine culturel nous permet de faire converger nos intérêts pour l'imprimé, la typographie et nous offre un véritable espace d'expérimentation et de développement – le role d'un catalogue d'art n'étant pas de contribuer au financement d'une institution à travers ses ventes, cela libère en effet le graphiste de certains prérequis." Berthod 2021c, 44–46.

The experimentation allowed by these clients enabled the newcomers to develop visual languages that went counter to the dominant approach to the discipline. They allowed the newcomers to convert their subcultural capital into economic capital to a certain extent. On the downside, these commissions often came with reduced fees. But for newcomers, the freedom to take risks and develop unconventional work outweighed the low pay.[166] Such commissions also allowed the new generation to change their relationships with clients.[167] Instead of working as service providers, they were able to adopt an authorial voice which presented their interpretation of the content as much as the content itself. Of course, this relationship was mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the smallest cultural clients could not necessarily afford well-known or commercial agencies. On the other hand, they also knew that the newcomers brought an added value that established designers did not necessarily offer.

166 Ernst 1999, 24.
167 Triggs 2009, 325.

Martin Heller, who worked as curator then director of the MfGZ between 1986 and 1998, explained that he

found most established designers "boring, and sometimes [...] old fashioned, or linked to the boring kind of Swiss school".[168] One notable exception was Hans-Rudolf Lutz, whom Heller chose to design the poster of his first exhibition at the MfGZ. When Windlin returned from London, Lutz introduced him to Heller, who asked him to design the poster for the exhibition *Zeitreise* in 1993.[169] They developed a regular working relationship which lasted until Heller left the MfGZ. The curator explained that working with Windlin was different from collaborating with other designers:

I worked with a lot of designers, among them Hanna Koller who often works with Scalo, Käti Durrer and Jean Robert, Trix Wetter, Hans-Rudolf Lutz [...] but within this circle, Cornel [Windlin] was a very constant relationship, and I [chose] him especially for the complex and therefore difficult subjects.[170]

168 Heller 2018.
169 *Zeitreise* (Time travel), MfGZ, 3 March 1993–2 May 1993.
170 Barbieri 2021b, 61–62.

Expanding on the reason why he chose Windlin for difficult subjects, Heller clarified:

[These were subjects] where it wasn't obvious how the graphic works for the poster and sometimes for the publication – where it wasn't clear from the beginning where it would end up. [...] At the beginning of every of these jobs, there was a getting into an exchange about the subject, about the motivation, what could be interesting, what could be surprising. It was not at all formal, it was always a question of content at the beginning. [...] But compared with

others, the exchange, the discussions with Cornel were much more interesting.[171]

171 Heller 2018.

Lutz (1939–1998), Robert (1945–2016), Wetter (*1947) and Durrer (*1948) were all from the same generation of well-established designers. The exception on Heller's list was Williamson-Koller (née Koller, *1966), who was younger than Windlin. However, she had spent her formative years at Robert & Durrer's and worked with Wetter from the 1990s onwards.[172] She shared their definition of design as a service. Heller's rationale for choosing Windlin for complex jobs shed light on the added value which the newcomers were able to bring. Not being merely subordinated to the content, they had something to say. Judging by Windlin's success, his clients, his peers and critics were interested in his statements.[173] Many newcomers similarly embraced the position of design authors, which allowed them to develop work in which they could express their subculture and allowed them to exert a degree of influence on the content that they designed and sometimes created.

172 Lichtenstein 2014, 209.
173 Heller 2018; Hollis 2012; Lehni & Owens 2013, 12; Poynor 1996.

4.3.2 Authorial strategies

In 1993 Heller was already able to remark that "the designers of the new generation [...] define themselves less as service providers or educators than as graphic authors."[174] Their work was unhindered by commercial concerns and focused on developing unconventional discourses instead. Windlin expressed this through his design, but also through his work ethic, which was different from that of other designers. Like artists, the designer paid little attention to economic viability. From the client's perspective, this was beneficial. Heller knew that he was trading efficiency for quality, a superiority which resided primarily in Windlin's authorial approach to his work:

In the graphic studio, he wasn't very efficient. And that was a quality. […] He wasn't organising himself and his studio upon economic criteria. He was always acting like […] the mastermind and the author, and if he liked something or if he wasn't pleased with the result, he could work five times more than the money was worth. […]. The organisation of the collaboration was not the one you would expect from an efficiently working studio. It was more like an artist's studio, and an artist's behaviour. There was a certain unreliability in parts of the cooperation, but I took it into account, because for me it was worth – it was one of the prices I had to pay for the whole thing. […] he didn't have to only fulfil the graphic role, but he was part of the nucleus of content, talking about the content and the background of the project.[175]

174 "Die Gestalter der neuen Generation definieren sich deshalb weniger als Dienstleister oder Erzieher denn als grafische Autoren." Heller 1993, 29.

