An Autopsy of Tastes and Values

80

Years

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The Most Beautiful Swiss Books 2023 and
*An Autopsy of Tastes and Values. 80 Years of
The Most Beautiful Swiss Books Competition*
are published conjunctively on the occasion
of the 80th anniversary of the competition.

[E]

80 Years
Achtzig. Huitante. Ottanta.
But what next?

Nicole Udry

It is now 20 years since the publication of *Beauty and the Book. 60 Years of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books**, published by the Federal Office of Culture and designed by Julia Born. That book celebrated the anniversary with a retrospective, using 143 books to illustrate the evolution of Swiss book design. Over those 60 years, which included an interruption between 1947 and 1949, some 14,000 books were submitted to the competition, with 1,710 of them awarded. In 2024, we have now reached some 22,000 books submitted and a total of 2,180 winning books.

The competition serves as a platform for many different kinds of interactions. It owes its development to the distribution and mediation of books and to the international network of people who are involved in myriad ways. These diverse points of view foster contemplation — a process that this catalogue celebrating the competition's 80th anniversary seeks to support by examining the historical contexts, legacies and significance of some of the winning books from over the years. The editorial committee consisting of Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger and Tan Wälchli invited 20 Swiss and international experts to share their views and critical insights at five round-table discussions. Each of these was devoted to a specific theme reflected in a selection of winning books from 1944 to 2023.

Inviting Julia Born to once again take on the graphic design inevitably highlights the temporal leap over the two decades. The publication can be seen as a space for reflection and a starting point for evaluating the history of the competition and its future development. Her design gives us tremendous freedom to access the content as we choose: via text or image. It grants the reader the agility to see what there is to read, and to read what there is to see.

Let's continue the discussion in another 20 years!

**Beauty and the Book. 60 Jahre Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher / Les plus beaux livres suisses fêtent leurs 60 ans / 60 Years of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books*, Niggli Verlag, Zürich, 2004.

[D]

80 Jahre
Huitante. Ottanta. Eighty.
Und was nun?

Nicole Udry

Vor 20 Jahren erschien *Beauty and the Book. 60 Jahre Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher**, herausgegeben vom Bundesamt für Kultur und gestaltet von Julia Born. Das Buch feierte das Jubiläum mit einem historischen Rückblick auf 143 Bücher, welche die Entwicklung der Schweizer Buchgestaltung veranschaulichten. In den ersten 60 Jahren, inklusive einer Unterbrechung von 1947 bis 1949, wurden rund 14 000 Bücher zum Wettbewerb eingereicht und 1710 Titel prämiert. Bis 2024 haben sich die Zahlen auf rund 22 000 eingereichte Bücher und 2180 Auszeichnungen erhöht.

Der Wettbewerb bietet Raum für vielfältigen Austausch. Seine Entwicklung verdankt er der Verbreitung der Bücher, ihrer Vermittlung sowie den geografisch weitläufigen Verbindungen zu den Menschen, die ihm in unterschiedlicher Weise verbunden sind. Die divergierenden Blickwinkel ermöglichen es im vorliegenden Katalog zum 80-Jahr-Jubiläum des Wettbewerbs, die historischen Zusammenhänge, Erbschaften und Nachwirkungen einiger der seit Beginn prämierten Bücher zu beleuchten. Auf Einladung des Redaktionsteams bestehend aus Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger und Tan Wälchli, tauschten 20 Fachleute der Schweizer und der internationalen Szene ihre Ansichten und kritischen Betrachtungen in fünf Diskussionsrunden aus. Jede Diskussionsrunde befasste sich mit einem bestimmten Thema, das sich in einer Auswahl an prämierten Büchern der Jahre 1944 bis 2023 widerspiegelt.

Dass der Auftrag zur grafischen Gestaltung wie vor 20 Jahren Julia Born anvertraut wurde, unterstreicht den Zeitsprung von damals zu heute. Die Publikation versteht sich als Reflexionsraum, als Ausgangspunkt, um das Erbe des Wettbewerbs und seine künftigen Entwicklungen auszuloten. Die Gestaltung erlaubt es dabei, sich den Inhalten wahlweise durch die Bilder oder die Texte zu nähern. Sie ermöglicht uns, im Text zu lesen, was zu sehen ist, und im Bild zu erkennen, was beschrieben wird.

In 20 Jahren wird es sicherlich viel Neues zu besprechen geben!

**Beauty and the Book. 60 Jahre Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher / Les plus beaux livres suisses fêtent leurs 60 ans / 60 Years of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books*, Niggli Verlag, Zürich, 2004.

[F]

80 ans
Ottanta. Eighty. Achtzig.
Mais encore?

Nicole Udry

Il y a 20 ans paraissait *Beauty and the Book. Les plus beaux livres suisses fêtent leurs 60 ans**, édité par l'Office fédéral de la Culture et réalisé par Julia Born. L'ouvrage célébrait l'anniversaire par une rétrospective historique, reposant sur 143 livres pour illustrer l'évolution de la création de livres en Suisse. En 60 ans, avec une interruption entre 1947 et 1949, on recensait environ 14 000 livres présentés au concours et 1710 titres récompensés. En 2024, un total d'environ 22 000 ouvrages ont été présentés, parmi lesquels 2180 ont été primés.

Le concours offre un lieu d'échanges tentaculaire. Il doit son développement à la diffusion des livres, à leur médiation ainsi qu'au rayonnement géographique des personnes qui y sont liées de manières multiples. Ces regards croisés impliquent une réflexion que ce catalogue dédié aux 80 ans du concours entend mener en examinant les contextes historiques, les héritages et la portée de certains livres primés au cours des années. À l'invitation du comité éditorial formé par Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger et Tan Wälchli, 20 spécialistes des scènes suisses et internationales échangent leurs vues et leurs regards critiques autour de 5 tables rondes. À chacune d'entre elles est dédié un thème particulier, mis en écho par un choix de livres lauréats des années 1944 à 2023.

Solliciter Julia Born pour prendre le relais du mandat graphique entrepris il y a 20 ans, c'est immanquablement évoquer le saut temporel entre ces deux décennies. La publication pourrait être perçue comme un espace de réflexion à partir duquel il serait possible d'évaluer l'héritage du concours et ses développements futurs. Son design nous laisse la grande liberté d'accéder aux contenus indifféremment par le texte ou par l'image. Il permet l'agilité suivante : voir ce qu'il y a à lire, et lire ce qu'il y a à voir.

Reparlons-en dans vingt ans!

**Beauty and the Book. 60 Jahre Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher / Les plus beaux livres suisses fêtent leurs 60 ans / 60 Years of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books*, Niggli Verlag, Zürich, 2004.

[I]

80 anni
Eighty. Achtzig. Huitante.
E poi?

Nicole Udry

Vent'anni fa usciva *Beauty and the Book. 60 Years of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books**, a cura dell'Ufficio federale della cultura e realizzato da Julia Born. L'opera celebrava l'anniversario offrendo una retrospettiva storica, con una selezione di 143 libri per illustrare l'evoluzione della creazione libraria in Svizzera. Nei 60 anni di storia del concorso, con un'interruzione tra il 1947 e il 1949, sono state censite circa 14 000 opere iscritte e ne sono state premiate 1710. Nel 2024 il totale dei libri premiati è arrivato a 2180 titoli a fronte di circa 22 000 libri presentati al concorso.

Il concorso offre un luogo di confronto oltremodo ramificato: deve il suo sviluppo alla diffusione dei libri, alla loro mediazione e all'influenza in termini geografici delle persone che, in tanti modi diversi, vi sono legate. Questo intreccio di punti di vista produce inevitabilmente una riflessione, che questo catalogo dedicato agli 80 anni del concorso intende portare avanti, esaminando il contesto storico, il lascito e la portata di alcuni libri premiati nel corso degli anni. Su invito del comitato editoriale formato da Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger e Tan Wälchli, venti grandi nomi del panorama svizzero e internazionale si scambiano opinioni e vedute critiche nella cornice di cinque tavole rotonde. Ognuna di esse si sofferma su un tema specifico, riecheggiato da una scelta di libri vincitori degli anni 1944–2023.

Invitare Julia Born a riprendere in mano il lavoro grafico avviato vent'anni fa significa, inevitabilmente, voler mettere in primo piano il balzo temporale avvenuto in questi due decenni. La pubblicazione potrebbe quindi diventare uno spazio di riflessione per analizzare l'eredità del concorso e i suoi sviluppi futuri. Il suo design ci lascia la libertà di accedere ai contenuti attraverso i testi o le immagini e ci permette, con grande agilità, di vedere ciò che viene letto e di leggere ciò che viene visto.

Tra vent'anni ci saranno sicuramente altre novità di cui parlare!

**Beauty and the Book. 60 Jahre Die schönsten Schweizer Bücher / Les plus beaux livres suisses fêtent leurs 60 ans / 60 Years of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books*, Niggli Verlag, Zürich, 2004.

The Most? Beautiful? Swiss? Books?

In the life of an individual, 80 years are quite likely to constitute a full cycle. In the life of the printed book, the last eight decades feel more like a short episode in the existence of a technology that has aged surprisingly well. And yet, the seismic shifts in geopolitics, technology, economics and society that have occurred since 1944 inevitably left manifold traces in culture, aesthetics and the arts. To what extent is this reflected (or plainly ignored) in an annual selection of 'beautiful' books that are considered to represent a nation's achievements in the field?

This publication attempts to lend a fresh look to around 100 of the 'most beautiful Swiss books' from the last 80 years, regarding them in some of the historical contexts from which they emerged. More particularly, we carved out five thematic trajectories, each represented by a pile of books, that would allow us to observe how some of the aesthetic tastes and values underlying the notion of the 'beautiful' book developed and changed over time, and how they might affect the future of this competition.

For example, why did various ideas around the 'grid' in book design endure until the present day, and why were others occasionally questioned? Why did children's books once allow female designers to be recognized, and why were they largely absent from the selection at other moments? How have print runs and sales prices of awarded books changed over time, and how might the global production chains continue to shape the field in the future? To what extent was the competition influenced by the various counter-reactions to modernism that occurred following the 1980s? And how has the 'beautiful' photo book evolved during a number of decades in which the media, discourses and photographic institutions proliferated and transformed with great speed?

Compiling the stacks for each of the five themes, we did not intend to establish a meta-selection of 'most beautiful' Swiss books. Rather we chose some well-known and some lesser-known publications that, in our view, each raise a number of potentially complex questions. A few of these express aesthetic preferences and cultural values that appear highly problematic today. And yet, we decided to display them here once again in order to discern and discuss the problematic historical situations at hand.

For each of the five piles, we then invited four specialists from Switzerland and abroad to engage in an informal round-table discussion in Zurich. Each of them was asked to bring to the table their particular point of view and expertise on the theme at hand. The conversations were largely self-led by the participants, and not all the books on the piles were discussed. The transcripts were shortened and edited for this publication.

We would like to thank the libraries that allowed us to use their collections and their facilities to host the round-table discussions: the Media and Information Centre at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK-MIZ) and the Schweizerisches Institut für Kinder- und Jugendmedien (SIKJM). For the generous loan of individual books we are grateful to Antiquariat im Seefeld, Zurich, and Bibliothek für Gestaltung, Bern. Last but not least, we thank our 20 guests, who managed to make room in their busy schedules to participate in the round-table discussions. Their personal dedication, experience and knowledgeable critical gazes made this book into what it is. A number of other specialists from the field helped us with selecting individual books or inviting certain guests. Our warmest thanks go to them as well.

Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger, Tan Wälchli

Die? Schönsten? Schweizer? Bücher?

Im Leben eines Menschen stellen 80 Jahre nicht selten einen ganzen Zyklus dar. Im Leben des gedruckten Buchs hingegen, dieser überraschend gut gealterten Technologie, sind die letzten acht Jahrzehnte eine vergleichsweise kurze Episode. Und doch: Tiefgreifende Veränderungen in Geopolitik, Technologie, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft haben seit 1944 auch in der Kultur, Ästhetik und Kunst unweigerlich vielfältige Spuren hinterlassen. Inwieweit wird dies in einer jährlichen Auswahl von «schönen» Büchern reflektiert (oder schlicht ignoriert), welche die gestalterischen Errungenschaften einer Nation zum Ausdruck bringen soll?

Die vorliegende Publikation wirft einen neuen Blick auf rund 100 «schönste Schweizer Bücher» aus 80 Jahren und auf einige ihrer historischen Kontexte. Wir haben zu fünf thematischen Schwerpunkten jeweils etwa 20 Bücher ausgewählt, um anhand dieser Stapel exemplarisch einige der ästhetischen Vorlieben und Werte zu untersuchen, welche der Auswahl «schöner» Bücher im Lauf der Zeit zugrunde lagen. Zugleich stellte sich damit auch die Frage, welche Rolle solche Kriterien in der Zukunft des Wettbewerbs spielen könnten und sollten.

Wie haben sich beispielsweise verschiedene Konzepte des Rasters in der Buchgestaltung bis heute gehalten, während andere gelegentlich infrage gestellt wurden? Warum boten Kinderbücher für Gestalterinnen einst den einzigen Weg, um im Wettbewerb ausgezeichnet zu werden, und warum war diese Art von Büchern in gewissen Jahrzehnten kaum vertreten? Wie haben sich die Auflagen und Verkaufspreise ausgezeichneter Bücher im Laufe der Zeit verändert und wie werden die globalen Produktionsketten die Buchindustrie auch in der Zukunft prägen? In welchem Ausmass wurde der Wettbewerb von den verschiedenartigen Reaktionen gegen den Modernismus erfasst, die seit den 1980er-Jahren in der internationalen Grafikgestaltung auftraten? Und wie hat sich der «schöne» Bildband im Laufe einiger Jahrzehnte entwickelt, in denen sich die Medien, Diskurse und Institutionen der Fotografie rasant ausbreiteten und veränderten?

Die Auswahl der Bücher für die fünf Fragestellungen ergibt keine kumulierte Liste von «allerschönsten» Schweizer Büchern. Wir wählten vielmehr einige sehr bekannte und einige weniger bekannte Titel, die alle eine Reihe von im besten Fall komplexen Fragen aufwerfen. Einige der Bücher bringen dabei ästhetische Vorlieben und Wertvorstellungen zum Ausdruck, die aus heutiger Sicht höchst problematisch sind. Dennoch haben wir uns entschieden, sie hier noch einmal abzubilden, um die historischen Problemlagen benennen und diskutieren zu können.

Zu jedem der fünf Bücherstapel luden wir Expertinnen und Experten aus der Schweiz und aus dem Ausland nach Zürich ein, um ein informelles Round-Table-Gespräch zu führen. Alle wurden gebeten, ihre persönlichen Standpunkte und Fachkenntnisse in die Diskussionen einzubringen. Die Gespräche wurden überwiegend von den Teilnehmenden selbst geleitet, und nicht alle ausgewählten Bücher konnten besprochen werden. Die Transkripte wurden für diese Publikation gekürzt und bearbeitet.

Wir bedanken uns bei den zwei Bibliotheken, die uns ihre Bücher und Räumlichkeiten für die Round-Table-Gespräche zur Verfügung stellten: das Medien- und Informationszentrum an der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK-MIZ) und das Schweizerische Institut für Kinder- und Jugendmedien (SIKJM). Dem Antiquariat im Seefeld, Zürich, und der Bibliothek für Gestaltung, Bern, danken wir für die grosszügige Ausleihe einzelner rarer Bücher. Nicht zuletzt gilt unser Dank den 20 Gästen, die in ihren vielfältigen Beschäftigungen Raum schufen, um an den Gesprächen teilnehmen zu können. Ihr grosses persönliches Engagement, ihre Erfahrung und ihre informierten, kritischen Blicke machen das vorliegende Buch zu dem, was es geworden ist. Eine Reihe von weiteren Spezialistinnen und Spezialisten haben uns in der Auswahl einzelner Bücher und bei der Einladung einzelner Round-Table-Gäste mit ihren Vorschlägen und Kommentaren unterstützt. Auch ihnen gilt unser herzlicher Dank.

Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger, Tan Wälchli

Les plus ? Beaux ? Livres ? Suisses ?

80 ans : à l'échelle d'une vie humaine, voilà qui correspond peu ou prou à un cycle complet. Pour ce qui est du livre imprimé en revanche, ces huit décennies passées constitueraient plutôt un bref épisode dans l'existence d'une technologie qui a étonnamment bien vieilli. Et pourtant, les profonds bouleversements géopolitiques, technologiques, économiques et sociaux qui se sont produits depuis 1944 ont inévitablement laissé des traces, nombreuses, dans la culture, l'esthétique et les arts. À quel point une sélection annuelle de « beaux » livres, censés représenter les réussites d'une nation dans ce domaine, reflète-t-elle (ou ignore-t-elle tout simplement) ces évolutions ?

Cette publication voudrait porter un regard neuf sur une centaine des « plus beaux livres suisses » des 80 dernières années en les replaçant dans le contexte historique qui les a vu émerger. Plus précisément, nous avons dessiné cinq trajectoires thématiques, chacune représentée par une pile de livres, qui devaient permettre d'observer comment certaines valeurs et certains goûts esthétiques sous-tendant la notion de « beau » livre se sont développés et modifiés au fil du temps et quelle pourrait être leur influence sur l'avenir de ce concours.

Comment les différents concepts de « grille » ont-ils par exemple imprégné le graphisme d'édition jusqu'à nos jours et à partir de quand ont-ils, pour certains, été contestés ? Pourquoi les livres pour enfants permettaient-ils à une époque aux graphistes femmes d'être récompensées et pourquoi étaient-ils largement absents de la sélection à d'autres moments ? Comment les tirages et les prix de vente des livres récompensés ont-ils évolué et comment les chaînes de production mondiales pourraient-elles façonner le secteur à l'avenir ? Dans quelle mesure le concours a-t-il été influencé par les différentes contre-réactions au modernisme qui ont émergé après les années 1980 ? Et comment le « beau » livre de photographie a-t-il évolué au cours de ces décennies qui ont vu les médias, les discours et les institutions photographiques proliférer et se transformer à toute allure ?

Notre intention n'était pas d'établir une méta-sélection des « plus beaux » livres suisses en composant les cinq piles thématiques. Notre sélection s'est portée sur des ouvrages connus et moins connus qui, à notre avis, soulèvent chacun un certain nombre de questions potentiellement complexes. Quelques-uns expriment des préférences esthétiques et des valeurs culturelles qui apparaissent hautement problématiques aujourd'hui. Nous avons néanmoins décidé de les exposer ici encore une fois, dans le but d'identifier les contextes historiques problématiques et de pouvoir en débattre.

Pour chaque pile, nous avons ensuite réuni quatre spécialistes de Suisse et d'ailleurs — majoritairement, mais pas exclusivement, des graphistes — pour une table ronde informelle à Zurich. Ils et elles étaient invités à apporter leurs points de vue et leur expertise sur le sujet en question. Ces tables rondes étaient en grande partie auto-animées par les participantes et participants et tous les livres sélectionnés n'ont pu être examinés. Les propos ont été raccourcis et réorganisés pour les besoins de cette publication.

Nous aimerions remercier les bibliothèques qui nous ont donné accès à leurs collections et ont mis à notre disposition leurs locaux pour la tenue des tables rondes : le Media and Information Centre de la Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK-MIZ) et le Schweizerisches Institut für Kinder- und Jugendmedien (SIKJM). Pour le prêt généreux d'une partie des livres, nous remercions l'Antiquariat im Seefeld à Zurich et la Bibliothek für Gestaltung à Berne. Et, bien sûr, nous tenons à remercier nos vingt invitées et invités qui ont réussi à se libérer malgré leurs plannings chargés pour participer aux tables rondes. Leur investissement personnel, leur expérience et leur regard informé et critique ont permis de faire de ce livre ce qu'il est. D'autres spécialistes ont contribué, à travers leurs remarques et suggestions, à la sélection de certains livres et au choix des invitées et invités. Un très grand merci également à elles et à eux.

Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger, Tan Wälchli

I più? Bei? Libri? Svizzeri?

Nella vita di un individuo, è assai probabile che 80 anni costituiscano un ciclo completo. Nella vita del libro stampato, invece, gli ultimi otto decenni sembrano piuttosto un breve episodio nell'esistenza di una tecnologia che è invecchiata sorprendentemente bene. Eppure, i mutamenti sismici registrati nella geopolitica, nella tecnologia, nell'economia e nella società dal 1944 in poi hanno inevitabilmente lasciato molteplici tracce nella cultura, nell'estetica e nelle arti. Quanto di tutto ciò si riflette (o viene palesemente ignorato) in una selezione annuale di «bei» libri considerati rappresentativi dei traguardi di una nazione nel settore?

Questa pubblicazione si propone di esaminare sotto una luce nuova circa un centinaio tra i «più bei libri svizzeri» degli ultimi 80 anni, considerandoli in alcuni dei contesti storici in cui sono nati. In particolare, abbiamo identificato cinque traiettorie tematiche, ciascuna rappresentata da una pila di libri, che consentirebbero di osservare come si sono sviluppati alcuni dei gusti e dei valori estetici alla base della nozione di «bel» libro, come si sono evoluti nel tempo e come potrebbero influire sul futuro di questo concorso.

Ad esempio, in che modo le varie idee di «griglia» hanno preso piede nel design librario fino a oggi e a quando alcune di esse sono state messe in discussione? Perché i libri per bambini un tempo consentivano alle designer donne di essere premiate e come mai sono stati largamente assenti dalla selezione in altri momenti? Come sono cambiati nel corso del tempo le tirature e i prezzi di vendita dei libri premiati e in che modo le filiere di produzione globali potrebbero continuare a plasmare il settore in futuro? In che misura il concorso è stato influenzato dalle diverse controreazioni al modernismo che si sono verificate dopo gli anni Ottanta? E come si è evoluto il «bel» libro fotografico durante una serie di decenni in cui media, istituzioni e dibattiti incentrati sulla fotografia si sono moltiplicati e trasformati a grande velocità?

Impilando i volumi per ciascuna delle cinque tematiche, non miravamo a operare una meta-selezione dei libri svizzeri «più belli». Al contrario, abbiamo scelto alcune pubblicazioni molto note e altre meno note, ognuna delle quali, a nostro avviso, solleva una serie di interrogativi potenzialmente complessi. Alcuni dei libri, per esempio, esprimono preferenze estetiche e valori altamente problematici per la società odierna. Tuttavia, abbiamo deciso di riproporli ugualmente per mettere in evidenza le questioni storiche sensibili che incarnano e aprire uno spazio di discussione.

Per ciascuna delle cinque pile di libri abbiamo poi invitato quattro specialisti e specialiste dalla Svizzera e dall'estero — per lo più esponenti del design grafico, ma non solo — a partecipare a una tavola rotonda informale a Zurigo. A ognuno di loro è stato chiesto di esporre il proprio personale punto di vista e le proprie competenze sulla tematica in questione. Le conversazioni sono state per lo più animate dalle stesse persone partecipanti, e non è stato possibile includere tutti i libri selezionati nella discussione. Questa pubblicazione presenta i dialoghi delle tavole rotonde in forma abbreviata.

Desideriamo ringraziare le biblioteche che ci hanno permesso di accedere alle loro collezioni e di usufruire delle loro strutture per ospitare le tavole rotonde: il Centro Media e Informazione dell'Università delle Arti di Zurigo (ZHdK-MIZ) e l'Istituto svizzero Media e Ragazzi (ISMR). Siamo inoltre grati ad Antiquariat im Seefeld di Zurigo e alla Bibliothek für Gestaltung di Berna. E ovviamente desideriamo ringraziare i 20 ospiti che, nonostante i loro numerosi impegni, sono riusciti a trovare il tempo e lo spazio per partecipare alle tavole rotonde. Il libro che possiamo ora tenere tra le mani è il risultato del loro grande impegno personale, della loro esperienza e della loro visione, tanto informata quanto critica. Infine, un sentito ringraziamento va alle molte per-sone esperte del settore che, con commenti e proposte, ci hanno aiutati nella scelta dei libri e dei partecipanti alle tavole rotonde.

Julia Born, Sereina Rothenberger, Tan Wälchli

Grid Myths

Born in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, GILIANE CACHIN is a graphic designer based in Zurich. After graduating from ECAL in 2014, she worked for the studio Norm, as well as for the Lineto foundry and Cornel Windlin. Since 2019, she devotes herself to her studio while teaching editorial design at ECAL and typography at ZHdK, with David Keshavjee and Marietta Eugster.

SILAS MUNRO is a designer, artist, writer, curator and partner of Polymode Studio, based in Los Angeles. He is also a co-founder of BIPOC Design History and Founding Faculty and Chair Emeritus of the MFA in Graphic Design at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Munro has always dreamed about letter forms.

Graphic designers ELISABETH RAFSTEDT and JOHANNA EHDE form RIETLANDEN WOMEN'S OFFICE (est. 2018, Amsterdam). Their printed publication series *MsHeresies* — about collaborative graphic design and the ornamental as a form of critique — is central to their practice. They teach typography at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and organise the poetry reading series 'Don't Pay Your Rent' with Phil Baber of The Last Books.

Among design concepts historically associated with the 'Swiss Style', the notion of the grid is a particular luminary. While to some it came to frame an era of accessible information and economic progress that unfolded in the West after the Second World War, to others it served, at a minimum, as a pragmatic and useful design tool. Both views have contributed to the grid long outlasting the 'Swiss Style'.

In the competition of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books, this style was never strongly represented. While its international appeal mostly originated from posters, advertisements, typefaces, signage, and so on, the medium of the 'Swiss book' appeared in a more 'classical' guise for quite some time – more Jan Tschichold than Max Bill, if you'd like. Influential 'Swiss Style' designers had relatively little say in the jury of the book competition, and their contributions to the field were only occasionally acknowledged. If these few examples – by Max Bill, Karl Gerstner, Emil Ruder or Josef Müller-Brockmann – inevitably occur in any historical overview of the competition, as manifest already in the 2004 exhibition of awarded books, this is due to the shift in perception that goes along with time passing, and history being written.
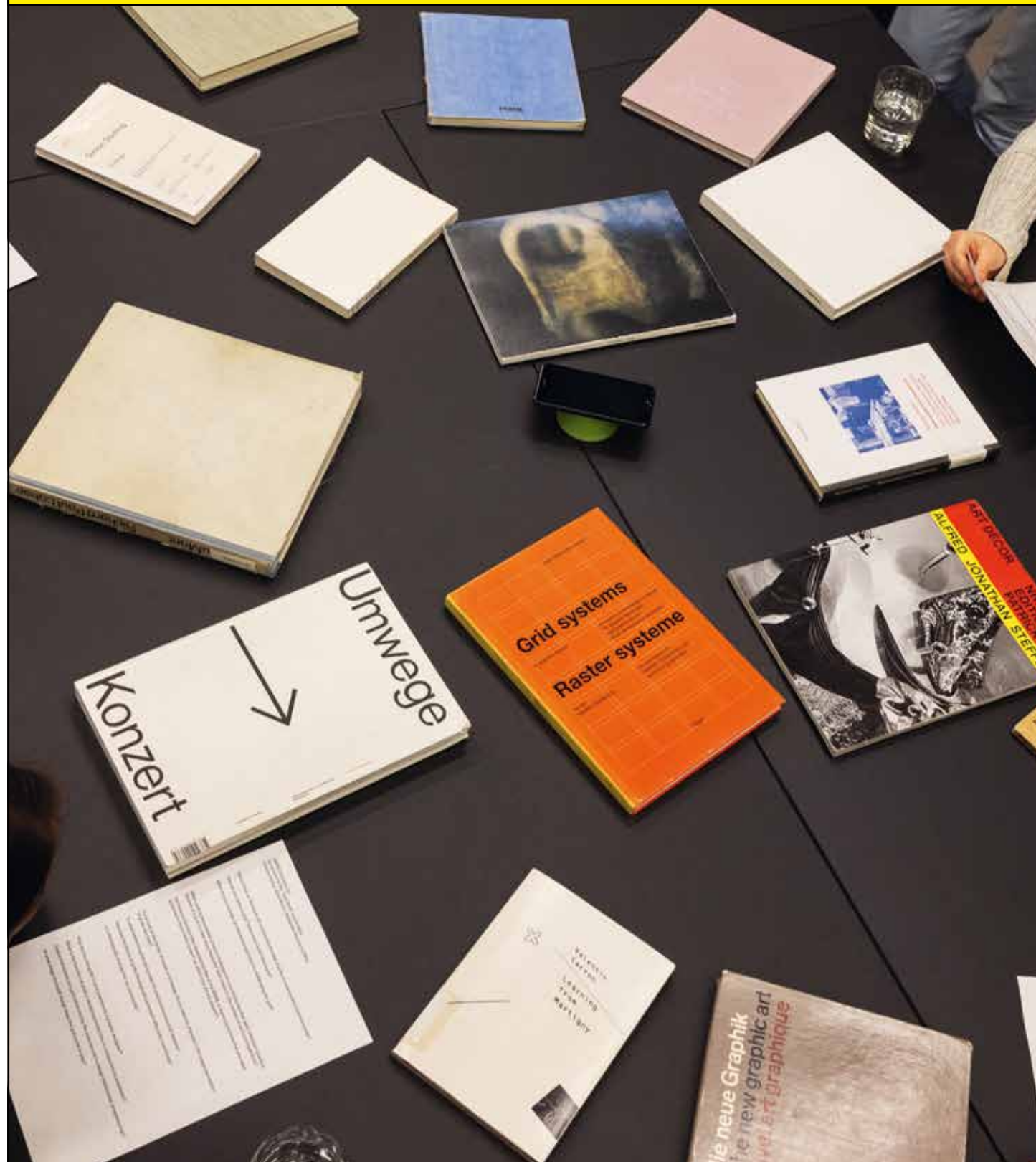
Another 20 years later, grids are still widely applied internationally in many sectors of graphic design; they are taught at design schools, and they are implemented in new technologies. To some, this might prove their timeless and quasi-universal objectivity and neutrality, yet to others grids have recently come to represent a false claim to objectivity, undermining or even obfuscating a range of more particular styles, stories and identities.
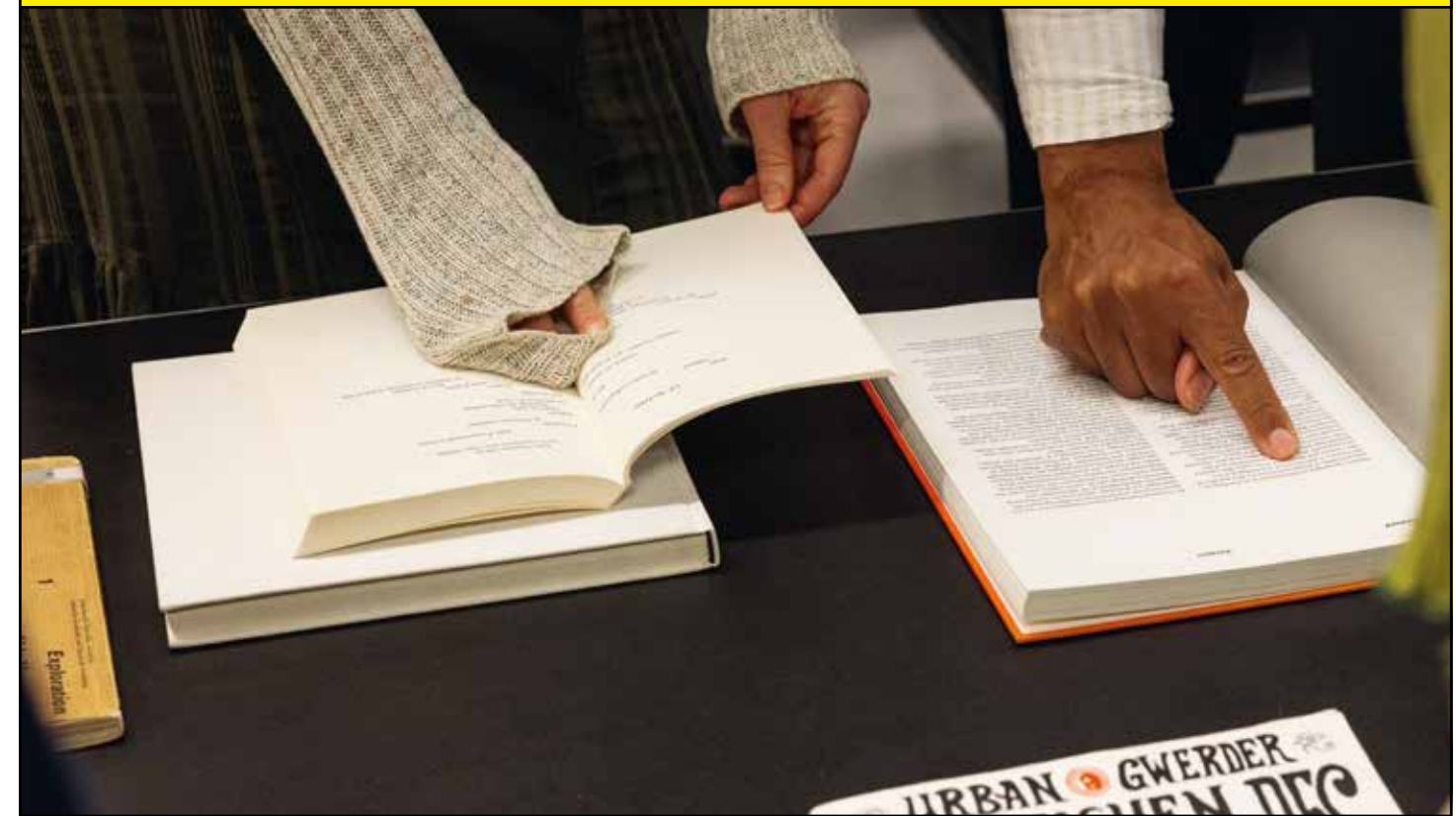
Some books awarded in the last 20 years testify to the tension between these two views, and a few also represent approaches to modifying or challenging established ideas of the grid. To engage in an exchange over such contemporary practices, as well as to evaluate the legacy of the more typical 'Swiss' grids, SILAS MUNRO from Los Angeles and Amsterdam-based RIETLANDEN WOMEN'S OFFICE (JOHANNA EHDE & ELISABETH RAFSTEDT) joined GILIANE CACHIN in Zurich.
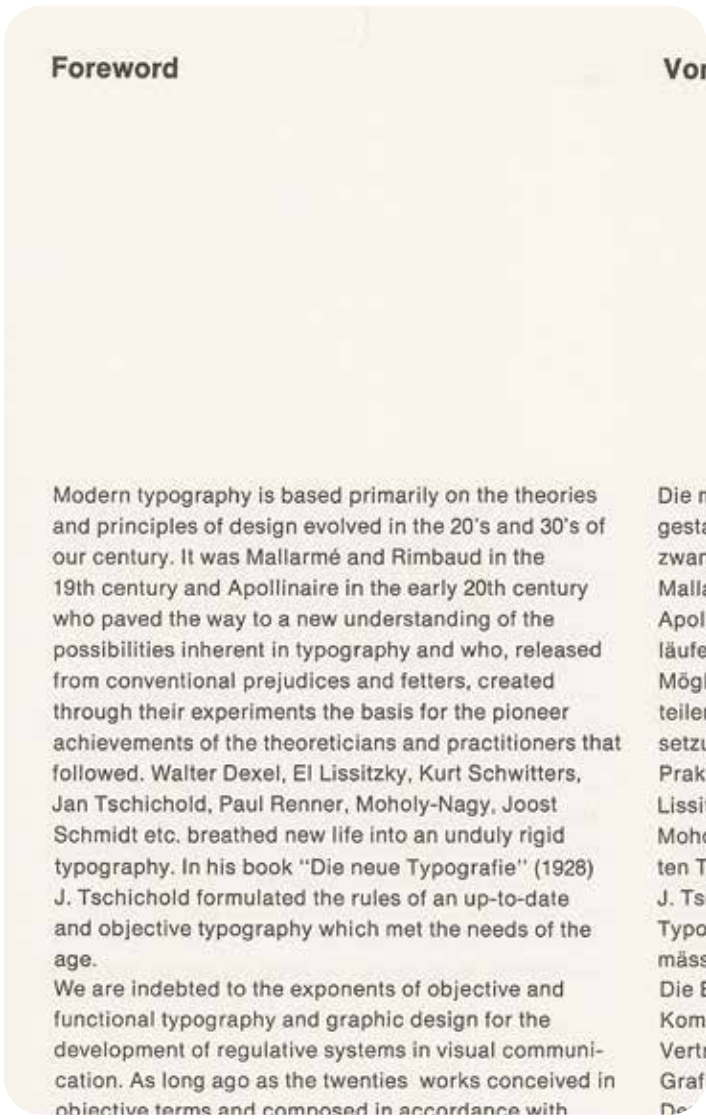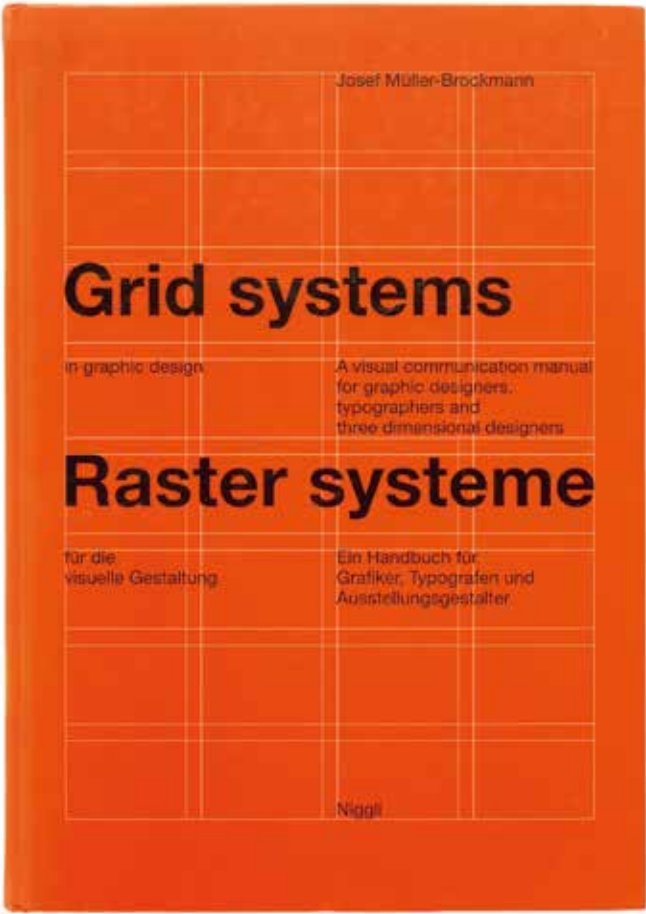
SILAS MUNRO: If I look at this stack of books, there is only one book that speaks about grids: Josef Müller-Brockmann's _Grid Systems_ (1980). The other books apply various kinds of grids, but this one talks about them, and I feel it possibly lasts today because of our contemporary how-to culture. People are very much interested these days in YouTube tutorials, in how they can do something they don't know about. You can find a TikTok about how to make the best pie or, really, anything. In a similar way, _Grid Systems_ is very digestible. It's consolidating a body of knowledge, and it promises that you will get something good if you follow this. This benefits many of the design students I encounter when teaching because they are often keen to know the 'right' answer. They are asking how they can get a good grade or how to do this or that — they want the bullet points.

GILIANE CACHIN: I can very well relate to this, because in my teaching I try to present a wide range of grid systems, but most of the students usually feel drawn towards Müller-Brockmann's. I assume that they find this particularly approachable because it provides a step-by-step model to arrive at a grid. This is an achievement of sorts, and I am not sure if many later books display a method as clearly as this.

JOHANNA EHDE: I'm curious how the book was received when it came out. I had always thought it was from the 1960s, but I noticed today that it was published only in 1980. I wonder if it was received as completely eccentric at that time. I generally have a slightly weird relationship to the grid, but I was inspired by the parallel between poetry and grid that Müller-Brockmann draws right in the first paragraph of the introduction. I would never have thought that this kind of grid system can be derived from writing poetry, from Stephane Mallarmé, whose book _Ein Würfelwurf_ (1966) is on our table, and from Guillaume Apollinaire.

Josef Müller-Brockmann

Grid systems
in graphic design

A visual communication manual for graphic designers, typographers and three dimensional designers

für die visuelle Gestaltung

Ein Handbuch für Grafiker, Typografen und Ausstellungsgestalter.

Raster systeme

Niggli

Foreword

Modern typography is based primarily on the theories and principles of design evolved in the 20's and 30's of our century. It was Mallarmé and Rimbaud in the 19th century and Apollinaire in the early 20th century who paved the way to a new understanding of the possibilities inherent in typography and who, released from conventional prejudices and fetters, created through their experiments the basis for the pioneer achievements of the theoreticians and practitioners that followed. Walter Dexel, El Lissitzky, Kurt Schwitters, Jan Tschichold, Paul Renner, Moholy-Nagy, Joost Schmidt etc. breathed new life into an unduly rigid typography. In his book "Die neue Typografie" (1928) J. Tschichold formulated the rules of an up-to-date and objective typography which met the needs of the age.
We are indebted to the exponents of objective and functional typography and graphic design for the development of regulative systems in visual communication. As long ago as the twenties works conceived in objective terms and composed in accordance with

ELISABETH RAFSTEDT: It's convincing to me to consider poetry in this context because poetic metre and rhythm can manifest in indentations, line breaks and so on.

It seems that the parallel between typography and poetry holds both with regard to measuring systems and to rhythm.
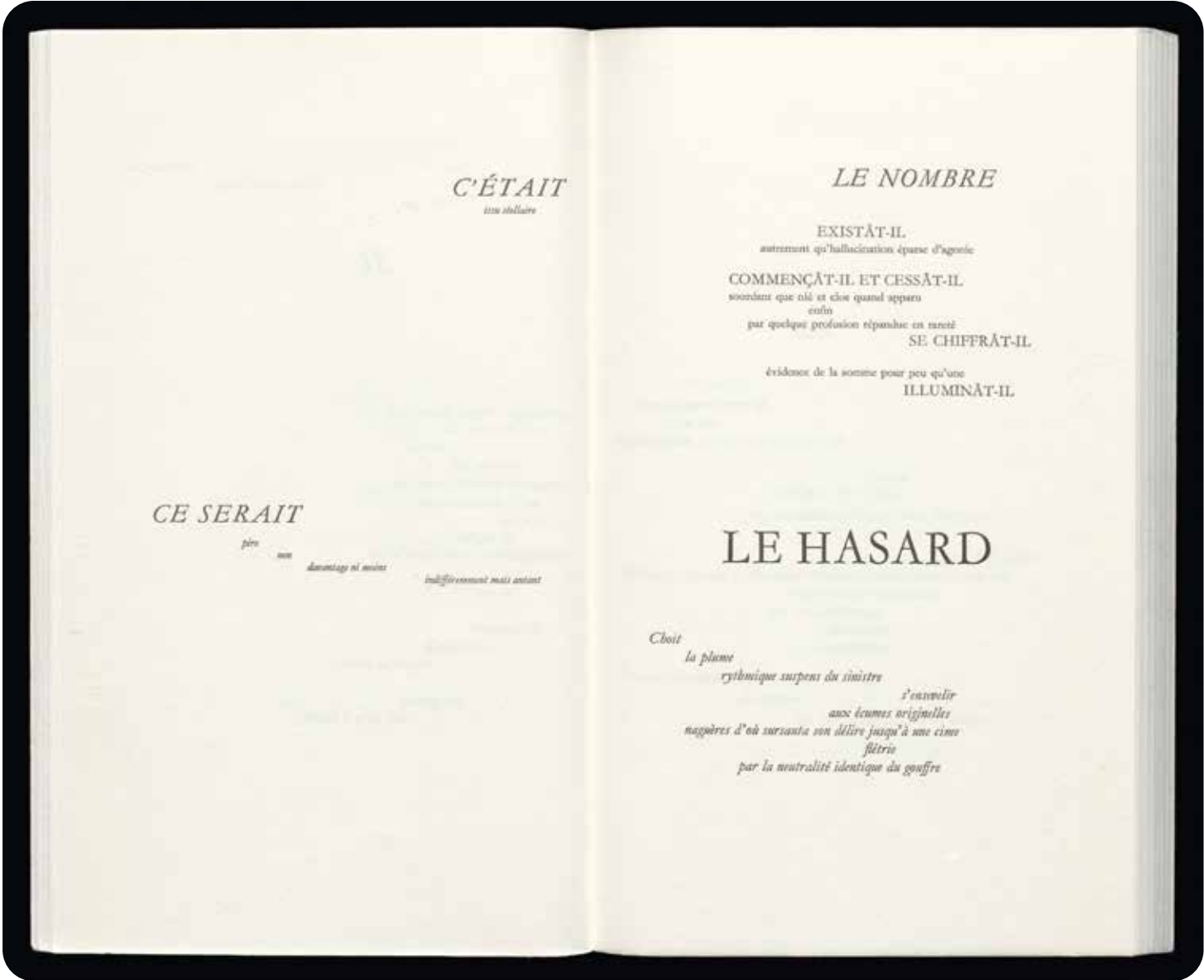
SM: It made me think about concrete poetry or other poets who were strongly interested in the form of the text. As an American, some Beat poets come to mind as well, such as Charles Olson, who used his idea of projective verse. There were also poets who had a strong interest in their text as a score for the sound of the poetry, assuming that the intonation or how the text is spoken is related to how it is displayed on the page. But while I find the parallel between grids and poetry fascinating, I wouldn't assume that this is the one and only history of the grids. Many other histories of the grid could be told.

GC: It seems that one reason for Mallarmé's influence on people like Müller-Brockmann was that he paid equal attention to the sense and to the structure of a sentence. Mallarmé also states somewhere that the book is an unfolded grid. And from what I understand he differentiates between grid and matrix. In this sense, the book might be a grid, but the matrix is a completely different system. I find this intriguing, given that today we mostly connect or even conflate the two. If you think of the studio Norm, for example, they use a millimetre grid, so this is both their matrix and their grid. But I like the idea of differentiating the two.

SM: If the book was a grid, then this could be an answer to the question 'Does every book have a grid?' It could mean that the actual object was a container with grid-like properties.

GC: For Mallarmé the book was a highly charged object and he even stated that 'everything in the world exists in order to end up as a book'. Müller-Brockmann doesn't share such an ideology of the book, in my view. He seems more concerned with the pragmatic aspects of finding a baseline rhythm and of developing a system and a toolbox which allow you to establish various kinds of orders inside a page. This can go quite far, because although he is talking about certain formats of the book page, his suggestions about the connection between baseline, type size and rhythm can today also be applied to a website, for example.

JE: But Müller-Brockmann also does formulate some strong ideas. He makes stunning claims to 'objectivity', for example. I have to admit that there are certain passages in that book that make me giggle. They are so outspoken about ideas that can appear questionable. But then again, the ambition is really inspiring in terms of what you think that graphic design is capable of achieving. So maybe you can appropriate his methods without those ideas.

ER: His claims to the objectivity of grids are even connected to certain ideas of democracy. He seems to think that the grid, being 'objective', could have an impact on the reader or user of a book that would help advance democracy. He also has strong claims about the mentality of the designer. This can appear somewhat contradictory at times because he is speaking about very subjective perceptions, but then goes a little wild discussing what the objective achievement of a grid can and should do.

SM: I had to laugh when this page with the three-dimensional cube of the grid was followed by pages that unfold the grid, and it looks like a cross. To me, this illustrates a certain religious fervour. But I also see the pragmatics, which are primarily related to Müller-Brockmann's understanding of modularity. As long as there is harmony in the modularity, the grid has this kind of infinite possibility to make beautiful things in all these different forms. There is something utopian about the

ER: Müller-Brockmann indeed writes about the future as if he could see it unfolding in front of his eyes and was eager to participate in it. Today most of us have a less certain and possibly grimmer view of the future. And we have seen so many grids over the course of the decades that Müller-Brockmann's didactic tone can sound a bit annoying today. We've actually seen a lot of grids in advertisements that were trying to teach us, and we're tired of it. We want to find out for ourselves. In my understanding, Müller-Brockmann also has this great belief that the designer is a sender that can project what the receiver will need to learn. As a designer, he knows a bit better than the reader herself. For me, at least from a feminist point of view, I don't think that I will know better than the reader who will take in my work. They will probably see other things that are much more intelligent than what I have thought beforehand. That's why I prefer connections to be drawn in more messy ways that I could not have predicted.

JE: The word 'confidence' is key for Müller-Brockmann. The grid is confidently looking ahead. And he aspires to transfer his grid into your mind. I personally find it more interesting to talk about graphic design that is somewhat unstable or not completely confident. At the same time, from a feminist graphic design conversation, it appears almost too obvious to just want to oppose the grid or react to it. This might also not lead very far. So I'm undecided. I don't know if the grid can be appropriated to serve complexity, or even to fit the complexity of our world.

almost infinite applicability of the toolbox. It's not a grid in the neoclassical sense of harmony, such as in music, for example, but a modernist grid that contributes to progress and to organising the world in an industrial way. But then I am asking myself: Are we now in this place where industrial progress made our world happier, almost half a century later? The grid might be helpful for presenting matters that feel logical and ordered, but our world is so much more complex in many ways, politically, economically, socially. So I wonder how the grid can deal with the messiness of the world, and I feel that it has its limitations there.

ER: I think we all have a certain love for the grid. Drawing from a feminist toolbox and references, I am reminded of the discussion about the 'tyranny of structurelessness'. It has been noted that often the people highest up in hierarchy speak about and, in fact, demand non-hierarchical organisation. This 'tyranny of structurelessness' makes it impossible to criticise any imposed structures, because they are not supposed to be there. Seen from this angle, I long for the grid also, because it is an openly declared structure.