175 Heller 2018.

The notion of "designer as author" can be retraced to a 1991 article by design critic Rick Poynor, describing the work of graphic designers Neville Brody and Jonathan Barnbrook.[176] Windlin worked for Brody before his return to Zurich, and his attitude proved influential. Poynor argued that Brody and Barnbrook were delivering a message in their design that was at least as important as the client's content.[177] This allowed them to upgrade their status to "stars" that clients would approach for their specific voice and perceived added value.[178] In 1996, an article by designer and writer Michael Rock brought a notable contribution to the topic. In his text, which rippled through the design

community, Rock argued that designers should consider their work on the same level of importance as the material provided by the client.[179]

176 Barnes 2012, n.p.
177 Barnes 2012 n.p.; Lupton 2011 (1998).
178 Baldwin & Roberts 2019, n.p.; Julier 2014, 99.
179 FitzGerald 2015, n.p.; Rock 2009 (1996).

However, many misinterpreted this as a call to arms for designers to start creating their own content in order to regain agency over their work.[180] As the designer Kenneth FitzGerald remarked, this strong response revealed their "hunger for meaning—and self-determination".[181] These designers resented their role, deemed as subservient, and attempted to secure their independence by creating a discourse.[182] This misinterpretation of the article indicated the designers' perceived lack of autonomy. Though forms of authorship offered a means to regain independence, they were – and still are – hotly debated.[183] Critics and designers have since invented various other positions, including the designer as producer, as reader, investigator, editor, publisher or researcher, which reflected increasingly broad professional models that moved away from design as a service.[184] Although authorial design was initially linked with the idea of a visible signature, over time it became closer to a position in which the designer is able to add "more intangible, almost invisible elements" in a project, which reflect "particular functional and conceptual inputs which all work to support the given content".[185] Authorial attitudes and self-initiated work became constitutive of the newcomers' professional identities.

180 Rock 2013 (2009).
181 FitzGerald 2015, n.p.
182 Barnes 2012.
183 Barnes 2012; Gavillet 2020; Lupton 2011 (1998); 2011; McCarthy 2011; Rock 2009 (1996); 2013 (2009); van der Velden 2011 (2006).
184 Barnes 2012; Gavillet 2020; Lupton 2011 (1998); 2011; van der Velden 2011 (2006).
185 Goggin 2009, 35.

Previous generations of designers had already used outputs traditionally associated with authorship, such as writing and publishing. The majority of the proponents of the Swiss Style issued articles or books and gave conferences as means of anchoring themselves in a historiography of design.[186] Over time, new generations moved away from such discourse and increasingly

published artefacts that focused on design as its sole content. The design historian Richard Hollis linked this trend with a post-modernist attitude rooted in self-expression.[187] In Switzerland, Lutz notably set up his publishing company, Hans-Rudolf Lutz Verlag, in 1966. Its catalogue included what may best be described as artists' books such as *1979* (1980), *Menschen* and *Gesichter* (both in 1986), whose common theme was an exploration of the means of image reproduction. In the 1990s and 2000s, the newcomers followed the same strategies. Instead of publishing articles or books reflecting on their practices, they published primarily visual material which was often self-referential. Furthermore, rather than producing these outputs in mid-career, the newcomers did so much earlier, sometimes even using them to launch their studios. As the design scholar Monika Parrinder pointed out in 2000, these designers were "[racing] to establish a persona within the industry by publishing their own projects".[188]

186 Kaufmann 2021.
187 Hollis 2006, 257.
188 Parrinder 2000, n.p.

A case in point was one of NORM's earliest projects. After they launched their studio, the designers barely had any work. They thus spent their time developing a manifesto-like monograph, *Introduction* (1999), which they accompanied with a website and promotional material. In this self-published book, the designers did not include essays describing their position: design was the content. The publication was self-referential, and NORM played with their readership's expectations. Though presented as a research project and using a pseudo-analytic language, it was in fact only scholarly in appearance and remained cryptic (Fig. 4.18). While the publication's thickness initially gave the impression of a substantial monograph, *Introduction* was only 34 pages long. The designers created this illusion by using a French fold binding and thick paper that made it resemble a more substantial book (Fig. 4.19). Rather than delivering the formal analysis it promised, *Introduction* was an experimental playground where the designers could be "totally self-centred and self-focused".[189] This publication was also used as a specimen for Normetica (1999), their first commercially available

typeface which was similarly experimental, not particularly legible and intentionally strange.[190]