SM: I can relate to your feminist points, because as a person of colour, or as a queer person, or as someone who's been historically marginalised, I am also often asking myself what to do with the grid. So I guess I'm pushing back at it. But I also love it, and I have a similar longing for it. I feel that it can provide you with a 'safe space' or something to refer to, which in turn then allows you to be intuitive or expressive.
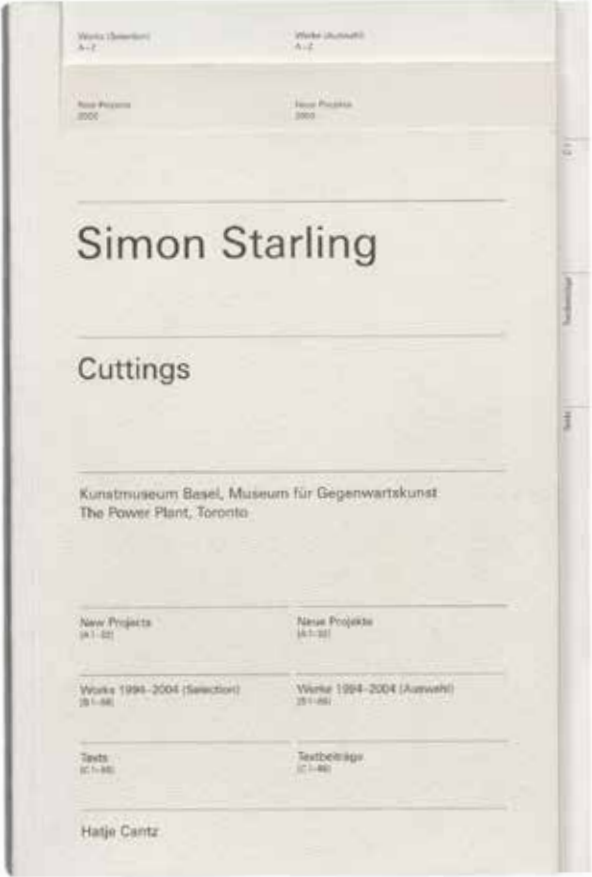
GC: I share that appreciation for restrictions. When I am confronted with a given structure, my brain will automatically start to explore all the possibilities within this structure, while I am satisfied much more quickly when I set out from an empty page. But, of course, grids can be conceived in very different manners, and I particularly like it if a grid allows the designer to create a visual metaphor or a hidden message. An example for this I find in the book designed by Norm, _Simon Starling. Cuttings_ (2005). As previously mentioned, Norm usually work with a grid system based on the unit of the millimetre. They also calculate the size of the type in millimetres, which forced them to establish tables that give the exact equivalent in point sizes for each millimetre size. And for the book format, they either use a two-third or a three-quarter. In this book, they used both formats, two-third and three-quarter. And when they worked on cutting the paper with Simon Starling, who is an artist, they discovered that the format in between happens to be the golden ratio. They used that as a third format for yet another section of the book. It's not declared anywhere in the book, but for them it was obviously an important discovery. I find it fascinating that a grid allows you to hide a message in your design, even if it's only for your own small pleasure.

SM: I love that example. I personally always use a grid when designing a book, and at my studio we say that we try to find a particular 'sacred geometry' that makes sense for the themes of a book and its content, while also allowing to imbue the book with some kind of meaning. When it comes to the golden ratio, I do have some issues, though. It has to do with the way I was taught that this was a Greek-Roman invention that spread to the rest of the world. I've since been discovering that there are other histories of that. For example, if you look at African architecture or African product design, pattern design, you find the golden ratio and similar harmonies in indigenous design, and you even find fractal geometry. Therefore I like to think that different cultures can have different ways of doing something, but then there's something beautiful and in common underlying it.
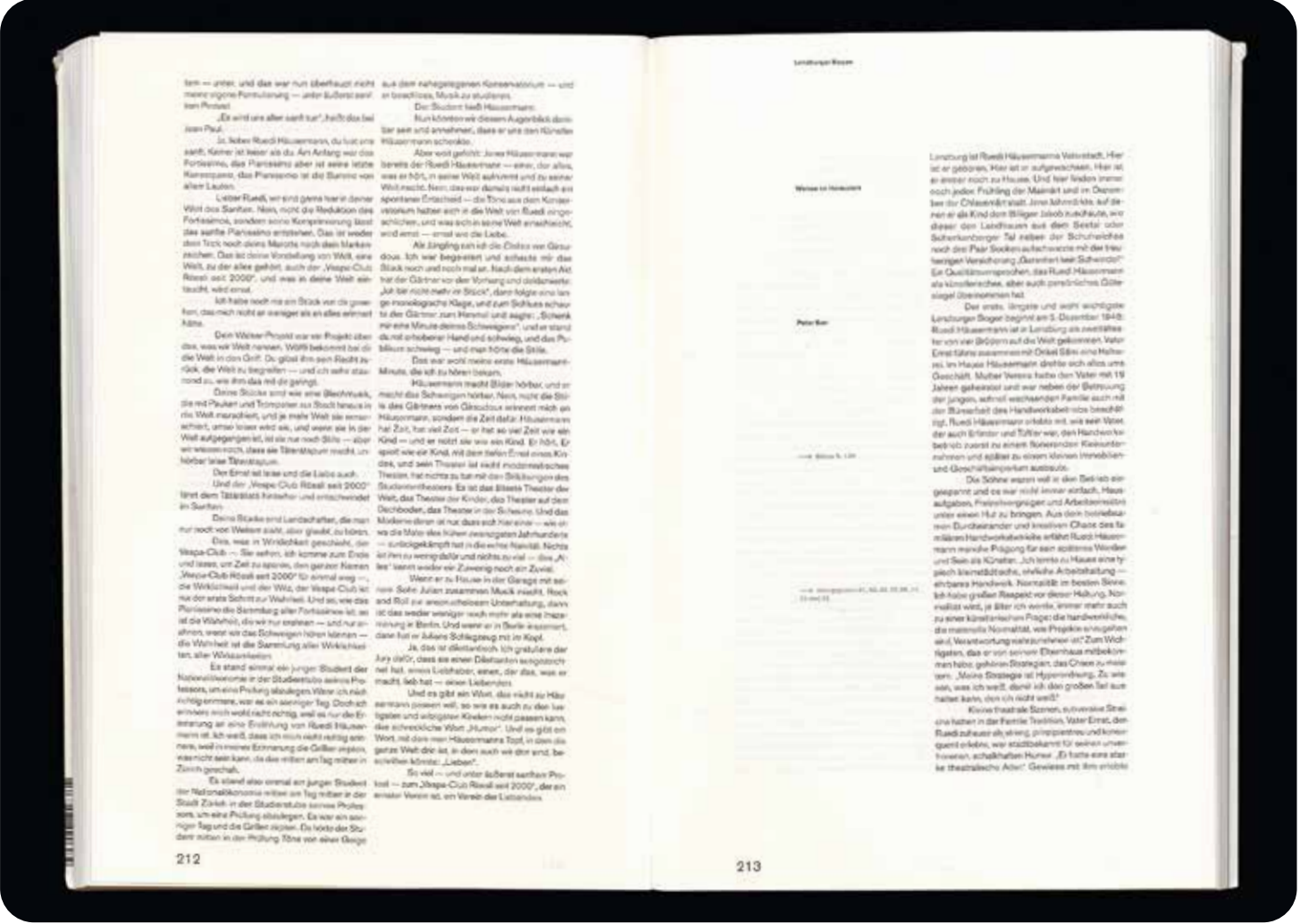
JE: If I understand correctly, the hidden message in the case of Norm is part of the form that the designers have been able to create, and to which they lend a particular meaning. So it might indeed be a kind of sacred geometry, and it almost becomes a mystic experience. As a designer, you constantly have to make choices, and what you two say sounds like some of these choices can become ritualistic.

GC: I meant 'secret message' primarily in the sense that a self-assigned design rule has a conceptual explanation which you do not communicate through the design. Another example can be found in the book designed by Kurt Eckert, Kerstin Landis and Jonas Voegeli, _Umwege zum Konzert. Ruedi Häusermann_ (2015). In one part of the book, they worked with various column heights for various texts. The underlying idea was an equaliser, so the display of text columns is supposed to relate to the field of music, and to how you equalise certain ranges of tonality.
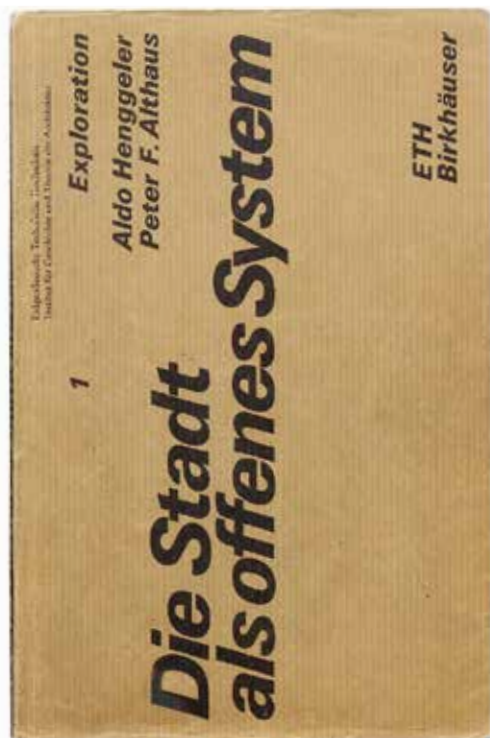
SM: *Die Stadt als offenes System* (1973), designed by Hans-Rudolf Lutz, connects to what you're saying. It's a book about architecture and the urban grid and it uses the materiality of a translucent paper and of a cream colour print to display the grid as an overlay. This can be related to how this publication is trying to make mathematical sense of how to design an ideal urban environment. All of us seem to love that book, and I don't know for sure, but I assume one reason for this is that it doesn't just work with the design of the text and images, but with shape and form in the materiality. I find it beautiful how the designer seems to have found a way to make the invisible visible, by using a flood of colour and by changing the translucency of the paper. Elements that would normally be flat suddenly have depth to them.
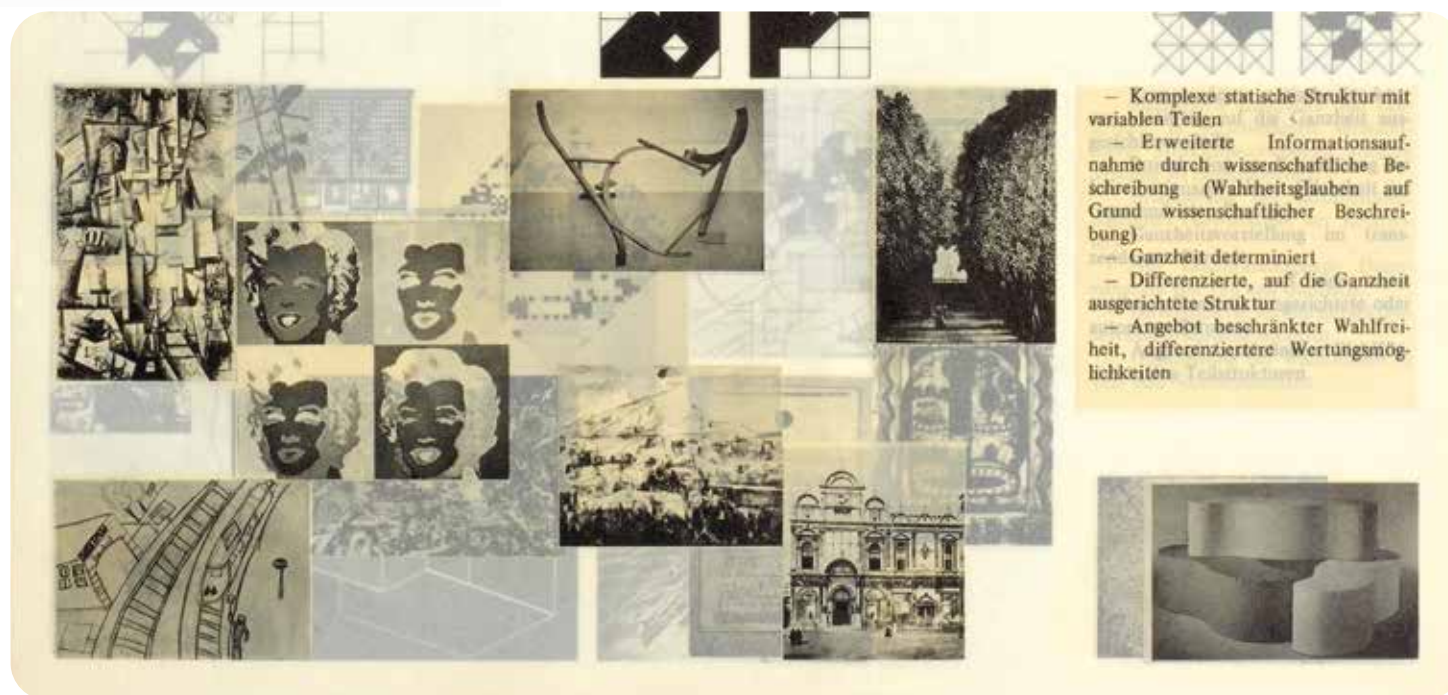
ER: Often when we speak about the grid in our education and teaching, we say it's about the organisation of information, which sounds really boring. But how we're thinking about it here at this table, and with regard to this book about cities in particular, it has something much more playful. It's more like the grid comes from a very playful rhythm, or from language, as Mallarmé would have it. So while the grid is usually said to be about organising information, what comes out at the other end is actually these hidden messages. In Müller-Brockmann, the notion of information is also very much related to mass production. It's a basic idea that you can reproduce your work and that it can reach large amounts of people. For example, he loves the DIN formats and how they become perfect paper formats that will work in all printers, and everyone can collect the documents because we will have the same paper folders. He sees this as a means of reaching bigger audiences. But personally, I think that graphic design doesn't necessarily have to aspire to such far-reaching messages. You can as well do something for maybe just one other person. You might want to make her laugh, or you want to make her think: 'Ah, this is interesting.' So it might become something much smaller.
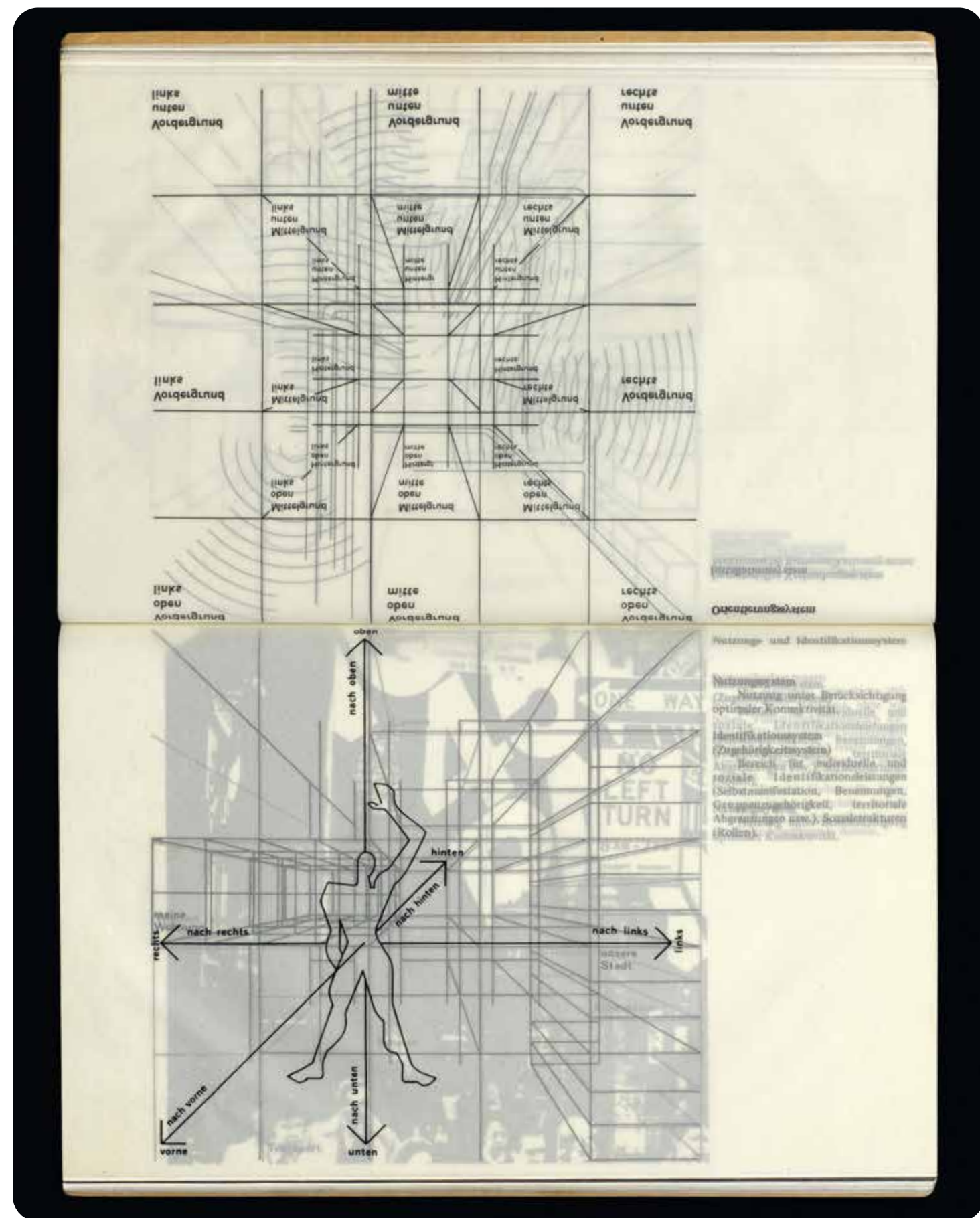
SM: To me this idea of the multiple or scale, of having many copies, is a double-edged sword. We usually relate it to progress and industry, and we think it's capitalism that is driving it in terms of revenue. But there is also something utopian about when you can make copies of things because this provides accessibility. I do see some beauty in the idea that someone's voice or thought can spread to

more people because you can mass-produce it. But to me, this doesn't go along with inventing norms for a format or a particular kind of grid. I rather find it worth pointing out who has historically been given access to define what the grid is on their terms. The oldest book on our table is Max Bill's _Form_, and in the introduction he says: 'This is primarily a picture book', with 'no claim to completeness or balance', but he also says 'it illustrates things that evince a remarkable degree of perfection, or embody some idea capable of further development'. And he's

basically presenting his personal standpoint on the evolution of form in the middle of the twentieth century. But I feel like he or Müller-Brockmann are making judgements about what is 'good'. And I would say that such ideas of 'good' design have been coded into InDesign and Figma to this very day. And I don't know if that's a good thing. I perceive a rather frustrating common denominator between who's represented in tech today and who is represented in the grid. Who is deciding and creating those platforms? Who has access to capital, who has access to knowledge?

GC: I don't exactly know how the first version of InDesign was built in 1999, but I find that the software has its limits. I have recently come to wonder if the way we build grids today might eventually be overcome due to AI. In the latest version of Photoshop you can write a prompt for an AI, and I imagine that InDesign will very soon implement similar options for the user to give orders on how to set up a page. So potentially the future of the grid could be the program reacting to what we imagine, which might actually mean that our thinking of grid construction will completely change.

FORM

JE: That leads me into what I find an interesting approach to challenge the grid. It would mean to be critical of the tools we use, and asking the question: How can we work with the grid, while remaining critical of the tools?

SM: I'm fascinated by AI, and I agree that it has potential for graphic design. I once saw Gustavo Soares, a Brazilian designer who teaches workshops where you can literally typeset a book in one click. He uses JavaScript style mapping from Word into InDesign, and you can code columns and styles and nested styles by clicking a button. So if you add machine learning to that, this could go quite far. But then what becomes our role as designers? And who's welcome to make the decisions around that? I lose sleep at night because of that.

ER: My view of the future is that platforms are getting bigger and taking over more platforms, creating more of a mono-platform situation where distribution of text and images happen. And those grids are very uniform.
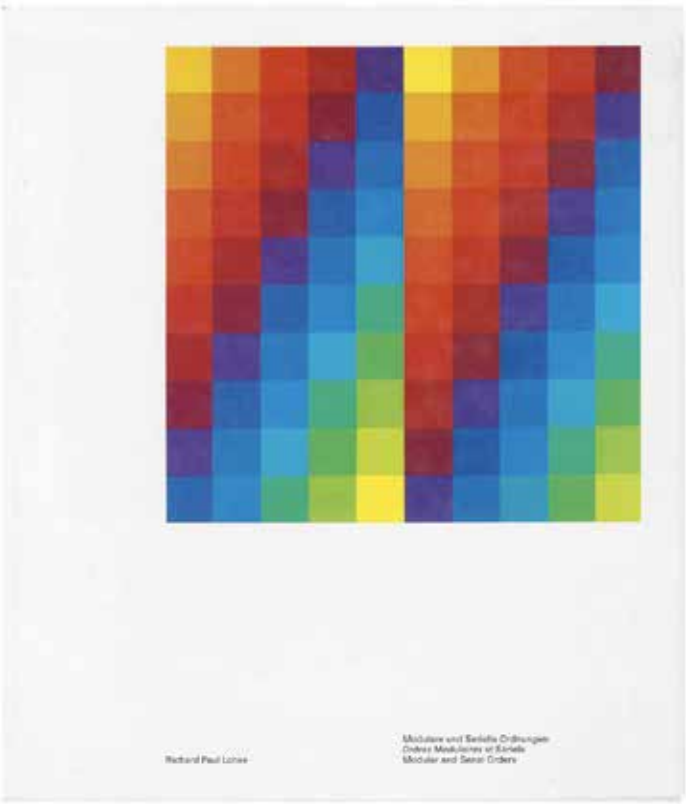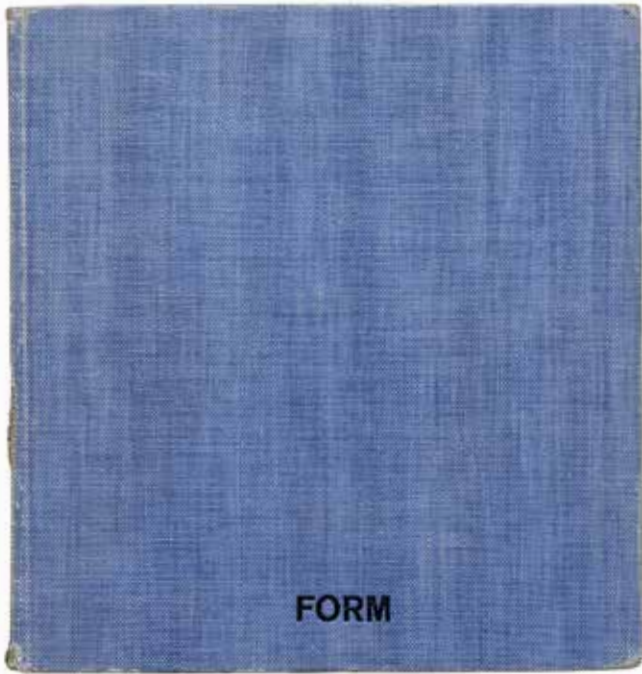
GC: To come back to the question of a designer's personal voice, I wonder if a particular grid that someone develops could become a personal signature of a designer. A lot of Swiss studios use their own sans-serif fonts, which they created as tools but also as a means for leaving a signature. I wonder if a grid lent itself to a similar gesture. For example, Richard Paul Lohse is sometimes credited for having broken the quadratic rules of a stiff grid and having invented a so-called progressive grid. It is not used in his book on our table, _Modulare und Serielle Ordnungen, 1943–84_ (1984), but it's this grid in which the columns get larger and larger. I don't know whether he developed this in relation to a particular content, but it might also be that the ego of the designer wanted to come up with something new, something personal, that could become a signature style.

SM: I'm glad you mention Lohse, because one of my typography teachers, Jon Sueda, who is from Hawaii but studied at CalArts and spent time in Holland, was always telling us that Lohse was a kind of B-side typographer, who had a particular approach to the grid, but didn't get as much attention as Müller-Brockmann or some other designers. To me it seemed that there

was always something a bit off in Lohse's work in a good way. Also Dan Friedman comes to mind, who was a big influence for me, who studied in Basel with Wolfgang Weingart, and when he was back in the United States was often trying to break the grid, or queer it. His weather report project was all about these progressive grids that were very strange, but he wanted the students to
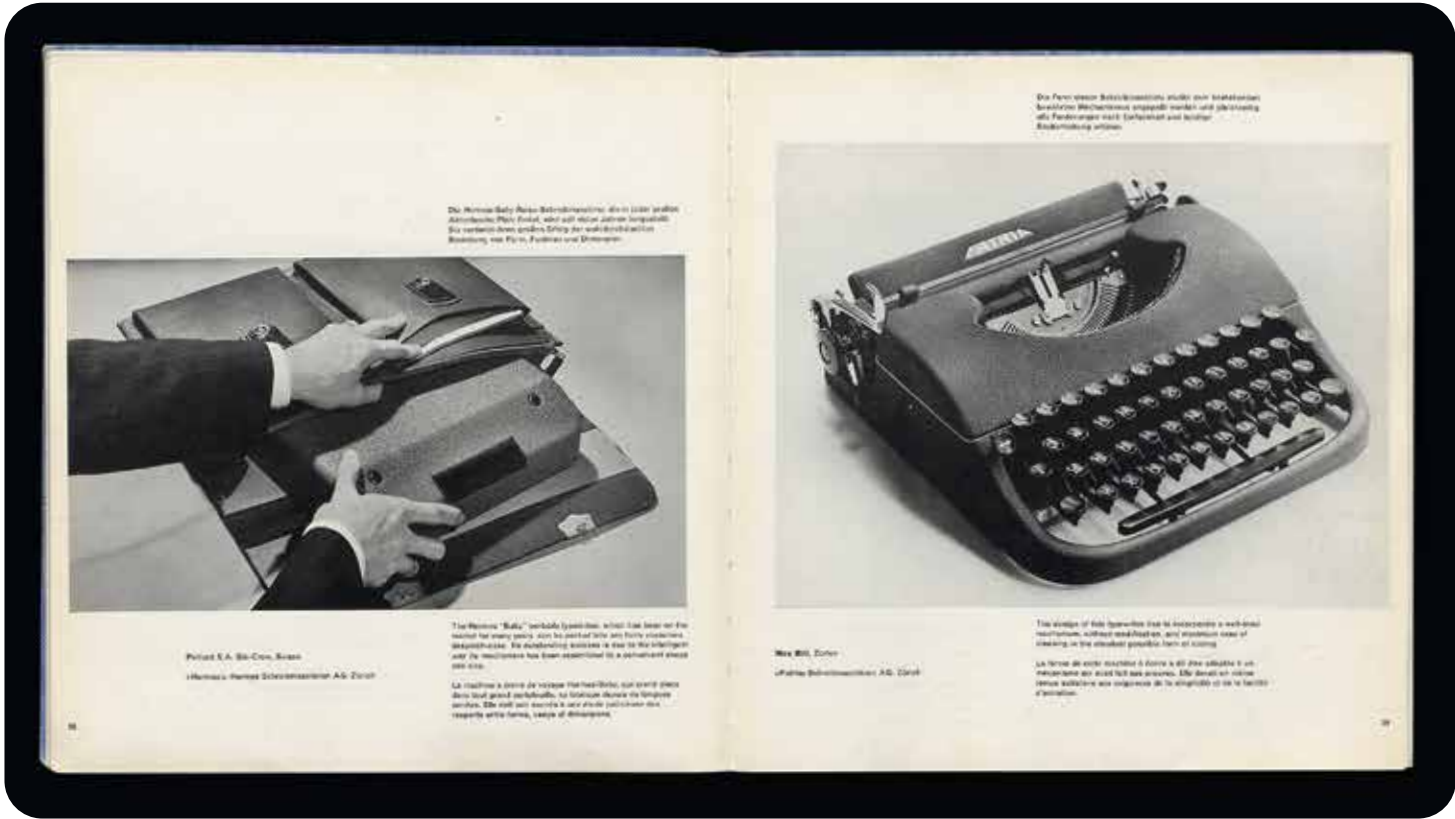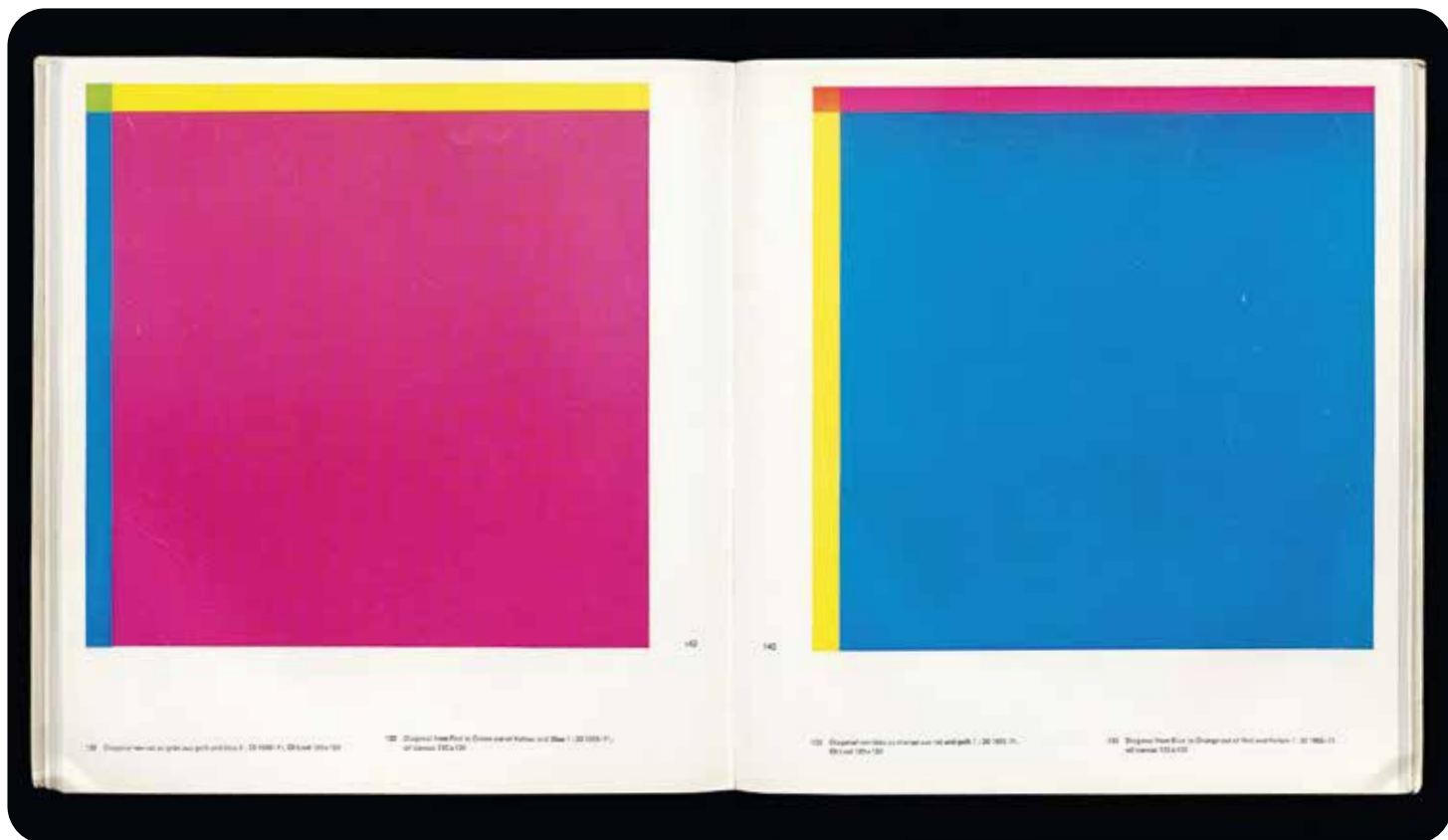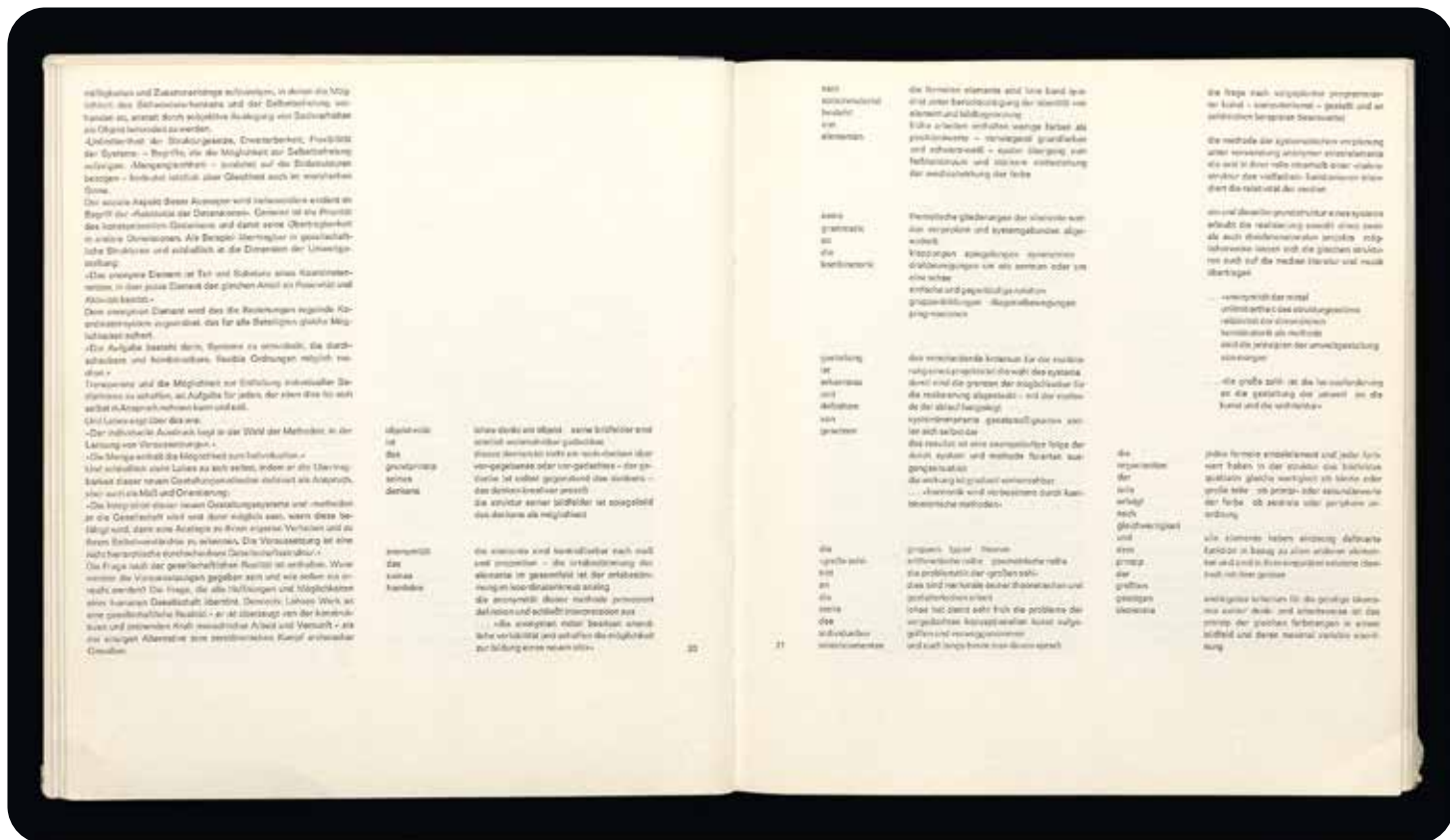
GC: On our stack of books from the Swiss competition, there are also books that don't have a grid at all — but they can still have a system. The artist's book _Valentin Carron, Learning from Martigny_ (2009), for example, doesn't use a grid, but it works with a design system that must have saved the designers, Gavillet & Rust and Nicolas Eigenheer, a lot of time. They just processed all text and images through a captcha app from Jeremy Schorderet. They said the book was designed in one click. But then they had to admit that it took them a very long time to make corrections in Photoshop. I find this a very interesting system that — not using any grid — allows you to handle content very swiftly, but then you spend way too much time with manual corrections.
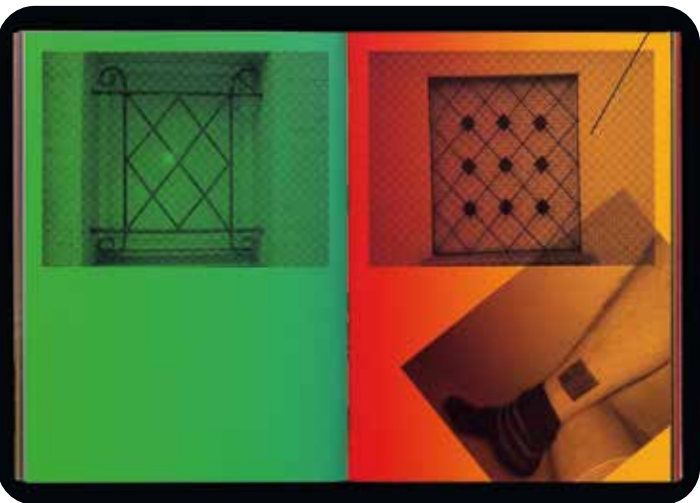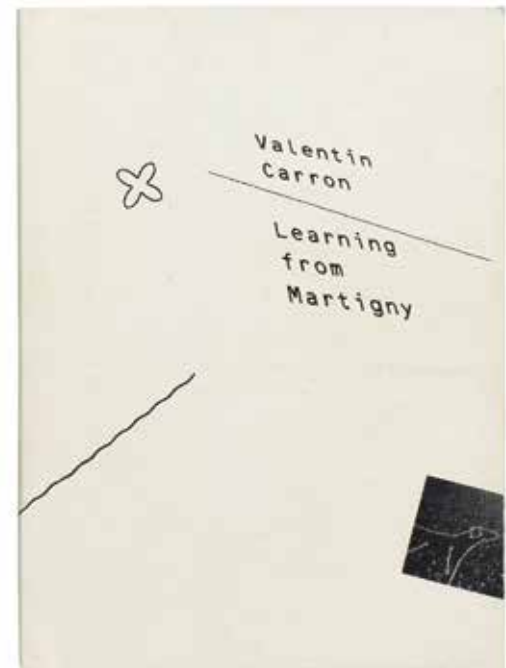
ER: I loved the iris colours, and this might be considered a kind of grid that manifests itself in printing. I would say that this is what the grid does in this case. But I also find the issue with corrections fascinating. It happens easily when you work with analogue material that you digitise. We actually do that a lot at Rietlanden Women's Office. We find it a great trick to avoid corrections, when you make something that you clearly can't edit.

JE: I would say that we never use the word 'grid' among us, although we probably do work with certain systems. For this publication series that we're making, _MsHeresies_, we paint out each single spread, but each follows the same sort of system that we have in our minds.

experiment with them. And I am reminded of Kathy McCoy, one of the key people at Cranbrook who created this so-called deconstructive approach. I'm adding a lot of names, but I feel it is important to think about the ways in which designers also get to have their own approach to the grid and making their own way. And then that can also become a commodity, something people associate with a certain person or studio.

ER: We base it on a kind of medieval Bible with annotations around it, but instead of the body text, we mostly use images. So it is a system where the images are sort of shaping the text flow. But that is really in our minds, it's not so much visible as a measuring line that we put up. However, the publication is grid-like in a sense that it's always the same format and always the same two printing plates, one iris, one black. It's also always one typeface, one type size. But we indeed never use the word 'grid' in our practice.

GC: Then again, if we differentiate matrix and grid, do you use a kind of millimetre matrix or similar in your InDesign document?

ER: Now that you say it, it's actually true: We do have a baseline grid. But it's on half the leading, so it can jump.

SM: I like the nerdiness of your conversation, and it makes me laugh, because people at my studio sometimes get annoyed with me when I use such a small base unit. I like the flexibility of it. But then again, we recently established a grid proportional to the size of a book, and once I was doing the initial add-ons, I didn't follow any structure, I was just feeling it. So when we start with a structure, it doesn't mean that the structure is going to stay in place through the entire process.

ER: The book *Katalin Deér, Verde* (2018) has an almost childishly clear grid. But, here comes a big 'but', because I think that the designers, Samuel Bänziger, Rosario Florio and Larissa Kasper, actually photographed photos that were laid out on a table. You can see that they are all a tiny bit off the grid. To me this speaks about how the digital design tools that we use nowadays are so easily applied, but you do not only want a perfect grid, you also want to feel the action of a hand, or a certain humanness. I sometimes miss that, and this is why I find this book very inspiring. It reminds me of how in certain older books you can feel the metal in the typography, as it creates some slight variety throughout. Maybe it will in fact soon be impossible to notice if something was done digitally.

JE: It might also be going somewhat against the speed of the economy and of the technology, which are often connotations of the grid. It's this idea or wish of Müller-Brockmann's that the grid was efficient. And if you lay a grid out by hand today, despite the digital tools available, it's maybe questioning these ideas to some degree.

GC: If I'm following your speculation about this book, that the photos were photographed on a table, then I wonder to what degree this approach was related to the content, which in this case were archive materials. I am not familiar with the design process of this book, but I often find it tricky to manipulate archive material, to import an image and place it in a grid far away from its original context. In this book it is very pleasant how the designers give the reader the feeling of discovering the archive in the same way as they did, involving, as Elisabeth said, an action of the hand, or a certain humanness.

SM: I agree with both of you. I can see how this relates to handling an archive and countering efficiency. The term 'medieval' made me think of Arts and Crafts and William Morris's resistance to the industrial. There are also multiple lineages of the idea of a scribe or of a bookmaking activity that was monastic. It took time, patience, labour and care. That was not necessarily about getting something done quickly, but about preserving something for a long time. Some of these ideas, to me, connect to the book *Marc Camille Chaimowicz, The World of Interiors* (2007), designed

by Lehni/Trüb, because it makes the mess of the book production visible. But then there's also irony, which feels very postmodern. The book is a collage. Outside it looks like a conventional book, almost like an older book rebound at a library. But inside, it's a commentary on a magazine. It makes you think you're looking at an interior publication, but it's actually an artist's work. I find it exciting how, all over the place, there is structure underpinning the layouts, but they also feel spontaneous in certain ways. Even when it does have the structure more visible, in parts that almost look like collages on a spread, you then have the various book folios colliding in it. It's almost like a layering of time, with the reproductions from the magazines but also with the folios.

JE: I find it fascinating how the scribes would doodle or draw themselves into a script. That is such an inspiring approach to graphic design, which runs counter to the sender-and-receiver approach of *Grid Systems*, for example. And while Müller-Brockmann is very much concerned with efficiency, Morris said that ornaments are spontaneously created when you are very well rested. You work very little, and you enjoy a lot of variation in your work. I like the spontaneous aspect of this as well, and I don't see how this kind of spontaneity, or serendipity, or unknown aspects of designing, would coexist with the grid.

Form. Eine Bilanz über die Formentwicklung um die Mitte des XX. Jahrhunderts / A Balance Sheet of Mid-Twentieth-Century Trends in Design / Un bilan de l'évolution de la forme au milieu du XXᵉ siècle
Max Bill

Verlag Karl Werner, Basel
DESIGN: Max Bill
PRINTING: Buchdruckerei Karl Werner, Basel
Awarded in 1952

Die Neue Graphik / The New Graphic Art / Le nouvel art graphique
Karl Gerstner, Markus Kutter

Arthur Niggli, Teufen
DESIGN: Karl Gerstner
PRINTING: R. Weber, Heiden
Awarded in 1959

Gärten Menschen Spiele
Esther and Paul Merkle, Adolf Portmann, Richard Arioli

Pharos Verlag, Basel
DESIGN: Emil Ruder, Armin Hofmann
PRINTING: Hutter, Basel
Awarded in 1960

Grafik einer Schweizer Stadt / Arts graphiques d'une ville suisse / Graphic Art of a Swiss Town
Armin Tschanen, Walter Bangerter

ABC Druckerei + Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Walter Bangerter
PRINTING: ABC Druckerei + Verlag, Zürich
Awarded in 1963

Ein Würfelwurf
Stéphane Mallarmé, trans. Marie-Louise Erlenmeyer

Walter Verlag, Olten
DESIGN: Theo Frey
PRINTING: Walter Druck, Olten
Awarded in 1966

Die Stadt als offenes System
Aldo Henggeler, Peter F. Althaus

Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel
DESIGN: Hans-Rudolf Lutz Atelier
PRINTING: Stäubli Buchdruck, Zürich
Awarded in 1973

Grid Systems in Graphic Design. A Visual Communication Manual for Graphic Designers, Typographers and Three Dimensional Designers / Rastersysteme für die visuelle Gestaltung. Ein Handbuch für Grafiker, Typografen und Ausstellungsgestalter
Josef Müller-Brockmann

Arthur Niggli, Teufen
DESIGN: Josef Müller-Brockmann
PRINTING: Schläpfer, Herisau
Awarded in 1981

Modulare und Serielle Ordnungen / Ordres Modulaires et Sériels / Modular and Serial Orders. 1943–84
Richard Paul Lohse

Waser Verlag, Buchs (ZH)
DESIGN: Richard Paul Lohse
PRINTING: Waser Druck, Buchs (ZH)
Awarded in 1984

Im Zeichen des magischen Affen
Urban Gwerder

Woa Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Urban Gwerder
PRINTING: Woa, Zürich
Awarded in 1998

Nelly Rudin. Randzonen: innen ist aussen. Bilder und Objekte
Nelly Rudin, Werner Blaser

Orell Füssli Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Odermatt & Tissi (Siegfried Odermatt)
PRINTING: Lichtdruck, Dielsdorf
Awarded in 2000

Simon Starling. Cuttings
Philipp Kaiser, ed.

Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern (DE)
DESIGN: Norm (Dimitri Bruni, Manuel Krebs)
PRINTING: Druckerei Odermatt, Dallenwil
Awarded in 2005

Marc Camille Chaimowicz. The World of Interiors
Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, ed.

JRP|Ringier, Zürich
DESIGN: Lehni/Trüb (Urs Lehni, Lex Trüb)
PRINTING: Vögeli Druckzentrum, Langnau
Awarded in 2007

Valentin Carron. Learning from Martigny
Lionel Bovier, ed.

JRP|Ringier, Zürich
DESIGN: Gavillet & Rust (Gilles Gavillet, David Rust)
PRINTING: Noir sur Noir Impression, Che Huber, Genève
Awarded in 2009

Shahryar Nashat. Downscaled and Overthrown
Kathleen Rahn, ed.

Sternberg Press, Berlin (DE) / New York (US)
DESIGN: Aude Lehmann
PRINTING: Brandenburgische Universitäts-
  druckerei und Verlagsgesellschaft,
  Potsdam (DE)
Awarded in 2010

*Umwege zum Konzert. Ruedi Häusermann –
eine Werkschau*
Judith Gerstenberg, ed.

Theater der Zeit, Berlin (DE)
DESIGN: Kurt Eckert, Kerstin Landis,
  Jonas Voegeli, Scott Vander Zee
PRINTING: Druckhaus Köthen, Köthen (DE)
Awarded in 2015

Art Décor. Alfred Jonathan Steffen
Veronika Minder, ed.

Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich
DESIGN: Krispin Heé, Samuel Bänziger
PRINTING: Kösel Media, Altusried-Krugzell (DE)
Awarded in 2017

Katalin Deér. Verde

Jungle Books, St. Gallen
DESIGN: Samuel Bänziger, Katalin Deér,
  Rosario Florio, Larissa Kasper
PRINTING: DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg,
  Altenburg (DE)
Awarded in 2018

Children's Books, Gender Tales

FRANZISKA BURKHARDT is a graphic designer based in Zurich. She works in book design, exhibition design, visual identities and illustration with cultural clients or in collaboration with artists. She taught at HSLU from 2009 to 2014 and has been a lecturer in graphic design at ZHdK since 2010.

ELISABETH JORIS is a freelance historian in Zurich with a research focus on women's and gender history in Switzerland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

SARA ARZU HARDEGGER founded the Zurich-based graphic design studio sava with Vanja Ivana Jelić in 2018. Their collaborative practice has a focus on social and political themes. Sara Arzu has been teaching Visual Communication at F+F Zurich since 2021.

OLIVIER LEBRUN is a self-taught graphic designer based in Paris who mostly works on publishing projects that explore relationships between container and content, speaker and receiver, expert and amateur, success and failure, yin and yang ☯.

In the *Beauty and the Book* publication which accompanied the museum display for the 60th anniversary of the competition in 2004, Swiss editor and publisher Christina Reble related her observation that children's books had at some point allowed female designers to appear on the list of awardees, from which they were otherwise largely, and conspicuously, absent. While this observation is generally accurate, a more detailed analysis of the available data suggests that the (mis-)representation of female designers in the competition evolved over time, along with the volatile structure of the profession.

In the 1950s, for example, designers were listed according to their individual contributions to a cover image, typography, dust jacket, illustrations, and so on. Only seven female designers were awarded for non-children's books during that decade, and six of these had created an individual part of the book such as a cover. The only female lead designer in charge of all components of an awarded book was Judith Olonetsky-Baltensperger, for Mary Lavater-Sloman's novel *Madame und die Jahrhunderte* (1958). In the comparably small section of children's books, the gender ratio was not much higher, with a total of four female winners from 1950 to 1961, all of whom were also responsible for the illustrations of the respective books. However, three of the four were listed as sole designers, which suggests that it might have been somewhat easier for women to be recognised as lead designers in the realm of children's book — particularly if they were illustrators.

During the 1970s, the winners were selected for the design in general, partly in tune with changes in the professional field. But the three female designers awarded for non-children's books during that decade were still contributing designers who worked in collaboration with a male. Results were now slightly better in children's books, with five awards for female lead designers and four more for contributing designers. (Again, most of these designers were also illustrators of the respective books.) In this decade, then, one might consider the children's books section as a back door which allowed for more frequent access of women to the awards. In the first half of the 1980s, the still very low numbers continued to rise. One female lead designer was typically awarded per year for a non-children's book, while two or three won annually with children's books.