189 Farrelly 2008, n.p.
190 Stender 2000, 48.

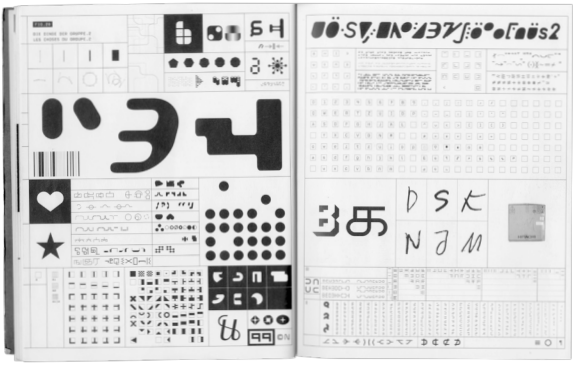


Fig. 4.18 A spread of NORM's *Introduction* (1999). Design: NORM.
Fig. 4.19 The French fold binding technique used by NORM in *Introduction* (1999), which enabled them to increase the thickness of the book.

With *Introduction*, NORM were evidently not attempting to attract traditional clients but asserting their authorial position instead. The audience was convinced, and the publication rapidly sold out. In 2000, it was awarded in the SDA. This was not by chance: the book had been designed with the awards in mind. The designers assumed that they were going to win, and arranged with the printer to delay payment until they had secured the money prize.[191] *Introduction* and its subsequent win at the SDA gave NORM visibility. Amongst the jury members, Rappo, who was the head of the graphic design department at ECAL, was impressed by the duo's presentation and invited them to teach in Lausanne.[192] This expanding network played a fundamental role in their career, as I will argue in my next chapter. Moreover, NORM secured book commissions from the FOC, such as the trilogy of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books catalogues 2001–2003 (published 2002–2004) and *Physiological Architecture*.[193] The scenario was repeated in 2002. NORM self-published a second tome, *The Things*, which they also submitted successfully to the SDA. As their notoriety grew, they secured further commissions in the cultural sector, notably for ECAL and the Migros Museum in Zurich.

191 Berthod 2021b.
192 Rappo 2021.
193 Décosterd & Rahm 2002.

NORM achieved critical acclaim and became one of the most famous design studios of their generation. The last tome of their self-published trilogy, *Dimension of Two* (2020), was symbolic of how far they had come over almost two decades. This time, they did not need to bulk up their publication artificially. Over 512 pages, the designers once again provided a quasi-scholarly exploration that had been years in the making.[194] This book was published at the same time as their first monographic exhibition at the MfGZ.[195] While NORM used *Introduction* to establish their status, *Dimension of Two* presented them at their peak. The different roles played by these successive publications highlighted the continued importance of self-published authorial strategies for NORM, who used them to assert their cultural relevance even as they had evolved from outsiders to insiders.

194 NORM 2017.
195 *Norm – It's Not Complicated*, MfGZ, 12.5.2020–27.9.2020.

4.3.3 Typefaces and foundries: from experimentation to commerce

NORM's *Introduction*, *The Things* and *Dimension of Two* were each typeset in one of their typefaces.[196] This pointed to an area of practice in which subcultural capital eventually translated into significant economic capital. From the late 1980s onwards, a large number of graphic designers – both newcomers and more established practitioners – were drawing typefaces.[197] The democratisation of type-design software now made it possible to create custom typefaces on a project basis.[198] Designers benefitted from digital technologies that had transformed type design and production from an industrial process requiring several people and just as many steps in the process to a single step that a single designer could undertake.[199] Initially, these typefaces were largely experimental and designers rarely expected financial gains from them.[200] Type design was a place to experiment outside what traditional clients might have expected. Because NORM had a growing number of commissions, they no longer produced a new typeface per project, but kept using a selection of their fonts. These became synonymous with their studio and turned every project into a vector of self-promotion.[201]

In the words of the designer Marc Kappeler, who had bought a license for Simple, "everything I design look[ed] like [NORM's] work".[202] The duo recognised that their typefaces had become "like a brand, a statement".[203] Though they may have been experimental, they cemented NORM's design language on the scene.