The perception that children's books are in some way more 'female' than other 'beautiful' Swiss books is not only related to the (non-)participation in various sectors of the design profession but also to social roles of women in general. As long as mothers are considered primarily (or even solely) responsible for the education of children, they are more likely to become consumers and/or curators of children's books.
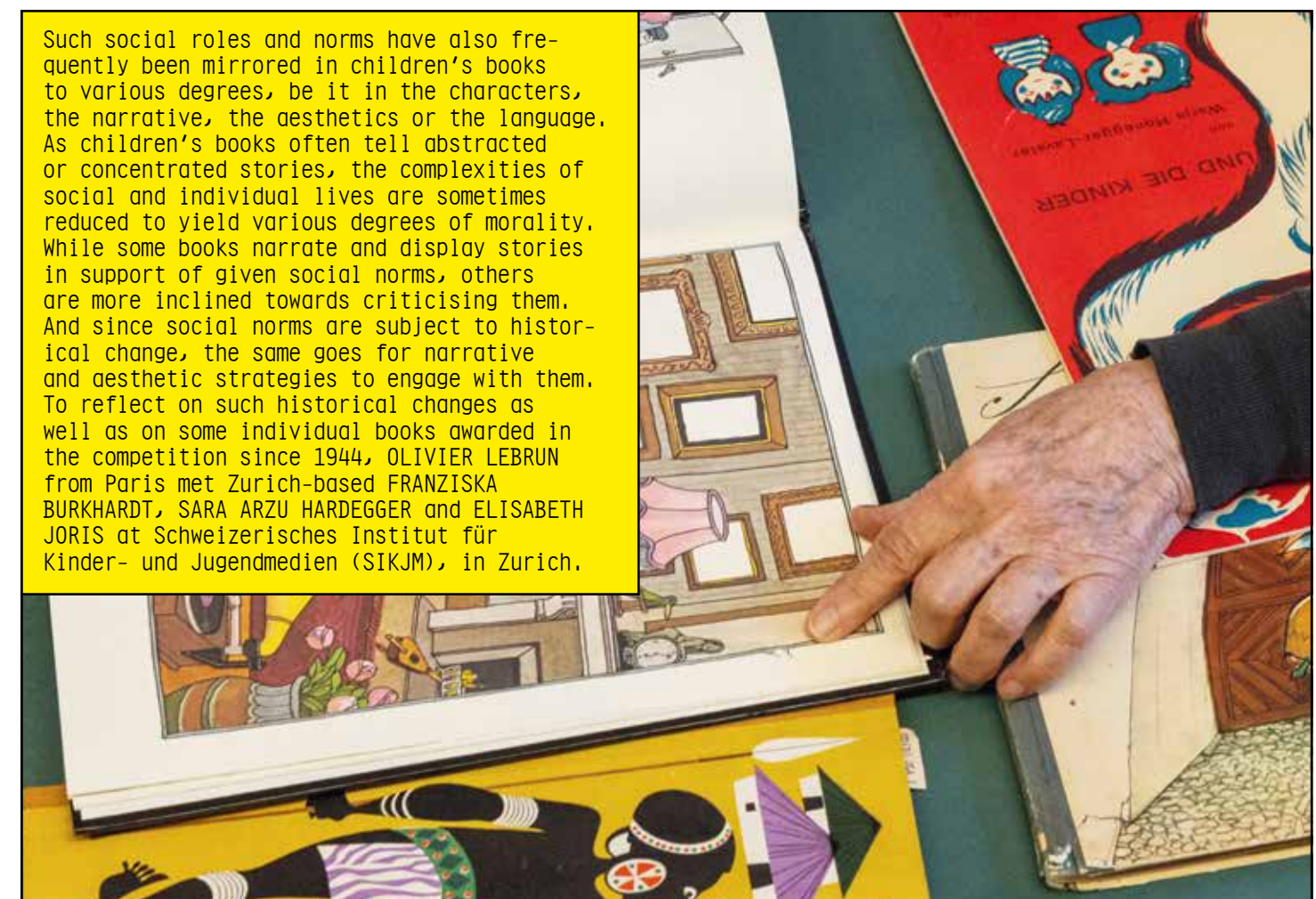
Such social roles and norms have also frequently been mirrored in children's books to various degrees, be it in the characters, the narrative, the aesthetics or the language. As children's books often tell abstracted or concentrated stories, the complexities of social and individual lives are sometimes reduced to yield various degrees of morality. While some books narrate and display stories in support of given social norms, others are more inclined towards criticising them. And since social norms are subject to historical change, the same goes for narrative and aesthetic strategies to engage with them. To reflect on such historical changes as well as on some individual books awarded in the competition since 1944, OLIVIER LEBRUN from Paris met Zurich-based FRANZISKA BURKHARDT, SARA ARZU HARDEGGER and ELISABETH JORIS at Schweizerisches Institut für Kinder- und Jugendmedien (SIKJM), in Zurich.

ELISABETH JORIS: Looking at this selection of Swiss children's books from a period of 80 years, one of the first examples that caught my eyes was *Sandy und die Kinder* (1950) by Warja Lavater. It stands out with very strong red and blue colours and with spectacular printing. It's an exploding visual world, and the speech is partly anarchic. The heroines are two girls, which is unusual for the time, but as Lavater mentions in the book, she had two daughters, and they are to some degree mirrored in the protagonists.
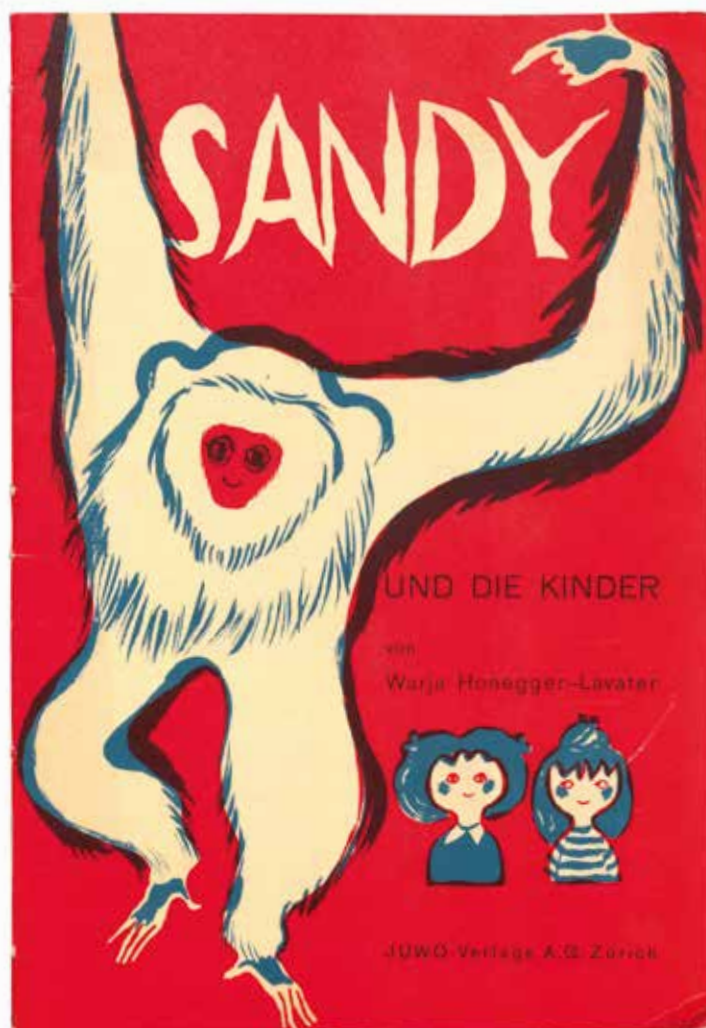
FRANZISKA BURKHARDT: The design and production of the book is outstanding in many ways. The lithography creates these intense colours, and it seems that the text was overprinted in a different technology. The format is not standard for large print runs. The book has no spine, and the visible threat of the binding makes it look precious. All of this differs remarkably from the standardised production which we find in today's children's books, where often water-repellent materials are preferred. It is also fascinating to see how Lavater worked with many different formats of images. Some of them are square format and many are blended with text that sometimes recedes into the background. Some images almost look like scientific illustrations, but then the composition gets wild, and suddenly an image takes up the entire space of the page. It testifies to a stunning virtuosity, not just in drawing, but also in book design.

SANDY

UND DIE KINDER

von Warja Honegger-Lavater

JUWO-Verlage A.G. Zürich

Das Fräulein lacht ob solcher Nöte
Und spielt voll Dankbarkeit die Flöte.

„O wie wird uns die Mutter lieben!
Es wird gesaugt, geputzt, gerieben.

So schön und sauber wird das Ganze
Die Brille schützt vor zu viel Glanze.

OLIVIER LEBRUN: I agree that there's a real savoir faire in the production, and there are many aspects that appear almost contemporary today. You can probably detect the number of colours and lithography plates used, but she creates additional colours with overprinting. The typography is quite radical with only one type of font and one size, reminding me of the uses of Mercator and Akzidenz Grotesk by Dick Bruna in the Netherlands back in the 1960s. It's impressive how she embedded the story, the illustration, the text, the typesetting, the printing — the entire production — to create this unified whole. And while the binding has the feel of an artist's book, the object is not very precious overall. It appears very accessible.

EJ: Swiss society was very conformist and conservative in the 1940s and 1950s, especially with regard to the role of men and women. Remember that women were only allowed to vote in 1971 and that husbands were legally allowed to prevent their wives from taking a job until 1988. So when the large national exhibition SAFFA on woman's work was staged at Lake Zurich in 1958, the priority was clearly on work in the household. I find that this conformism is reflected in many children's books from the time with soft colours such as pale red and pale blue, and with cute images of play and motherhood. In our selection we see it in _Frohes Schaffen im Handarbeits-Unterricht_ (1944), for example, which is a schoolbook but aesthetically close to many children's books from the time. _Sandy_ is entirely different visually, and also with regard to the role of the girls in the story. They are certainly not sitting in a corner and knitting. In addition, the book also breaks the conventional hierarchy of professions in book production, because women were typically expected to participate as illustrators, not as so-called genius artists or authors. This hierarchy reflects to some degree the general role of women in society as rather timid bystanders, and in the making of children's books it was expressed in the fact that the pictures (potentially made by women) would typically illustrate the text (often by a male author). A good example of this hierarchy between text and image is _Tzigaga das Wollschaf_ (1958). But in _Sandy_ it's the other way round: you primarily read the images, and the text accompanies them, sometimes going along, and sometimes articulating the very opposite of what you see.

EJ: The binding is actually made in the style of a typical cahier of the time. I was at elementary school when this book was published, and all our notebooks were bound like this. This underscores that this children's book is an object of everyday culture — although it's also highly artistic.

SARA ARZU HARDEGGER: The softcover is a rarity among the selection of books on our table, and also among children's books in general, which mostly have hardcovers for reasons of protection. _Sandy und die Kinder_ appears rather loose in comparison. I also find it an outstanding example in the way it employs text. Most of the early books that we are looking at here use quite a lot of text, compared to children's books of today. According to the social norms of the time, it was the mother's role to read the text and explain it to her children. Lavater uses comparably little text, while the images become much more important, which makes the story more accessible to children. So if I imagine the typical scene of the time, with the mother reading a book to her children, then this one challenges that norm.

FB: Also in contrast to _Tzigaga_, _Sandy_ doesn't come with a moral. The entire story of _Tzigaga_ is based on the moral that you should be learning. _Sandy_ relates the journey of a monkey which was freed from the zoo by the two girls. In the end they set him free, which seems to be quite an unusual gesture for the 1950s.

EJ: _Sandy_ is clearly a product of the non-conformist movement in Switzerland at the time. This wasn't a social movement yet, as it would become after 1968, rather it was driven by individuals, many of which were intellectuals and artists. The famous representatives were mostly men, like Max Bill or Max Frisch, but Warja Lavater and her then-husband, the sculptor Gottfried Honegger, were at the centre of this scene. Lavater was originally from Moscow. Her mother, Mary Lavater-Sloman, became a famous writer after the family had settled in Winterthur in 1922, and her father, a Swiss engineer, worked for Sulzer — first in Moscow until the revolution and later in Greece and Switzerland. Warja was almost 10 years old when the family moved to Switzerland and she married Honegger in 1940. He was a committed communist, even though he wasn't active in the party. They worked together a lot, but eventually they separated in 1972, and Honegger finally became more famous than her — partly because his new partner, Sybil Albers-Barrier, was very wealthy and supported his work and exhibitions.

OL: Against the background of _Sandy_, a later book about an animal that we find in our selection represents a shift in many ways: _Der Bär, der ein Bär bleiben wollte_ (1976). It also relates an animal's journey through the human world, but the bear is quite human itself, and it doesn't have to escape from the zoo, it already lives in the city. I wasn't able to understand the German text, but I had the impression that I could follow the story well thanks to the images. The illustrations are humorous, even partly cynical, for example when the bear visits the owner of an art collection that references the work of some famous artists of the time. The story also embraces many political and environmental concerns of the 1970s. The depiction of the working class reminded me of Diego Riviera — it's almost like some traditional Marxist aesthetics were adapted here for kids. I find it a fantastic book and I hope very much I will be able to find a French translation.
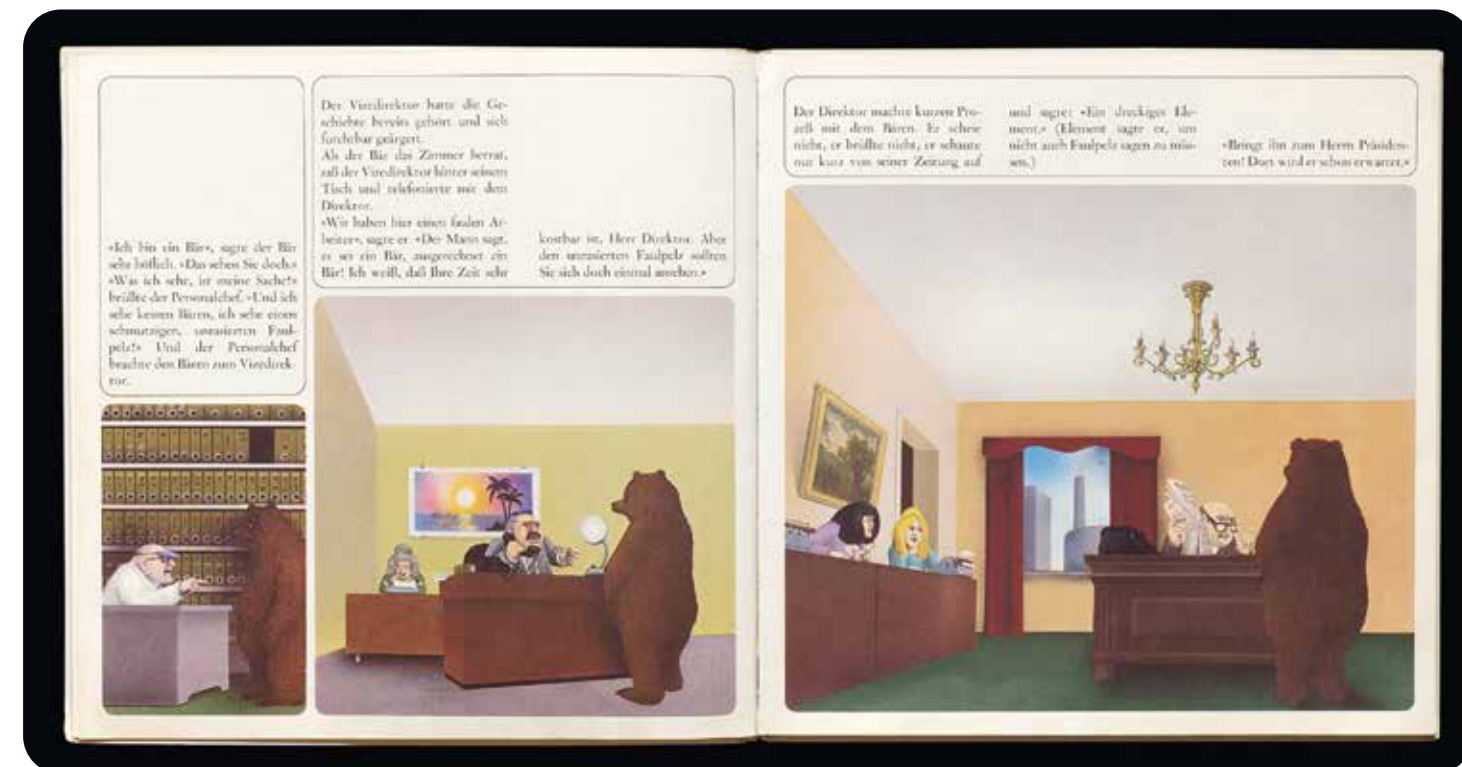
EJ: Some of the shifts that you notice have to do with 1968. This book is clearly post-68. You find classic Marxist terminology in the text such as 'alienation' or 'exploitation', and the story presents a clear contrast between the working class and the upper class. But the Marxist point of view is combined with a concern about the environment. This represents a combination of two major political themes that was typical for this time. While the first years after 1968 were dominated by the call for 'la fantasie au pouvoir', the revolutionary hopes were soon infused with environmentalist concerns. In Switzerland, this starts around 1973, and Jörg Steiner, the author of the _Bär_ book, is fully in tune with this shift. Yet interestingly enough, he also takes an urbanist point of view, so the worries for the environment and the anti-capitalist attitude do not yield an accusation against the cities.
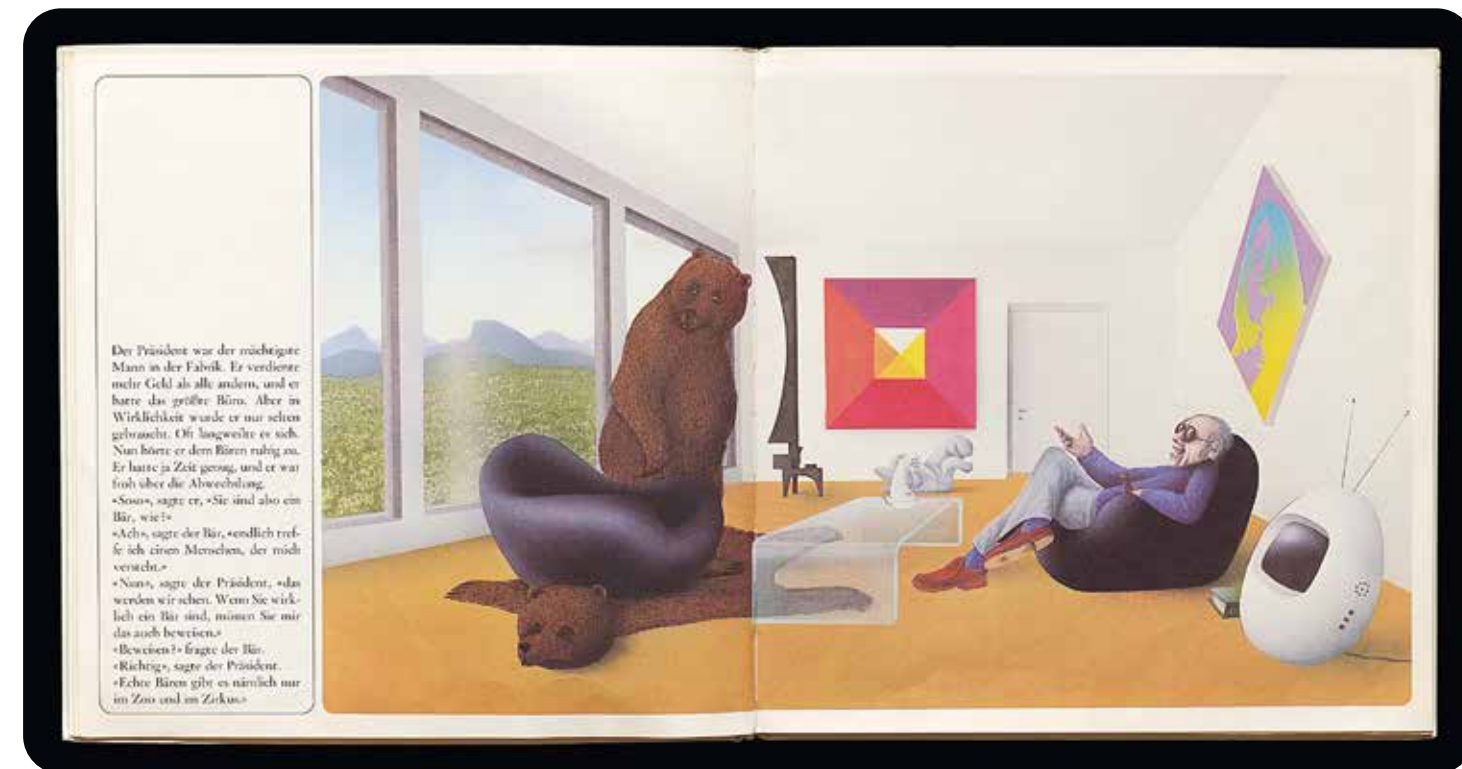
FB: I find it fitting for a story about the oppression of nature that the illustrations by Jörg Müller are mostly naturalistic, but the machines and technological devices are presented in a fantastic manner, underscoring that the bear doesn't understand them. The same can be assumed for the children looking at the images. I knew this book when I was a child, and I loved it for its precise and detailed drawings in which you can immerse yourself. Müller also uses a number of dramatic tricks such as sequences of images without any text, or series of quasi-identical pictures in which only one element changes. There is also an outstanding sequence depicting a rise in hierarchy: while the bear advances from one boss to the next, the images get larger and larger, until it ends up at the very top of the hierarchy. The design is really sophisticated in many regards.

SAH: I find that the political claims of the book are strengthened by the fact that the bear doesn't have a gender. Some animals indeed can equally represent any gender, which in my view makes them promising actors for children's books that try to circumvent binary role models for boys and girls. This contributes to the contemporary appeal that for me the _Bär_ book still has. I generally find that contemporary children's books are most successful in addressing complicated societal issues if they create new and often abstract characters, instead of trying to explicitly address the issues at hand. Some of these books, like _Knigi_ (2011), overcome gender-binary storytelling. But for sure, most of the older books we are looking at here are thinking of gender in a binary way.

Knigi

Diogenes
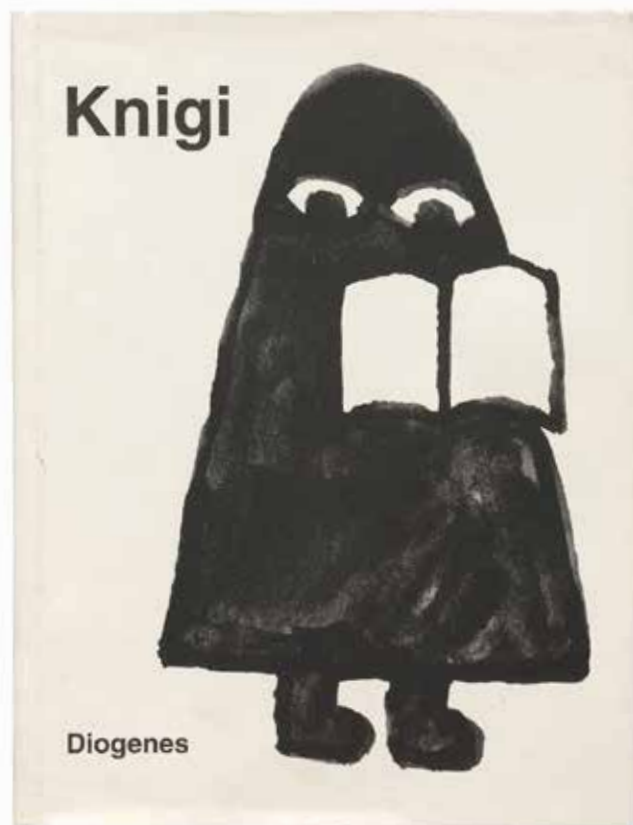
OL: In 2016 Urs Lehni and I were involved in a book about a French designer called Bernard Chadebec, who for many decades created posters with safety advice for factories. He often used animals to illustrate the various dangers or precautionary measures, and he explained this with the general familiarity with La Fontaine's fables in France, which had the effect that virtually everybody would be able to identify a turtle as a slow character, and so on. The animals in fables are certainly more generic than gendered, but sometimes they also represent certain stereotypes which can be problematic. So I assume it depends on how you use a particular animal in a story.

FB: Tomi Ungerer's *Das Biest des Monsieur Racine* (1972) is an interesting case in this regard, because the enigmatic animal, which Monsieur Racine discovers, turns out to be impersonated by a boy and a girl that hide under a blanket. As long as everybody assumes it's an animal, it functions like a beast for projections, but once the children present themselves, everything turns upside down until the social order collapses. The author and illustrator of the book, Ungerer, is a partner in crime with the children, also taking on the social order. It's not a coincidence that his drawings are filled with objects desired by children, like large amounts of ice cream, for example.

TOMI UNGERER

Das Biest des Monsieur Racine

Diogenes

EJ: The 1968 call for 'la fantasie au pouvoir' resonates with the *Biest* as much as with the *Bär* book. Another background is provided by A. S. Neill's famous book about educational 'self-regulation', which was translated both into German and French around 1969–70. Ungerer gives a depiction of two 'self-regulated' children, who just do what they feel like, and who manage to turn the established hierarchy upside down. Meanwhile, Monsieur Racine, named after the hero of French literary classicism, occupies a double-bind position. At first he represents all the virtues of the French bourgeoisie — learning, culture, city life, the nation, even military service — but then eventually he takes the position of the children. I find it a very French book, because you find allusions to French culture on each spread. And even before the bourgeois world collapses, you will find small disturbing elements that do not fit into the frame of the images and that start to question the established order, or let it appear slightly damaged.

OL: Several other books on the table also address issues of education. This might be a typical theme for children's books. I have to admit that the early example we already touched upon, *Frohes Schaffen* (1944), left me rather puzzled. At first I felt drawn to the typesetting and the images in the way that I am often attracted by historical books at second-hand stores. But then I realised that it is basically a manual on how to become a 'good' girl, which I find quite frightening. I then became excited about this other schoolbook in the same format, *Krokofant* (1977). I like the mix of illustration and photography as well as the depiction of words. It's a territory of adventure, full of promise. And similar to the *Bär* book, there is no gender-binarism, no colour code for boys and girls, nothing of that kind. There is even a bit of multi-media, with songs. It's a nicely filled suitcase. If I have to attend any school, then I want to go to this one!

EJ: Another educational book is the one with children's songs, _Alli mini Äntli_ (1963). The whole world of these songs is very cute, you have all these diminutive Swiss German words ending on 'li'. 'Tierli, tänzli, Chatzeschwänzli.' 'Tribätzeli, Nägeli.' 'S'Oschterhäsli schöni Eili bringt.' But then the illustrations and the graphic design aren't cute at all. I find it wonderful because at times it even has an anarchic touch. I know a lot of these songbooks from my own childhood, from singing with my children, and now with my grandchildren, and they rarely come with such bold design.

SAH: Indeed, the illustrator Lise Rumley makes a strong contribution. In some cases, she even manages to alter the meaning of a song with her images. A good example is the song about snow, 'Es schneielet, es beielet'. This includes a line saying 'while the girls are putting on gloves, the boys just walk faster'. The image tells a different story: it's not clear at all who are the boys and the girls, as the identity of the children is left entirely open. Text and images collide in not just tonality or style, but also in their respective narratives.

Es schneie-let, es beie-let, es gaht en chüele Wind,

Es schneielet, es beielet,
es gaht en chüele Wind,
es früred ali Vögeli
und ali arme Chind.

said: 'Oh, it's half, half, but this will change soon, because in the professional world of graphic design only 10 per cent are women.' That's basically what I was taught in my first semester.

OL: From my teaching experience, I would say that the numbers in the professional field still strongly deviate from the situation in art schools. I have been teaching classes where gender representation was totally at odds with the way the graphic design profession is represented in lectures, festivals and awards. In France, and I suspect in many other countries as well, the representation of women and multiple genders in the field is still inadequate.

EJ: And this is 1963, long before the women's liberation movement started in Switzerland in the 1970s. I was part of that, and after my children were born in 1977 and 1978, I would switch 'boys' and 'girls' when singing with them. In our interpretation, the boys put on gloves while the girls walked fast.

SAH: I also used to change it like this, but then I was told by friends that they sing 'some put on gloves, others walk fast'. This lets the behaviour appear more individual, instead of associating it with a certain group.

EJ: Another example is the song 'Ringe-ringe Reie', where it says that the girls pick flowers, while the boys collect hazelnuts. In other words, the girls are supposed to look nice with their flowers, while the boys are active and responsible to bring home food. But again, Lise Rumley's illustrations work against the text, undermining the gender dichotomy of the kids picking either flowers or hazelnuts.

SAH: As you already mentioned with regard to the hierarchy between illustrators and artists/authors, gender dichotomies are also pertinent in the professional field of graphic design. For example, during my first semester at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), about a decade ago, a publisher that we visited counted the male and female students in our class and

FB: It seems that, for a while, it was more common for female designers, illustrators and artists to work in the field of children's books than in other sectors of book design. I noticed that when men made children's books this was considered more noteworthy, or even met with applause at certain times. It reminds me of that strange term 'daddy's day'. Some people consider Friday daddy's day, and all the other days are just normal. However, I feel that most recently it's changing, and that it is becoming more common for men to be involved with children's books.

OL: I agree, and I think this is a positive development. In post-Covid France, new children's books from independent designers have become quite common. A friend of mine who started making children's books as a gift for her child, always thanks her family at the beginning of each book, and she finds this neither outstanding nor questionable, just normal. Her practice made me look for other dedications to children that we might find at the beginning of books, but on our table here, I only stumbled across Tomi Ungerer addressing his book to Maurice Sendak. So from male to male…

WIDMUNG: _für Maurice Sendak_

SAH: Looking at this selection, I feel we cannot not talk about *Makulu und andere südafrikanische Negermärchen* (1954). Reading the blurb in an online bookshop already made it clear to me that there is racist content in this book. But now going through the pages, I see that the racism isn't only in the text, but also in the visual storytelling. For example, humans are visually levelled with animals. The book is steeped in a colonial and racist worldview.

EJ: The depictions that you point out are supposed to teach the viewer about different people, different crafts and different animals. But there is no doubt that in the 'Black' world, animals, children and adults are more or less on the same level. I was stunned that the book manifests all these highly problematic categories and points of view. You already see it in the dedication at the very beginning of the book, which is addressed to Sanna Majolo, 'who told us the stories'. Sanna Majolo is depicted as a woman with a child-like face, working in her home. While she is doing dishes or laundry, she is speaking, and the white
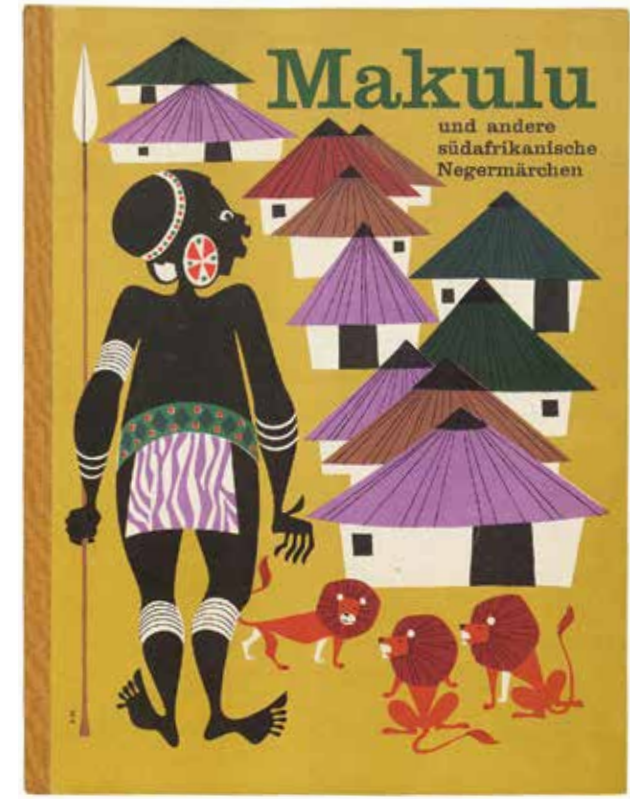
man and woman then make the book. It seems fitting that it appeared during the early years of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, which was formally established in 1948.

SAH: The two books are a stunning couple, because they function quite similarly, but in different media: illustration and photography. Looking at a few pages from the *Bim* book, I think it could almost be replaced with a geographical magazine from the era. It is this idea that you take your camera and go visit a foreign country and 'document' it somehow. But then the outcome is totally colonialist.

EJ: Photo-reportages from foreign countries quickly gained popularity in Europe, and certainly in Switzerland, in the 1950s, *Life* magazine was the main model for this. I agree that the *Bim* story is most likely referring to the Maghreb, where the French were the colonial power. By the way, the early 1950s mark the beginning of the Algerian liberation movement. To me, the book is an example of 'orientalism', a seeming fascination and validation of the 'Orient', which is, however, based on stereotypes and prejudices. I was stunned to read that the story was written by Jacques Prévert. He was a leftist poet, and I own two other children's books of his that are very different and not moralistic at all.

FB: Everything is told as if it was self-evident; there is not a single question mark. I was also wondering about the way the stories were allegedly transmitted. Even if there was more background information about the supposed narrator Sanna Majolo, this wouldn't change the fact that the material was selected and arranged by white (possibly male) editors and publishers that decide how the readers are supposed to be educated about this far-away country.

OL: I didn't understand the German text, but the images are problematic enough. They are very stereotypical, using strong colours to evoke an 'as if' South African visual style. I have similar problems with stereotypes in the photographic book about the donkey, *Bim* (1951). We do not know for sure, but I suppose the story is set in Algeria, and the local inhabitants are often shown in the photos as tiny characters that appear almost like puppets. In a closer shot I was wondering if the guy had a fake moustache painted or printed on the photo. It's presented entirely from the view of the colonialists.

OL: It might have been a commissioned project, but still… I find it hard to explain that the news magazine approach is combined with an entirely bizarre story. There is this evil person, a thief, and at some point he is just hanging out smoking shisha, but the text presents this as a threatening image. Plenty of dark shadows are supposed to make the photos more dramatic, to the point where it might actually be frightening for children. The technique is heliogravure, which is by now extinct, but was very popular at the time, and the book isn't an isolated case in terms of the visual narrative. For example, there was a series of similar books called 'Les enfants du monde' by photographer Dominique Darbois, which ran from 1952 to 1975, using iconotextuality as a method to narrate stories. French art historian Catherine De Smet wrote an enlightening piece about this collection in 2013, although she didn't invoke any post-colonial point of view. I assume these kinds of books were meant to offer access to foreign countries and images, but they did so mostly under the premise of exotism.

Lika
Nüssli
Starkes
Ding

SAH: A very different approach is pursued in Silvia Hüsler-Vogt's book that coincidentally carries my name: _Arzu_ (1990). Intended for second and third graders in Zurich, it relates a transcultural story via the narrator Arzu, who tells her Swiss friends about her second homeland, Turkey. I personally grew up in a very 'Swiss' environment, and it was an exceptional case for me when I found part of my story represented in that book. This encouraged me to talk about my background and experiences, and I still find the book's educational approach valuable today, in the way that it translates certain Turkish phrases into German and even explains how to pronounce them. The intention behind the book was to address non-German-speaking migrants – in this case people from Turkey – and support them in becoming a part of the Swiss educational system. It was an inclusive project and I find it a good example of how children's books can influence society.

EJ: The most recent book on the table is dear to me, Lika Nüssli's _Starkes Ding_ (2022). It tells the story of Nüssli's father, who was a _Verdingbub_, a boy that for many years was forced to work hard for a farmer while his parents collected the meagre salary. The history of these exploited child workers, which starts in the 1930s, has only recently gotten the attention it deserves. The Swiss Farmers' Union still refuses to apologise to the _Verdingkinder_, who mostly worked for farmers, or to acknowledge any wrongdoing.

FB: _Starkes Ding_ differs remarkably from all the books we have discussed so far. It's not necessarily a children's book in my understanding, rather a graphic novel. The author and illustrator gave her father a voice and allowed him to relate his story. At the same time, the book gives a voice to all the _Verdingkinder_. So while it works through a personal history, it has a much wider outreach and is highly political.

OL: This reminds me of Riad Sattouf's _The Arab of the Future_, which tells the story of a child raised between France, Libya and Syria from the 1970s through the 1990s, and which recently became a hit in France. It's a bit more naïve than _Starkes Ding_, presented solely from the point of view of the child, but it also uses a personal history to bring attention to similar experiences of others. It seems to have become a broader tendency very recently, that children's books or young adults' books address rather unusual biographies of children. At the public library in Paris, which I visit with my kids, they have a fantastic bookshelf with new releases, and I find more and more books there about children who are raised by a single mother, for example, or children who have two dads. These books seem to say, if you want to discover your life through books, then this one might be for you.

FB: But then I find it important that the particularity of the case doesn't limit the outreach. For example, a book about the boy of colour who wants to become a mermaid mustn't be tailored to that boy. In my opinion, it shouldn't be for boys only, or for children of colour only, but all kids should read such a book about a particular life.

Christine und sogar Real mit ihren Drachen fliegen.
«Haltet euch fest!» ruft sie den andern zu.

Die Kinder und die Katze fliegen über die Stadt hinaus,
über Felder, über Wälder, über den See
und sogar über die Schneeberge.

Türkisch:	Aussprache:	Deutsch:
koyun	kojun	Schaf
uç uç bulutların arasına	utsch bulutların arasına	flieg flieg zwischen die Wolken

10

SAH: It occurs to me that we didn't talk about the Swiss pop star, *Schellen-Ursli* (1945). None of us mentioned this book, which is probably the most famous one among the selection at hand.

EJ: I cannot separate this book from its historical context, namely from the Swiss cultural policy of *Geistige Landesverteidigung* which was supposed to strengthen the national identity during the Second World War. One focus of *Geistige Landesverteidigung* was to highlight the cultural diversity of Switzerland, with its four main languages and many different dialects, but this diversity was presented as primarily rural, while cities and urban cultures where widely ignored. In *Schellen-Ursli*, the valley of Engadin – and the village of Guarda in particular – make a case for this cultural diversity of rural Switzerland. After the war, this political self-image remained predominant in Switzerland for many decades. Urban sceneries such as the ones we encountered in the *Bär* book were rare, not only in children's books but also in the visual arts. In French painting, you have Paris, in Italy, Rome or Florence, but in Switzerland you will find mostly rural landscapes and mountains. And when abstraction became the dominant style in Switzerland with movements such as Konkrete Kunst, urban sceneries were again omitted. In that regard, artists like Max Bill didn't challenge the Swiss tradition. I find it telling that Philipp Etter, the Catholic conservative member of the Swiss federal government and father of *Geistige Landesverteidigung*, shaped Switzerland's cultural policy for

25 years. In view of historians, he was a questionable person. And he was both a fan of *Schellen-Ursli* and a supporter of abstract art in Switzerland.

SAH: The representation of rural diversity in *Schellen-Ursli* works primarily through architecture, doesn't it? I wasn't familiar with Engadin for a long time, but when I recently started to visit the valley and saw all these typical old buildings, I realised how strong the cultural identification of *Schellen-Ursli* must have been. I literally felt like I was walking through the book, almost 80 years after it came out.

EJ: The illustrations by Alois Carigiet are full of local details. You are assured that you are in Engadin on every page. And the entire story revolves around these local festivities at the end of winter, in which the boys parade through the village carrying cowbells. I have to admit I was always stunned that a female author, Selina Chönz, created such a boy's story through and through. The boy is the hero, and his task is to compete with other boys about who will carry the biggest bell at the parade.

STACK OF BOOKS FOR THE ROUND TABLE
'CHILDREN'S BOOKS, GENDER TALES'

Frohes Schaffen im Handarbeits-Unterricht. Für Mädchenprimarklassen I.–IV. Schuljahr
Elisabeth Kupferschmid

Verlag H. R. Sauerländer, Aarau
ILLUSTRATION: Annelise Jung
PRINTING: H. R. Sauerländer, Aarau
Awarded in 1944

Schellen-Ursli
Selina Chönz

Schweizer Spiegel Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Alois Carigiet
PRINTING: Orell Füssli, Zürich
Awarded in 1945

Sandy und die Kinder
Warja Honegger-Lavater

Juwo-Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN: Warja Honegger-Lavater
PRINTING: Grafika, Basel
Awarded in 1950

Bim le petit âne
Jacques Prévert, Albert Lamorisse

La Guilde du Livre, Lausanne
PHOTOGRAPHY: Albert Lamorisse
DESIGN: J. P. Conrad, G. Burnand
PRINTING: Héliographia, Lausanne
Awarded in 1951

Makulu und andere südafrikanische Negermärchen
Helga Slattery, Bill Slattery

Artemis Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN: Bill Slattery, Ernst Steiner
PRINTING: Brunner & Bodmer, Zürich
Awarded in 1954

Tzigaga das Wollschaf
Marguerite Paur-Ulrich

Artemis Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Jacqueline Blass-Tschudi
DESIGN: Artemis Verlag, Zürich
PRINTING: Bodmer & Leonardi, Zürich
Awarded in 1958

Alli mini Äntli. Kinderlieder mit Bildern von Lise Rumley
Lise Rumley, ed.

Artemis Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Lise Rumley
DESIGN: Artemis Verlag, Zürich
PRINTING: Sigg Söhne, Winterthur-Seen
Awarded in 1963

Hü Rössli hü. Lesebuch für die erste Klasse der aargauischen Gemeindeschulen
Ruth Staub

Kantonaler Lehrmittelverlag, Aarau
ILLUSTRATION: Children age 6 to 12 from Aargau
PRINTING: A. Trüb, Aarau
Awarded in 1963

ABC der Tiere
Celestino Piatti, Hans Schumacher

Artemis Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN: Celestino Piatti
PRINTING: Sigg Söhne, Winterthur-Seen
Awarded in 1965

Das Biest des Monsieur Racine
Tomi Ungerer

Diogenes Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Tomi Ungerer
PRINTING: Vontobel, Feldmeilen
Awarded in 1972

Krokodil, Krokodil
Peter Nickl

Nord-Süd Verlag, Mönchaltorf
ILLUSTRATION: Binette Schroeder
DESIGN: Binette Schroeder, Brigitte Sidjanski
PRINTING: Walter Verlag, Olten
Awarded in 1975

Das Riesenfest
Max Bolliger

Artemis Verlag, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Monika Laimgruber
DESIGN: Monika Laimgruber, Rolf Parietti
PRINTING: Lichtdruck, Dielsdorf
Awarded in 1975

Der Bär, der ein Bär bleiben wollte
Jörg Steiner

Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau
ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN: Jörg Müller
PRINTING: Jordi, Belp
Awarded in 1976

Krokofant, Interkantonales Sprach- und Sachbuch, 2. Schuljahr
Various

Lehrmittelverlag des Kantons Zürich, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Werner Maurer
DESIGN: Hubert Hasler
PRINTING: J. C. Müller, Zürich
Awarded in 1977

Zürcher Zoo für Kinder
Annemarie Schmidt-Pfister

Tages-Anzeiger, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN: Willi Rieser
PRINTING: Regina-Druck Offsetdruckerei
  Tages-Anzeiger, Zürich
Awarded in 1980

Arzu
Silvia Hüsler-Vogt

Lehrmittelverlag des Kantons Zürich, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Silvia Hüsler-Vogt
DESIGN: Felix Reichlin
PRINTING: A. Schön, Zürich
Awarded in 1990

Sardinen wachsen nicht auf den Bäumen
Vera Eggermann

Verlag Pro Juventute/Atlantis, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Vera Eggermann
DESIGN: Ueli Kleeb
PRINTING: Grafiche, San Martino (IT)
Awarded in 1998

Knigi
Benjamin Sommerhalder

Nieves, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION & DESIGN: Benjamin Sommerhalder
PRINTING: Printing Partners, Tallinn (EE)
Awarded in 2011

Starkes Ding
Lika Nüssli

Edition Moderne, Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Lika Nüssli
DESIGN: Julia Marti, Claudio Barandun
PRINTING: OZGraf, Olsztyn (PL)
Awarded in 2022

Crowd-pleasers and Rarities

VELA ARBUTINA lives and works in Zurich. She studied at Central Saint Martins, Gerrit Rietveld Academie and at Institut Kunst Basel. As a graphic designer specialising in book and identity design for the cultural field, and as an artist, she enquires structures, hierarchies, rules, norms and restrictions. In 2022 she was in charge of the identity for Finland's pavilion at the Venice Biennial.

BAHIA SHEHAB is an artist, author and professor of design at the American University in Cairo where she founded the graphic design programme and TypeLab@AUC. Her work has received international awards and recognitions including the BBC's 100 Women list, a TED Senior Fellowship, a Prince Claus Award, and the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture. Her latest publications include the co-authored book *A History of Arab Graphic Design* (2020) and *You Can Crush the Flowers: A Visual Memoir of the Egyptian Revolution* (2021).

LUKAS HALLER has been a publishing director at Limmat Verlag since 2019. He lives and works in Zurich.

DAVID KESHAVJEE lives and works between Zurich and Paris. He founded the design studio Maximage with Julien Tavelli in 2009. They received the Jan Tschichold Award in 2020 and released Maxitype, a collaborative platform dedicated to type design research. David Keshavjee has been teaching type design at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) since 2021.

Despite many prophesies and predictions, the Gutenberg Galaxy still hasn't collapsed. Over the last 100 years, the printed book has survived the global rise of the various electric and electronic mass media. Yet the growing competition among different 'containers' for 'content', along with manifold technological and economical shifts inside the printing industry and book trade, have strongly altered the circumstances under which books are conceived, produced and distributed.

Attempting to chronicle how some of the shifts manifested in the various areas of book production represented in the Most Beautiful Swiss Books competition over the decades, the following round-table discussion was organised around a number of books that stood out, in their particular years, for a high or low print run. The books also give an indication of the diverse productions that were acknowledged in the Swiss competition.

For example, both pricey and affordable books can be seen in both high and low print runs, and some were not commercially available but either distributed for free or not distributed at all. Some books are entirely 'Made in Switzerland', while others testify to the various international relations in the book industry. Finally, the different conditions might affect the ways in which the various agents contribute to an individual book – from commissioners and editors to designers, publishers, printers and others.
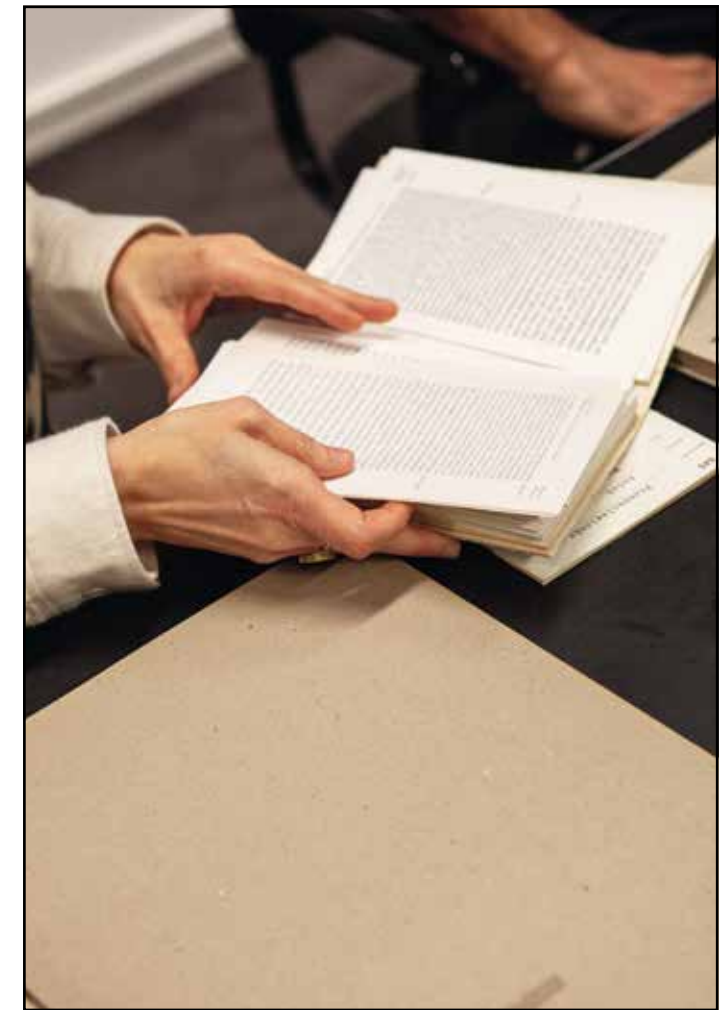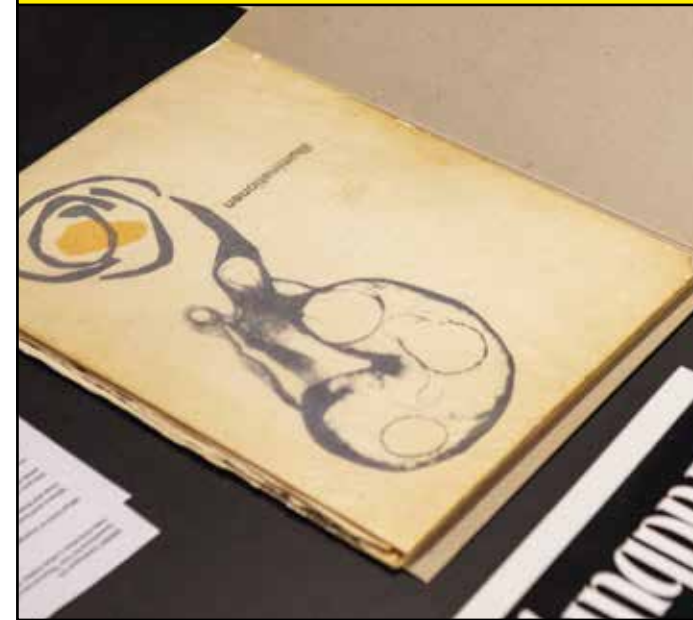
An overall glance at the data available from eight decades leaves little doubt that the average print run of the awarded books fell considerably from the 1970s and 1980s to the 2010s and into the present. Yet it is not obvious to what extent this drop reflects general developments in (certain segments of) the book industry, or to what extent it was determined by the new criteria of selection that arose from the changing institutional allocations of the competition. The most recent years also brought about a global pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and other geopolitical challenges that partly limited the access to resources and production chains. What future can the book have under such conditions? Graphic designer VELA ARBUTINA and publisher LUKAS HALLER were joined for this round table in Zurich by artist/graphic designer/historian BAHIA SHEHAB (Cairo) and graphic and type designer/publisher DAVID KESHAVJEE (Paris).