196 Normetica (1999), Simple (2000) and Riforma (2018) respectively.
197 Balland *et al.* 2004, 36; Gavillet 2017; Hares 2018; NORM 2017.
198 Middendorp 2012, n.p.
199 Kinross 1992, n.p.; Perondi 2020, n.p.; Rappo 2014b, 282.
For a thorough analysis of the development of digital type in the 1990s, see King 1999.
200 Janser & Reble 2004, 3.
201 Rappo 2014b, 282.
202 "Tout ce que je fais, ça a l'air de votre travail". NORM 2017.
203 "Comme une marque, comme un statement". NORM 2017.

NORM sold their typefaces on Lineto from 1999 onwards. The foundry offered a prime example of the shift from experimental work to commercial success. It was founded by Windlin and Müller in 1993 as a label under which the duo released typefaces on the digital foundry FontFont.[204] It evolved into a digital type foundry whose first website went online in early 1999.[205] Like many of their peers, Windlin and Müller were initially not interested in making a profit.[206] Lineto was primarily "an exciting platform [...] functioning as a trading place for ideas and attitudes" and was also described as an informal, behind-the-scenes network of like-minded designers.[207] It was a site of exchange and learning as much as a foundry.[208] It supported collaborative projects, offered technical classes, and organised gatherings which were social occasions as much as opportunities to share recent work and new ideas.[209] Lineto was therefore a community of practice for those who shared the design lifestyle. In this aspect, it replaced the role previously held by professional organisations. NORM notably likened the foundry to their version of the prestigious design association AGI, which many members of their generation rejected.[210] Over time, however, and like many of the newcomers, Lineto managed to convert its subcultural capital into something attractive for clients.

204 FontFont 1997; Windlin 2018.
205 The launch date of Lineto as a website is the subject of a somewhat parochial controversy. Windlin and most of the literature maintained that the first Lineto website was established in 1998. This is – perhaps not coincidentally – the same year Optimo was launched, which was the only other online Swiss type foundry at the time. While Lineto's website may have been in the works for a while, I argue that it actually launched in 1999. This is confirmed by a series of sources. On a digitally archived version of the original website dated from 2000, the "beginning of 1999" is given as the date of the launch (Windlin and Müller 2000). In 2004, Lineto asked the FOC for financial support and the minutes of the meeting also mention 1999 as the date of the website's launch (Crivelli 2004b). The decision to promote 1998 as a founding date may stem from a desire by Windlin to historicise Lineto on a par with Optimo rather than risk it playing second fiddle, especially since Lineto had been in existence long before their rival.
206 Ernst 2000a, 244.

207 Bruggisser & Fries 2000; Windlin & Müller 2000.
208 Berthod 2019a.
209 Hares 2018; Windlin 2018.
210 NORM 2017; Barbieri 2021a; Windlin 2018.

The platform initially published highly idiosyncratic typefaces often based on vernacular references. For instance, Jonas Williamsson's Biff (1995) was partly based on early New York graffiti, Stephan Müller's Numberplate (1998) on car registration plates, Windlin's Thermo (1999) on luggage tags, Laurent Benner's PEZ (1999) on the eponymous candy logo (Fig. 4.20) and Windlin and Gavillet's Vectrex (1999) on the game consoles of the same name. The graphic designer Jonathan Hares explained that "putting out fonts in those days was a bit more relaxed" than it is today, which allowed Lineto to become "a repository of people's other fonts that they used for their projects".[211] Lineto's symbolic turning point from subcultural venture to commercial success was Laurenz Brunner's Akkurat (2004), which became a best-selling font (Fig. 4.21).[212] Part of Akkurat's success can be attributed to its controlled release. Brunner and Lineto granted early access to a select handful of designers, notably Julia Born, who used a beta version for a book commissioned by the FOC, *Beauty and the Book* (2004).[213] Akkurat's initial exclusivity and its subsequent adoption by a select circle of designers led to its ongoing commercial success and, ultimately, to a place in the canon.[214] A symbolic measure of its success was the ensuing development of its character set. Today, it covers 143 languages across seven scripts including Arabic, Hebrew and Devanagari.

211 Hares 2018.
212 Lebrun 2020; Lzicar 2015; Phaidon 2012; Hares 2018; NORM 2017; Windlin 2018.
213 Fischer *et al.* 2004.
214 Purcell 2012.