BAHIA SHEHAB: Looking at the range of books on our table, I find it refreshing to see that even in the 1950s this competition recognised both corporate publications and independent, playful, crazy, heart-warming work from individuals. Each production is inevitably linked to the politics of the community from which it arises. You can always ask: What's the motivation for that book? Why is it being produced? Who was commissioned to design it? How much money was spent on it? Who is supposed to read it? None of this is random, it's all planned. It's a kind of ecosystem, out of which a book is born, and each one has an agenda. And then we can also ask, how well was it received?

DAVID KESHAVJEE: From my experience I would say that while many factors of a production are indeed planned, it's more difficult to foresee the reception of a book. You hardly can know in advance if a book is going to be a financial success, which means that in some cases you have to adapt the distribution channels later. So there are a variety of parameters, and some of them might change in the process. Even if your target public is to some extent defined, and your budget is given, there are other parameters that might have to be adapted later.

BS: A special case are books that were not commercially available, and we have several of these in this selection. They all have a high print run and were funded by powerful entities. Both _50 Jahre Knorr Thayngen_ (1957) and _Ringier Annual Report 2007_ (2008) were published by private companies with huge budgets and economic power. I have to say that whoever was responsible for the _Knorr_ book, they were visionaries in my view. They understood that capturing a brand in a book is a valuable gesture, they printed a lot of it, and they turned it into a gift even before the brand was global. I see a vision here and a strong intent that resulted in such a kind of document in the 1950s. For that time, it was a good marketing stunt.
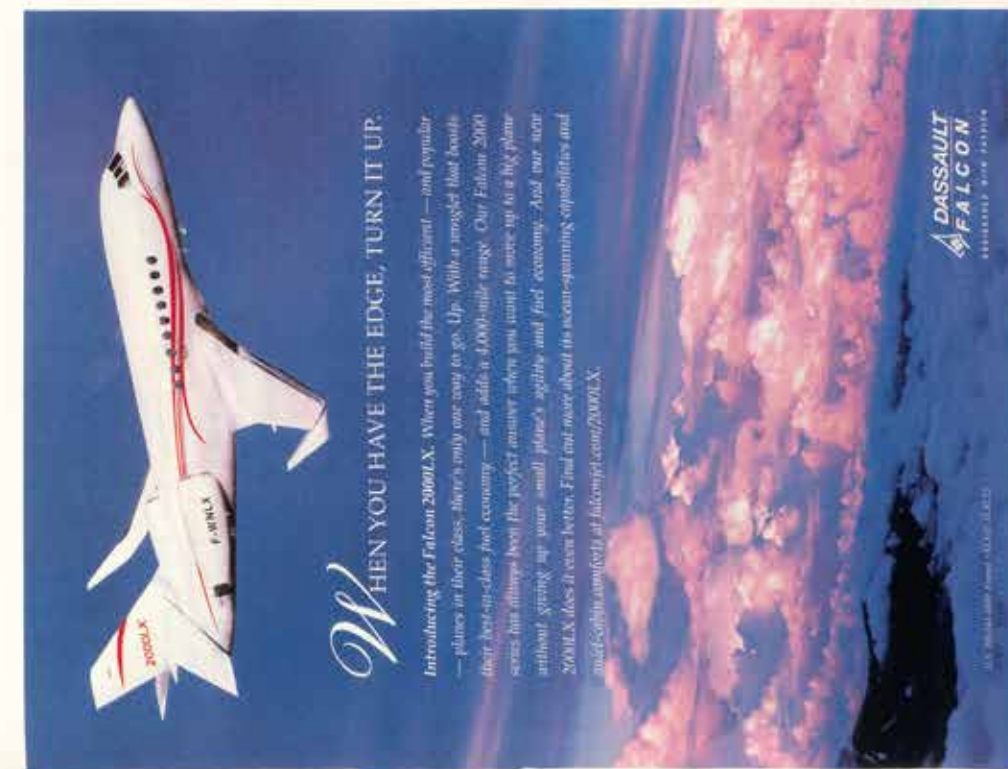
VELA ARBUTINA: There are commercial aspects to these books. At the same time, both Knorr and Ringier created space for designers and artists to make a contribution to culture, art and aesthetics. _50 Jahre Knorr Thayngen_ consists of photography of their products, and it also portrays their workers over time. It talks about the development of the soup industry, the history of their soup, the genesis of Thayngen from a village to an industrial place. It is content written by experts and also a representation of the company, but not a marketing stunt. The _Ringier Annual Report_ series works with concepts from changing designers and artists. It is curated. Ringier also has an art collection. The series is a rare instance of an economic entity that invites artistic or cultural intervention. A few examples come to mind from the Netherlands, where the national postal company has occasionally collaborated with artists.

DK: I would even go so far as to say that the aim of the _Ringier Annual Report_ was to create an art edition. It's just that they include these few pages of financial data at the beginning. The _Knorr_ book, meanwhile, was a promotional tool for the company, and I assume there were more books like this at the time. I suppose you could find a Coca-Cola book or a Nestlé book from that era, for example. And some brands or companies are still producing such kinds of promotional books even today. There has actually been a wave of anniversary books for brands recently.

Art project by Peter Fischli and David Weiss
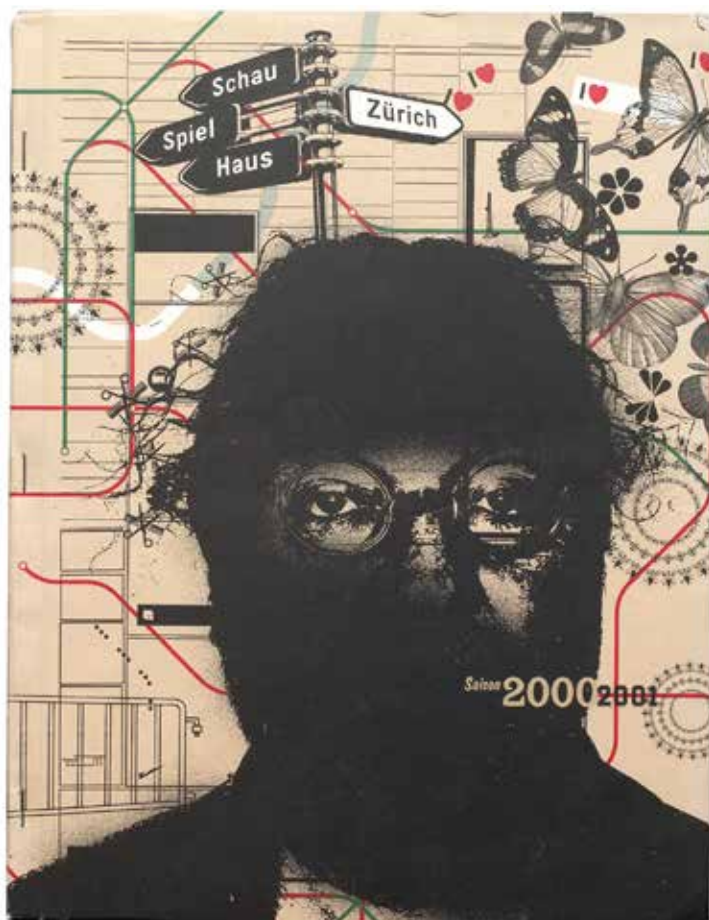
LUKAS HALLER: Part of the appeal of anniversary books is that you can disseminate them easily. It's quite clever in terms of distribution to create a festive occasion and then give the book away. I assume that's why it was — and maybe still is — tempting for companies to relate their history in a book. But we have yet another book on the table with a high print run that was given away for free, and here the producer was not a private company, but the government of the City of Zurich. _Saisonvorschau 2000/2001_ (2000) was the season preview publication for the biggest theatre in Zurich, Schauspielhaus, which is largely funded by the city. This book is part of a larger identity created by the designers which included posters, signage, booklets about individual plays, leaflets and so on. It manifests a strong position of the design team, which was provided space to take many decisions not just about the form but also about the content.

DK: To me, this publication represents a specific period from the end of the 1990s to the early 2000s, when graphic designers in many countries started to experiment intensely with the possibilities offered by the new digital tools. Many also experimented with analogue production, be it with different materials or interventions in printing. Some of these experiments were very playful, sometimes including jokes. In this publication, a large part of the design team's work was to create a special object. It's printed in web offset on newspaper stock, but cut and bound in an unusual way so as to yield an object that you would want to keep, almost like a book. In terms of editorial choices, the publication somewhat jokingly starts with a series of one-page advertisements from the corporate donors of the city theatre. But then it continues with a long series of one-page portraits of people involved in the theatre productions, both on-stage and behind the scenes. This was again unusual given that this space would more commonly be reserved for the actresses and actors. So the outcome is quite experimental in all regards: in production, editorial design, and in the desktop-publishing approach to graphic design.

VA: Since it was part of a larger identity, the designers were provided insight into the institution, and they made great use of this knowledge. The editorial decision to dedicate a page to each person working at the institution is a gesture of empowerment. They made visible what is behind a large cultural institution. The choice to use newsprint can be understood as a comment on the high print run of 34,000 and on the fact that the publication was going to be a giveaway. I assume that they had to carefully balance the budget, making room for a large format, integrating professional photography, newsprint, offset printing, and binding technique.

LH: I agree, it's really cultural politics. It's a commissioned work, and one of the aims is to create a product that reflects the role of the theatre in the city, how it represents the city, and how it justifies the high funding it receives. The publication appeared at the end of a decade in which the City of Zurich was governed by a coalition of leftist parties for the first time. Politically speaking, it was the beginning of an era that continues today.
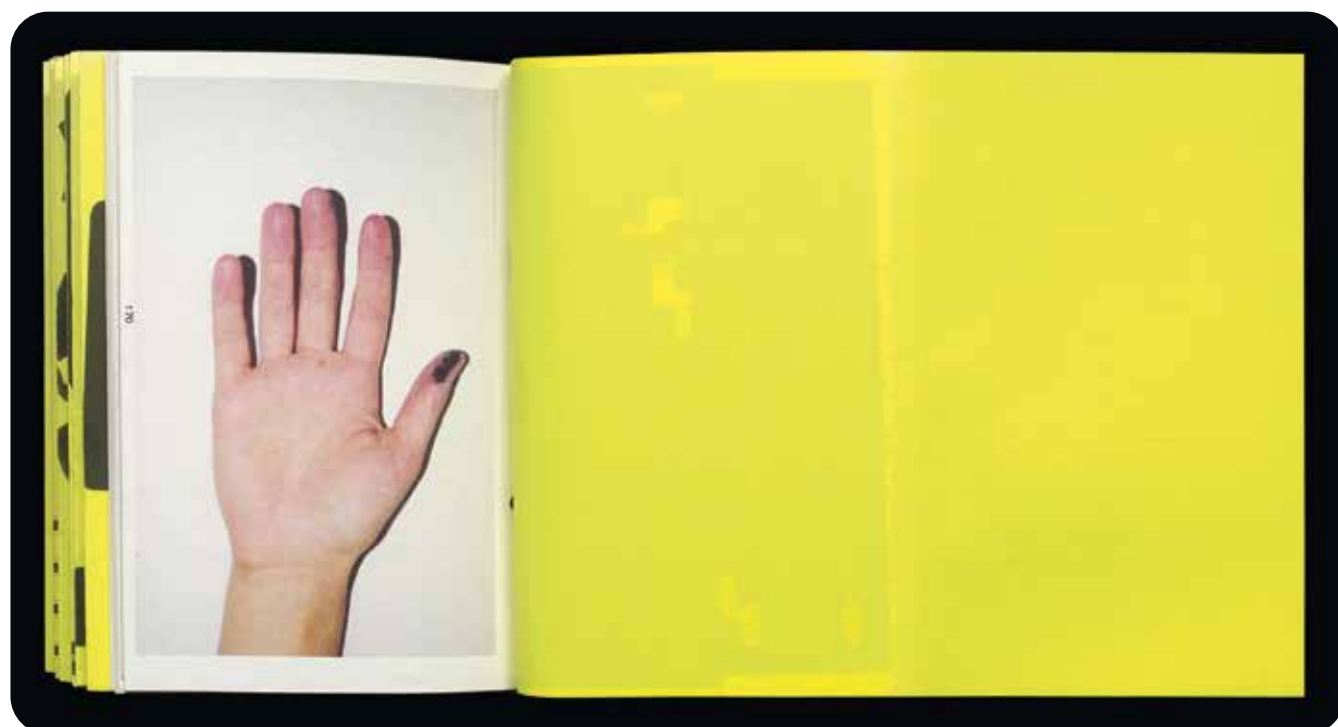
BS: Everything you say is very interesting to me, because lacking all the knowledge about the context, I had a hard time accessing this publication. It appeared to me like a rather eclectic and inconsequential blend of design approaches. Now it suddenly makes a lot of sense, and I start to see parallels with other books from around the same time. In terms of the technical novelty in the production and the reflection of the DIY approach, I would compare it to *Ennetna, voisinage technologique* (2000), which made early use of print-on-demand. Both publications provide a remarkable degree of autonomy to the readers.

DK: I agree, and I would add that you can also detect a certain proximity in the visual language which, again, is strongly representative of the time.

BS: Yes, but apart from the visual language, both publications are trying to actively engage and address more people on all levels of the production and reception. I am convinced that design is always a reflection of the politics of a certain time, so I wonder if this reaching out to and activating more people was part of the politics of the time in Switzerland, or Europe. And in that regard, the books relate to yet another one, namely *1000 Peace Women, Across the Globe* (2005). I find this

quite a powerful book; it's really a statement. When the number of women getting Nobel Prizes is generally so low, and then this book comes out saying: 'Here are a thousand. And you can't even find two?' The beautifully minimal and straight design fits this strong, straightforward statement. It's a feminist movement. And it has a rather high print run of 10,000, but it was for sale, not given away for free.

LH: Both the Schauspielhaus publication and *1000 Peace Women* were made by accomplished designers from Zurich who were internationally renowned already back then, and who are still active today. Both books were also strongly determined by the given budget of the commissioner that set the boundaries for what was possible. In the case of *1000 Peace Women*, it was the NGO 1000Peacewomen.org which developed the project along with Zurich-based Kontrast publishers. Scalo, a publisher of high-end photo books from Zurich, was then commissioned for distribution. As Scalo released about 10 to 20 books per year in relatively large print runs, they had the international distribution network to make this book a success. And if you want to distribute worldwide, if you want to enter the North American market, then you need to have a certain number of books.

1000 PeaceWomen
Across the Globe

DK: But large-scale international distribution can pose logistical and financial challenges. Scalo, for example, always had large print runs, but they went out of business only one year after that book, in 2006. Part of their problem seems to have been storage costs and

agreements with distributors that turned out to be unfortunate as soon as a book with a very large print run didn't sell as expected. Hearing that Scalo published up to 20 books per year, I have to say that times have really changed, but the question of how many books you produce still involves a certain risk today. While a higher print run allows you to lower the cost for each copy of the book, you might encounter higher costs later if you don't sell enough.

BS: In that regard, print-on-demand can be quite helpful. When I made my first book, my Arab publisher located in the Netherlands was afraid of printing more than 150 copies because it was an art book. Now it's just available through print-on-demand, because they're a very small publisher and they don't have the capacity to store large numbers of books. So I think technology is helping with the problem of storage.

LH: Digital technology also made reprints more affordable. If a publisher was envisioning a potential second or third edition before digital printing, this might have included a rather complex logistics to store the type or the printing plates for a couple of years. Now you just send your data again to China or wherever you print. This relatively easy access to second editions contributes to the trend towards lower print runs in the first edition. You know that if you need more copies, you can achieve this without any storage costs or complicated logistics.

DK: Another more recent development is that people offer online pre-sale copies to try to assess the demand for a certain book. It also has the advantage that once the book is produced, you can skip some steps in the distribution. You can ship directly from the printer to the consumer, for example. I definitely see more and more people trying to pre-sell and promote books that don't yet exist.

VA: Regarding print-on-demand, we should also mention that it offers only limited design choices for printing, material, binding and so on. So while it can't fully replace certain kinds of books, it might serve as a platform for experimentation. But we should also look at book production and numbers more generally through the lens of resources. What materials do we use, what are their costs, what is the industry behind it? We had a temporary shortage in the paper market during the pandemic. Paper needs water and energy for its production, which is yet another problem to solve. And then it's shipped across the world. How does our problem with resources reflect on the edition?
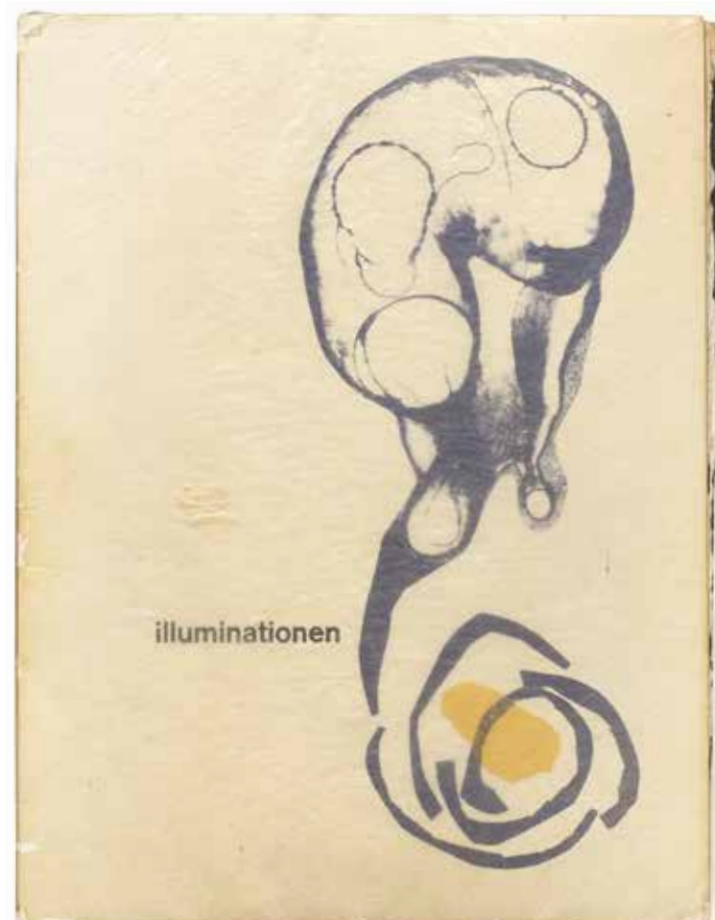
BS: On our table some of the books with the lowest editions are the most expensive ones. They are rare art book productions such as *Illuminationen* (1950) or *Caroline* (1985), which are almost considered works of art. These are rather modest in their use of resources.

DK: During the pandemic, the final price of a certain paper stock could change more than 25 per cent within days. This led to publishers adapting the print run, or buying large amounts of paper in advance, and when large projects were cancelled, they ended up with dead stock. I appreciate the creative approach of the Waste Paper Project, selecting and using leftover and waste paper available at print shops for new publications. I also find that low editions can generally offer promising options. Thanks to the internet, a book can be seen by many people even if you only print a couple of hundred copies. And then there is the secondary market, so as soon as people start to collect a book, it becomes even

more visible online. I find this quite fascinating, and I assume that's why the self-publishing sector is still growing, with many specialised art book fairs popping up across the globe. A book can have a significant impact with a very low edition, and people can be very familiar with it without having it on their bookshelf.
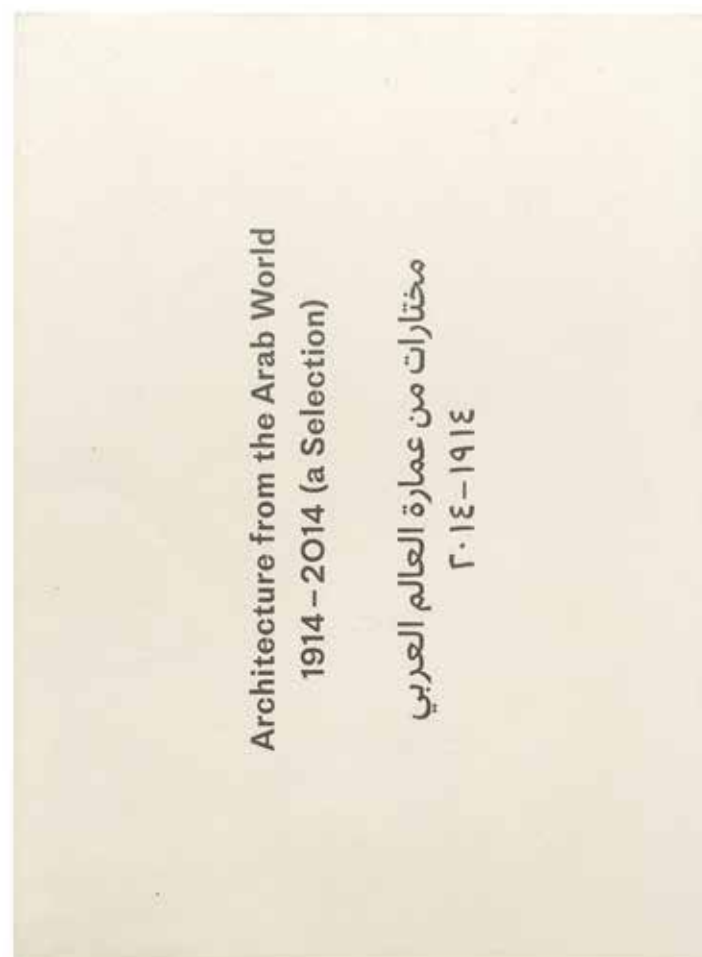
DK: Were you not able to find it online?

BS: In Egypt, internet access is heavily regulated, and online purchases are further inhibited due to limits set on our credit card spending since the inflation. But even if I could buy a book online, it would face further obstacles once entering the country. All books have to be scanned by border authorities for suspicious content. It's very difficult to bring foreign books into Egypt. By the way, the postal system is not functioning properly, which is a common issue in many Arab countries. So this is a totally different set of challenges that we are facing. No matter whether you are a small independent children's book publisher in Beirut or you're a mega-publisher in Cairo, the distribution channels common in large parts of the world are broken in our region. It also affects the huge diasporic communities all over the world that can't access books published in Lebanon or Egypt, for example.

Architecture from the Arab World
1914–2014 (a Selection)
مختارات من عمارة العالم العربي
٢٠١٤–١٩١٤

BS: Sometimes it can also be very hard to get a physical copy of a book even though it has a high print run. _Fundamentalists and Other Arab Modernisms_ (2014) was presented in an edition of 44,000 at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in a show that was co-curated by a friend of mine, George Arbid – but I have never had it in my hands until today. I had to come to Zurich to see it. It's a phenomenal book, covering 100 years of Arab architecture, and it would obviously be particularly important for people who live in the Arab world. But it was extremely hard to get inside this very region. It was funded by the government of Bahrain, and given away for free at their pavilion in Venice – but who has access to Venice? I would have liked to own this book, but I didn't manage to.

Dear Reader,

_Architecture from the Arab World 1914—2014
(a Selection)_, George Arbid (ed).

This is one of a few remaining copies of a book produced for the Kingdom of Bahrain's National ... 14th International Architecture ...

LH: Against this background, it even appears as a conscious gesture of the Bahraini government to primarily release the book in Venice. It's like ensuring to reach the potential audience all at once in a big print run.

BS: It was certainly a political statement by the Bahraini government to bring this book to Venice, and it was a marketing stunt. It must also have been a conscious choice to work with an internationally established designer based in Switzerland, even though the rest of the material for the pavilion was designed in Lebanon. All of this reflected the accomplishment of George, who was lucky to have a book on the history of Arab architecture funded in a very high print run and introduced in an international context.