Fig. 4.20 Specimen for Pez (2000) printed on a Letraset transfer sheet. Pez was later renamed Tablettenschrift after a complaint from the candy company. Design: Laurent Benner.
Fig. 4.21 Type specimen for Akkurat (2004). Design: Laurenz Brunner.

When compared to Lineto's 2004 catalogue, which was largely based on the ironic in-jokes or referential forms I evoked above, Akkurat offered a stark contrast. It featured a neo-Modernist construction recalling the archetypes of grotesque typefaces (constant stroke width, stability) crossed with geometrical principles (curves made of arcs of a circle with little optical correction). At odds with the foundry's subcultural attitude, the "phenomenal success" of the typeface was later attributed by Lineto to its technical approach and nod to the "classic sans-serif" popular with designers of the Swiss Style.[215] Rather than humour, it had a certain coldness and a rigidity and nodded at "qualities such as technical precision, down-to-earth robustness, reliability and neutrality".[216] Windlin maintained that this change of direction was not a conscious strategy and that he simply chose to publish typefaces that he was interested in.[217] Nevertheless, for Lineto, Akkurat certainly symbolised a move away from experimental fonts and a step towards more functional, if not mainstream, typefaces, whose licences are bought today by multinational corporations including Spotify, Dell and Mitsubishi.[218] Akkurat offered an occasion for Windlin to merge his anti-establishment attitude with an instinct for business that turned the small Swiss foundry into a heavyweight player on the international type design scene.

215 *Lineto* 2020.
216 *Ibid.*
217 Windlin 2018.
218 Lebrun 2020.

After Akkurat, Lineto published a series of other commercially successful neo-Modernist typefaces, such as NORM's Replica (2008), Aurèle Sack's Brown (2011) and Brunner's Circular (2013). As I will discuss in the following chapter, many of these would be awarded prizes in the SDA. Prior to their releases, beta versions of these typefaces were used by their respective designers, sometimes for several years, which echoed Akkurat's initial exclusivity followed by commercial success. These releases also demonstrated how digital type design was being "disciplined", that is, how it was evolving from experimental practice to an autonomous field.[219] As the newcomers moved from experimental typefaces to increasingly considered ones, they fixed their discipline's quality

criteria. Lineto published fewer experimental typefaces over the years. Its production became technically refined, and the foundry soon exported its specialised knowledge. In 2014, Müller founded Alphabet, a separate company with font engineer Andreas Eigendorf, which specialises in the back-end of type design, namely testing, engineering, mastering and metrics, services which it provides not only to Lineto but also to a wide range of clients. Despite the evident "disciplinarisation" of the field, Windlin has argued that Lineto had not changed its attitude from its early days and experimental fonts. Commenting on one of NORM's latest releases, Riforma (2018), he has explained that the designers had drawn it with their own use in mind and ignored any potential client market.[220] Whether or not this is true, or an attempt by Windlin to pre-empt any accusation of selling out, Lineto's progression from subculture to commerce followed the newcomers' move from outsiders to insiders. This process, to which I shall return in the next chapter, became a reality for most actors in the professional shift.

219 Schultheis 2005, 67.
220 Windlin 2018.

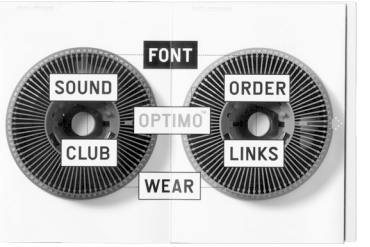


Fig. 4.22 Optimo's 1998 specimen showing the structure of its website. Design: Stéphane Delgado, Gilles Gavillet and David Rust.

Lineto was not the only digital foundry to launch a website in Switzerland in the late 1990s. As mentioned above, Optimo was established in 1998. It began as a graduation project of ECAL students Gilles Gavillet and Stéphane Delgado with the collaboration of teaching assistant David Rust. Like Lineto, it was initially imagined as a platform retailing not only typefaces, but also music, clothes and image licensing. Its structure was illustrated in the only printed specimen produced for the platform (Fig. 4.22). A diagram reflected the transdisciplinary organisation of the venture, with categories such

as “sound”, “club”, “wear” and “font”. This structure, which was identical to the menu of the website, suggested the topicality of subcultural entrepreneurship for the newcomers, or at the very least a strong interest in alternative professional models. Although Optimo quickly reduced its offerings to typefaces only, its model of a digital agency reflected a desire to build new models that reflected the newcomers’ interests, rather than following existing ones Optimo’s website had a dual role. On the one hand, it had the traditional function of providing self-promotional material, albeit in a digital form, thereby establishing the newcomers’ arrival. Its designers hoped to reach an international audience, because they wanted to work for “anyone but the local scene”, which they rejected.[221] On the other hand, the website also attempted to carve out a professional model that had no equivalent on the scene. As Gavillet explained,

In Switzerland it’s impossible to get decent clients who are up for doing interesting things. We thought therefore that the best approach was to first; do and then to find an application for it.[222]

221 Gavillet 2017; Roope & Gavillet 1998.
222 Roope & Gavillet 1998.

Optimo’s attitude towards type design was radical. Its designers rejected established promotional models. As Gavillet explained, they “wanted to show [...] that the specimen was dead”.[223] They also refused to bow to the “worldwide reputation” of Swiss typography, which according to Gavillet was a misconception:

Everyone in Switzerland is still influenced by the modernist approach that is still considered correct. The reputation tends to make typographers very boring as they’re under the illusion that Swiss design is still GREAT, which it’s not.[224]

223 Gavillet 2018.
224 Roope & Gavillet 1998.

Gavillet's statement illustrated the complex relationship with the label Swiss Style whose legacy was both historical and contemporary. For him, it constrained the practice of his peers. Optimo reacted with an ironic rebuff which was evident on the cover of their specimen (Fig. 4.23). It featured a photograph of an extended hand that was a re-enactment of one of Josef Müller-Brockmann's most famous poster campaigns. The designers superimposed the pixelated icon of a hand on the photograph, but this was not a respectful handshake. The digital world was poking fun at a design icon from a past world. The designers declined to take themselves too seriously, as the sentences used in the specimen showed. They were knowingly mundane, such as "life can be incredibly better" or "center of selection". Nevertheless, their approach was not offhand either.

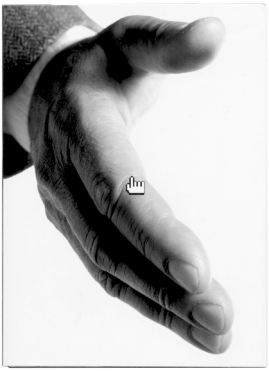


Fig. 4.23 **The cover of Optimo's 1998 specimen, which nods to Josef Müller-Brockmann's famous poster "das freundliche Handzeichen" (1954). Design: Stéphane Delgado, Gilles Gavillet and David Rust.**

Optimo was described by Nicolas Roope, the co-founder of the British interactive design agency Antirom, as "more ambitious than many high budget design jobs".[225] The new designers were thus not dilettantes. Optimo was a skilful display of their definition of the profession, which merged a subcultural attitude and a flair for commerce.

225 **Roope & Gavillet 1998.**

One of the main reasons for the 2002 relaunch of the SDA was a change in the profession. As we have seen in this chapter, a new school had arrived with practices that redefined their discipline. The professional shift of the

1990s and 2000s resulted from the alignment of a series of conditions. A new generation of designers felt disenfranchised by a loss of control over their activities. They reacted by embracing ostensibly "unprofessional" models which privileged their practices instead. Rather than joining professional organisations, they preferred flexible communities of practice. They embraced subcultural identities and fields of practice that promoted their own personalities, which they staged carefully in portraits as well as self-promotional material. Their new professional models had a direct influence on the type of work they produced. They expanded their activities, notably launching digital platforms that enabled them to publish typefaces but also books or music. Their self-initiated activities and their renegotiated relationship with clients pushed the boundaries of the traditional model of service providers. Indeed, these newcomers embraced the position of cultural agents who were not simply packaging content for clients, but adding a layer of meaning through their design. The newcomers successfully used their attitude to attract clients who valued their practices. These were mostly located in the cultural sector. Thanks to the field's high degree of independence from commercial viability, it was freed from a need to appeal to the masses. The work produced by the newcomers for these clients could thus be experimental and featured a strong authorial voice. In other words, these conditions allowed the newcomers to translate their design attitudes into forms. From the late 1990s, the SDA became synonymous with authorial design.[226] The awards reflected these new practices not only in the type of design that was awarded, but also in the people who defined design promotion, namely the FDC and the experts. Over time, members of the new school took over design promotion. As I argue in the next chapter, they appropriated the SDA and redefined them in their own image.

226 Stirnemann 2005.