THE CLASSIC BESTSELLER ABOUT CENSORSHIP
— MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER BEFORE

Fahrenheit 451

...THE TEMPERATURE AT WHICH BOOKS BURN

The novel of firemen who are paid to set books ablaze

Ray Bradbury
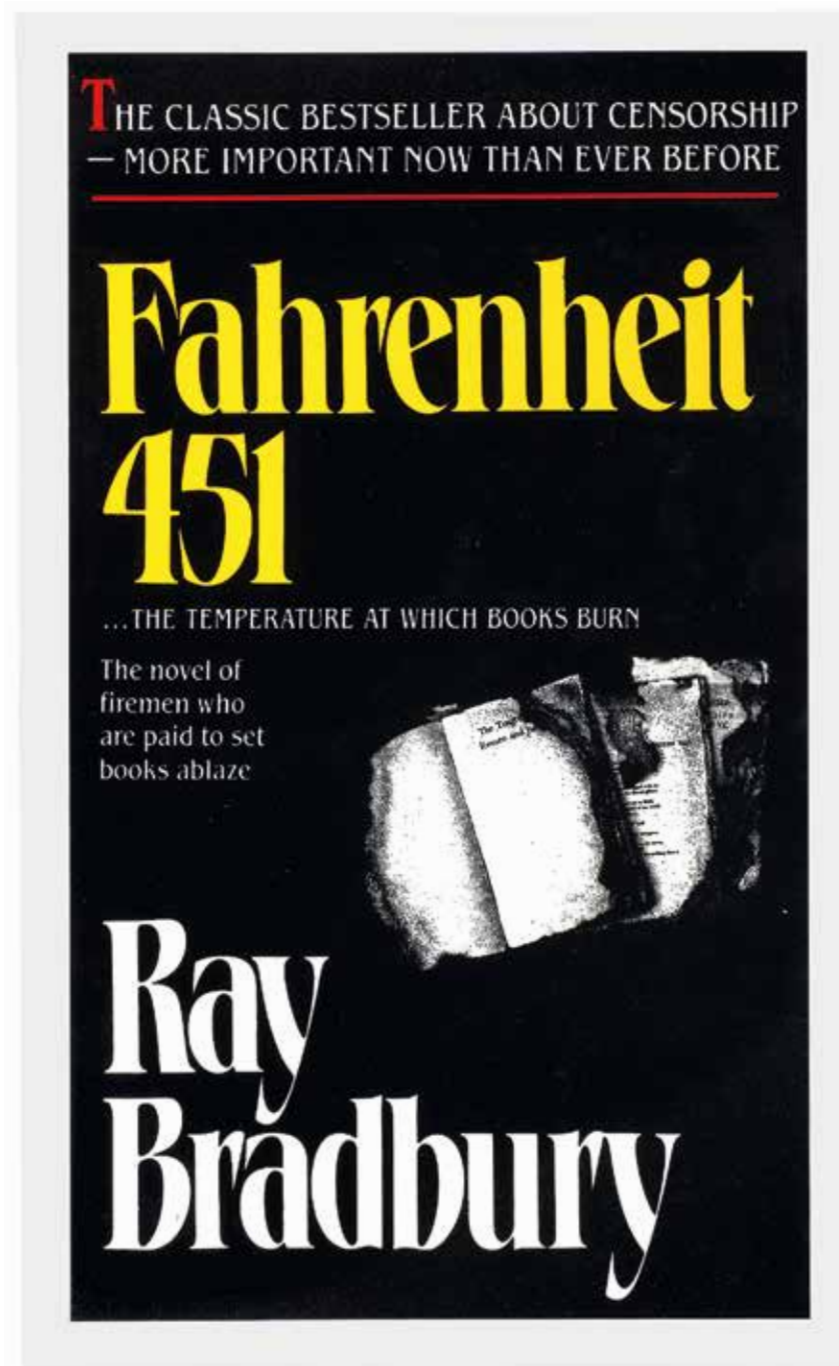
LH: Seen from a different angle, the once-and-for-all release of the book in Venice is maybe not entirely different from some strategies pursued with some of the precious artist's books mentioned before. A more recent example on our table is _Fahrenheit 451_ (2009), which was handmade in 40 copies out of pure joy. In each case a rather exclusive moment of accessibility is created, and after that, the book is gone. But in some way or other, it seems that these exclusive books still find each other, be it at some of the specialised book fairs or on the secondary market. It's a particular ecosystem, or even a kind of heterotopia, where books that are not supposed to be available still circulate.

BS: We have an art book fair in Cairo now, too. We also have a guy that managed to bring a Risograph to our city, for the first time. So there is definitely a budding local scene of independent publishing. But it doesn't solve the larger issues with distribution and accessibility in the region. I wasn't surprised to hear that the Swiss Federal Office of Culture wasn't able to bring the Most Beautiful Swiss Books exhibition to the Cairo art book fair earlier in the year, because they were stuck at the border. That's another example of inaccessibility. Our community deserves to see these books!

VA: Bahrain, of course, is also an authoritarian country that restricts freedom of expression and heavily violates human rights still today. Funded by a state in these political circumstances, the *Arab Modernisms* book is problematic to me. But with regard to the independent publishing scene, I am somewhat optimistic. I would say that there is a mutual interest across different regions. It's not Swiss- or European-centred. And I would say that communication has generally become a bit easier thanks to the internet, even though access to websites and online platforms is regulated in many countries. It has become somewhat more convenient to talk and communicate, and to get to know other people's work. I would like to think that technologically, at least, it is possible to initiate exchange and realise ideas. Before the internet, print was largely local, and the discourse about it was different.

LH: I don't intend to argue against what you said, but the independent publishing scene is obviously highly specialised, mostly focusing on art, design and other cultural publications. It exists in parallel to an entirely different and much larger sector of the commercial book market, for both fiction and non-fiction, which remains outside the scope of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books competition. On this market, print runs can be much higher than what we see on this table, and the aim is to distribute as many books as possible, in as many languages as possible. It's about flooding the market, with a global distribution network dominated by a few players whose outreach sometimes reminds me of the old Empires.

BS: It's true that the obstacles for distribution in certain areas are in stark contrast with the quasi-global outreach of the international mega-players. Their accessibility and their ability to literally flood the market, as you said, is unbelievable. And this means that they are also in control of many of the narratives. These are actual power structures that are in place, and they are not easy to challenge.

LH: The backbone to these power structures is provided by the only three global delivery companies left in business: FedEx, UPS and DHL. Of course, they are also key for the independent book publishing scene. They even play an important role in the production of books, if proofs need to be shipped internationally from a printer to a designer, for example. If these channels don't function properly, like in some regions of the Arab world, then accessibility is a problem for any kind of books.

DK: It's probably true that the books from the commercial market are largely outside the scope of the Most Beautiful Swiss Books competition. But among the ones on the table there are still a few that had larger print runs and were distributed commercially, like *1000 Peace Women* or *Gustave Courbet* (2014), which had a similar print run of around 10,000. This was a catalogue for a large museum released with a large publishing house. As a book designer, I personally find it rewarding to work in different contexts. While art books with rather small print runs are often well-funded in Switzerland, and sometimes provide a lot of freedom for designers, they involve the risk that you stay inside a certain bubble. If you work for a more commercial publisher, the challenge is how to bring your ideas into a system that is primarily interested in selling as many books as possible. You are maybe going to large-scale print shops in China, or have restrictions with paper options, and the publisher might not want to reveal the final print run to you. But I find it worthwhile for designers that are established in the niche art book market to also try working on a bigger scale. They can bring fresh ideas into projects that would otherwise potentially turn out to be much more standardised.
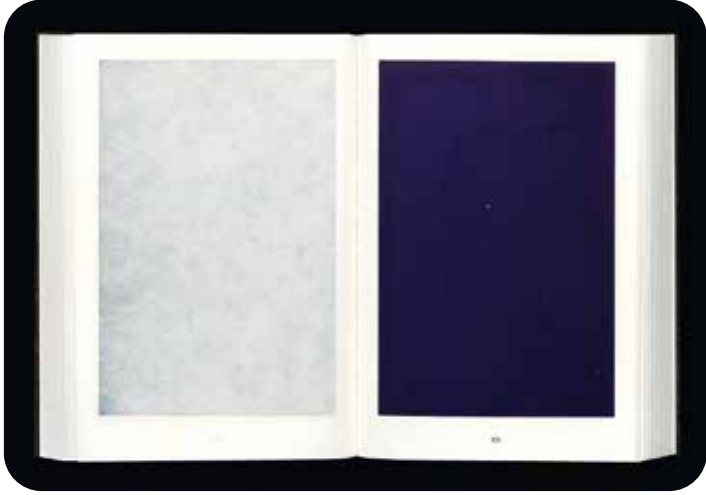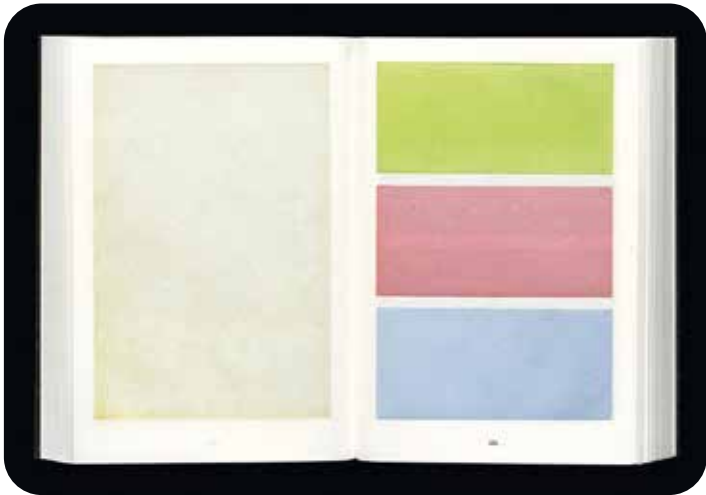

VA: I agree that there are different challenges and working conditions in various sectors of book production. For example, it makes a difference whether you work in a personal exchange with an artist whom you have known for many years, or whether it's a large one-time project with many professionals involved. If you have online meetings with several people from various countries, and everyone is on a tight schedule, you want to be precise within the restricted time available for your PDF presentation. In smaller, more personal collaborations, where you have the possibility to meet on a regular basis, the dialogue is very different. In any case, I find dialogue is essential for bookmaking.

DK: From my experience, both situations that you describe can actually turn out to be either simple or complicated. A personal relation to an artist can become highly emotional and difficult, while a more streamlined production with a publisher that has a large team and a financial mindset can sometimes work smoothly. But it can also be the other way round. And oftentimes you are not just engaged in conversations with commissioners, but also with contributors
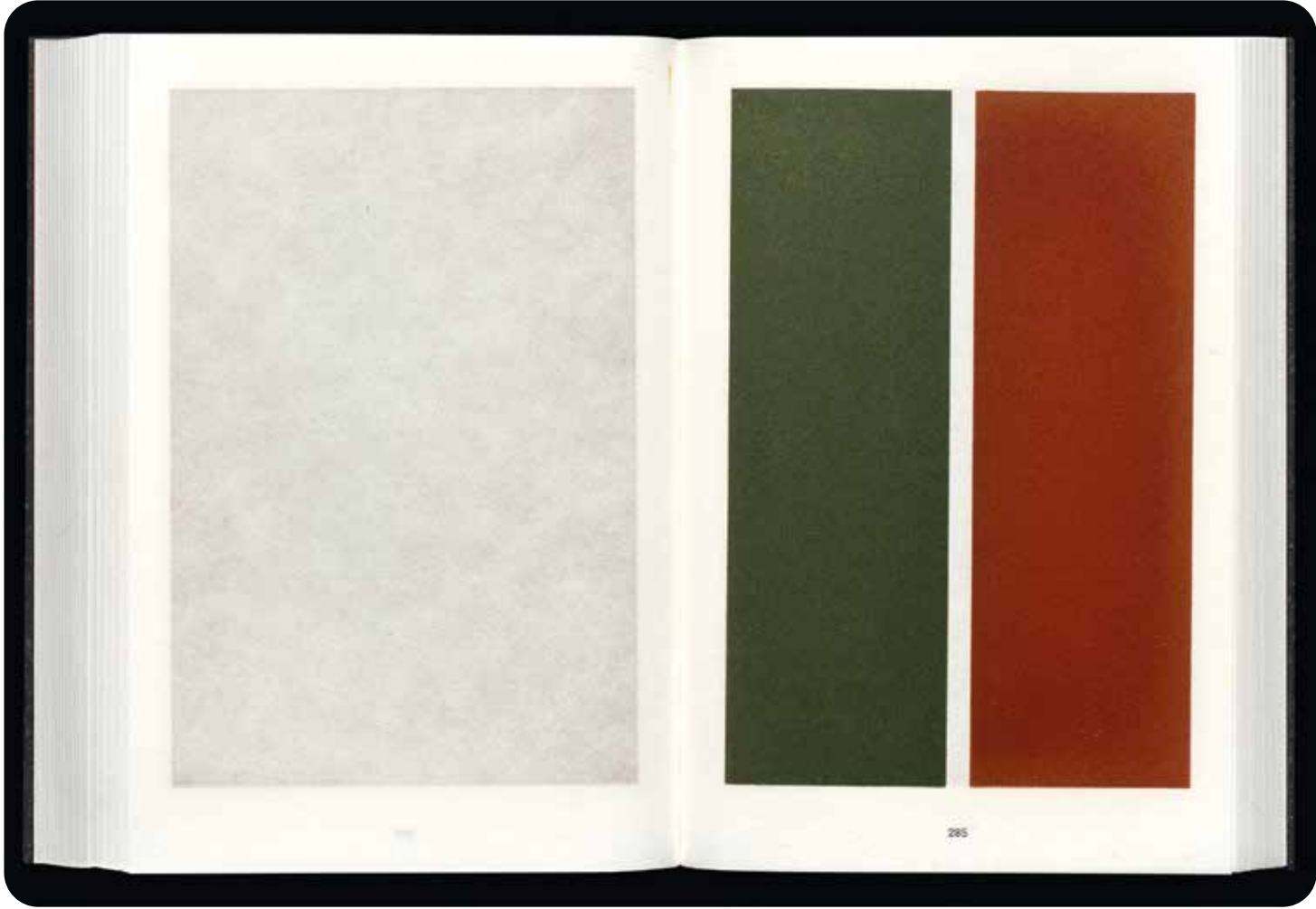
or people on the production side. I remember when we worked for the first time with the printer Che Huber, who made *NOIR SUR NOIR* (2020), he told us that as a printer, he considers a book his own. But he said it was also our book, as designers, and it was the book of the publisher, and of the author. So everyone needs to find their role in what can be a rather delicate balance of power, and if one party aspires to take more control of the project than the others, it becomes problematic.

BS: I am fully taken by _NOIR SUR NOIR_. It's powerful, it's emotional, it's musical. It's perfect. No matter if you're a designer or not, and no matter where you're from, this book is going to speak to you in a certain way. It just communicates beautifully through the many shades of coloured rectangles, and through the rhythm. Compared to the Schauspielhaus book, for example, which was hard to access for me without any knowledge about the local context, _NOIR SUR NOIR_ really can stand on its own, without any commentary. Even if I hadn't been told that each coloured rectangle visualises the printer's collaboration with one of his clients, I would still find it beautiful. Each colour could also represent a day in his life, or the changing taste of his coffee on Sunday mornings. It could be whatever I want it to be.

VA: Another book with a low print run in this selection is _Schrift und Papier_ (1974). It shows a technical aspect of bookmaking; it compares paper and the way paper works with various fonts, type sizes and printing. It is not bound, but very loosely put together and it has a folded cardboard cover. I find it unexpected that it was entered into the competition at the time, and remarkable that it was awarded. Despite the very low print run of 100 copies, it has an industrial aim and purpose.

DK: It's quite tempting to compare it with the art edition printed with stone lithography, _Illuminationen_, which is also not bound. Both publications have a very low print run and look very precious, but one is mostly displaying drawings and the other typography; one is more visual and the other more technical. The fact that they were both awarded might say something about this competition. I generally have the impression that in those decades, design didn't play such an important role in the competition. It seems to have been more about printing or other material qualities of the production. But even under these premises, books with very different focuses could be selected, like these two.
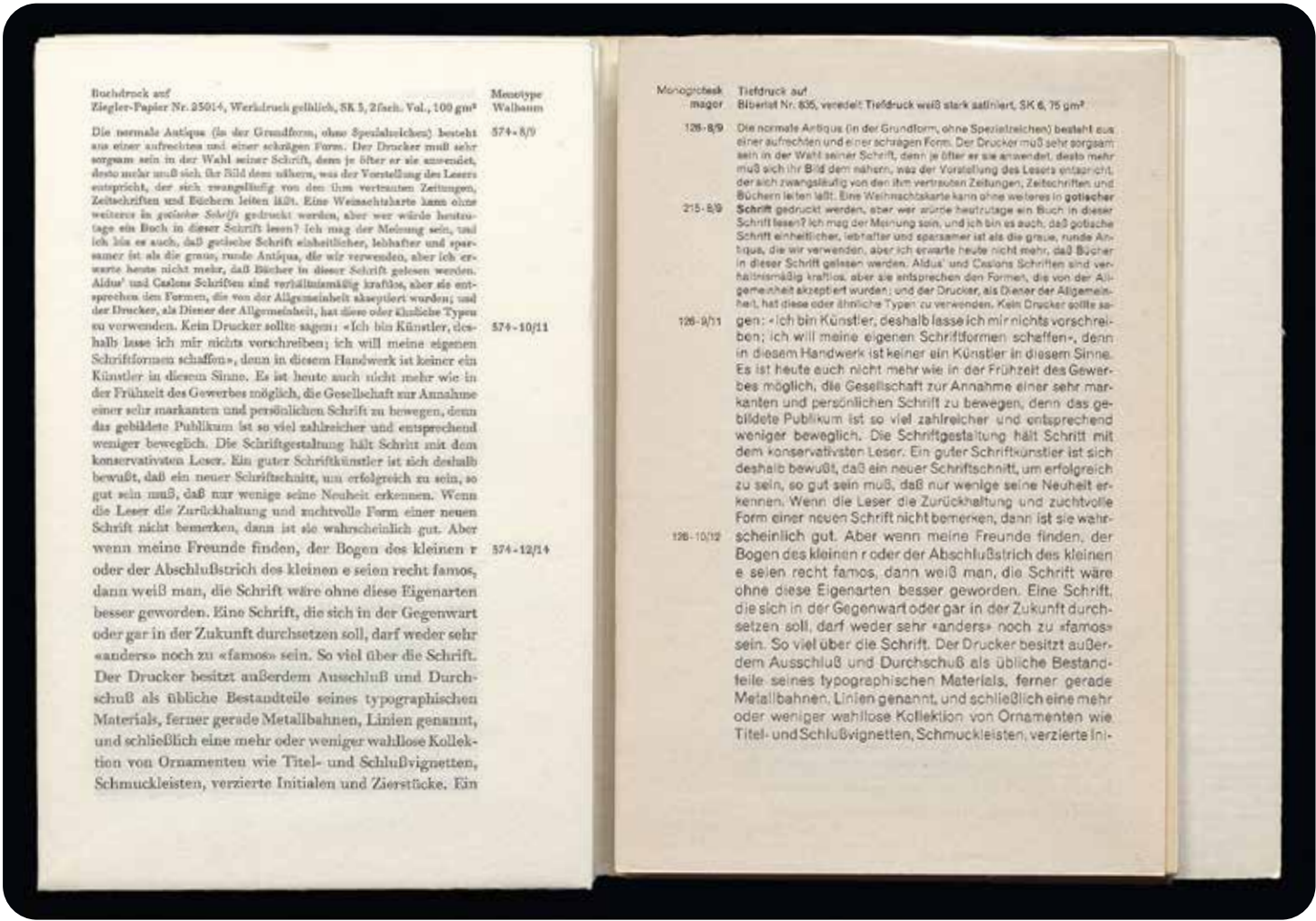
LH: I have been working in this industry for about three decades, and I would say that I had the opportunity to observe two generations of designers emerge and establish themselves. Graphic design has really been continuously changing and evolving during that time. I sometimes feel like the Swiss publishing sector has been in a crisis ever since I can remember, which is probably not true given that the annual output has been pretty stable for two decades. About 12,000 books are published in Switzerland every year. But graphic design has not been stable at all, it's been developing continuously.

[High Print Runs]

Le Corbusier. Œuvre complète 1938–1946
Willy Boesiger

Girsberger-Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Willy Boesiger, Girsberger-Verlag
PRINTING: Effingerhof, Brugg
PRINT RUN: 10,500 copies / PRICE: CHF 38.–
Awarded in 1950

Japan
Werner Bischof, Robert Guillain

Manesse Verlag, Zürich
PHOTOGRAPHY: Werner Bischof
DESIGN: Ernst Scheidegger, Walter Huber
PRINTING: Conzett & Huber, Zürich
PRINT RUN: 30,000 copies / PRICE: CHF 28.–
Awarded in 1954

Fremdenlegionär Anton Weidert
Paul Eggenberg

SJW Schweizerisches Jugendschriftenwerk,
   Zürich
ILLUSTRATION: Hans Falk
PRINTING: Fachschriften-Verlag &
   Buchdruckerei, Zürich
PRINT RUN: 30,000 copies / PRICE: CHF –.50
Awarded in 1955

50 Jahre Knorr Thayngen 1907–1957
Board and management of Knorr, Thayngen

Knorr Nahrungsmittel, Thayngen
DESIGN: H. P. Schaad
PRINTING: Buchbinderei Meier, Stäfa
PRINT RUN: 20,000 copies / PRICE: not
   commercially available
Awarded in 1957

Dicot Weeds 1
Toni J. Häfliger, ed.

Ciba Geigy, Basel
DESIGN: Marcel Berlinger
PRINTING: Reinhardt-Druck, Basel
PRINT RUN: 10,000 copies / PRICE: not
   commercially available
Awarded in 1988

Saisonvorschau 2000/2001
Schauspielhaus Zürich

Schauspielhaus Zürich, Zürich
DESIGN: Cornel Windlin, Gilles Gavillet
PRINTING: Zürichsee Druckereien, Stäfa
PRINT RUN: 34,000 copies / PRICE: not
   commercially available
Awarded in 2000

1000 Peace Women. Across the Globe
Association 1000 Peace Women for the Nobel
Peace Prize

Scalo Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Tania Prill, Alberto Vieceli,
   Kristina Milkovic, Piero Glina
PRINTING: C. H. Beck, Nördlingen (DE)
PRINT RUN: 10,000 copies / PRICE: CHF 58.–
Awarded in 2005

Ringier Annual Report 2007
Ringier, Peter Fischli, David Weiss

Ringier, Zürich
DESIGN: Norm (Dimitri Bruni, Manuel Krebs,
   Ludovic Varone)
PRINTING: NZZ Fretz, Schlieren
PRINT RUN: 7,400 copies / PRICE: not
   commercially available
Awarded in 2008

Gustave Courbet
Ulf Küster, ed.

Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern (DE)
DESIGN: Studio Marie Lusa (Marie Lusa,
   Martina Brassel, Carmen Tobler)
PRINTING: Aprinta Druck, Wemding (DE)
PRINT RUN: 10,600 copies / PRICE: 62.–
Awarded in 2014

*Fundamentalists and Other Arab Modernisms.
Architecture from the Arab World 1914–2014
(a Selection)*
George Arbid, ed.

Bahrain Ministry of Culture (BH), Arab Center
   for Architecture, Beirut (LB)
DESIGN: Jonathan Hares
PRINTING: Musumeci, Quart (IT)
PRINT RUN: 44,000 copies / PRICE: not
   commercially available
Awarded in 2014

BS: This is even more true from a global point of view. The decentring of design history has the effect that many different voices from around the world are becoming heard more and more. For example, where I come from, we are now trying to look at our Islamic visual heritage with millions and millions of manuscripts that have completely different layouts than common in the 'International Style' or 'Swiss Style' that has become a quite globalised aesthetic since the mid-twentieth century. Around the world, there are literally thousands of completely different schools of thought. So how would you engage as a representative of the 'Swiss' design tradition and of Swiss institutions with other cultures and other entities? How could we have healthy conversations and build bridges between different visual traditions? This is something I would like to explore even more in the future. How can we create collaborations, conversations, exchanges?

VA: I am personally hesitant to use the term 'Swiss' with relation to design for many reasons. Switzerland, amongst other countries like the Netherlands, enables conversations about graphic design in general and about book design in particular. Today it is an inclusive and diverse environment, with a tradition of providing space for discussion and analysis of book design.

[Low Print Runs]

Illuminationen
Gottfried Honegger, Selma R. Gessner

Girsberger-Verlag, Zürich
PRINTING: Graphische Anstalt Kratz, Zürich
  (lithography), and Uehli & Hürlimann, Zürich
  (text)
PRINT RUN: 25 copies / PRICE: CHF 85.–
Awarded in 1950

Schrift und Papier
Max Caflisch

Papierfabrik Albert Ziegler, Grellingen
DESIGN: Max Caflisch, Hans Enderli
PRINTING: Ziegler Druck und Verlag, Winterthur
PRINT RUN: 100 copies / PRICE: not
  commercially available
Awarded in 1974

*Caroline. Gedichte und Radierungen
von Meret Oppenheim*
Meret Oppenheim

Edition Fanal, Basel
DESIGN: Atelier Fanal
PRINTING: Max Fürer
PRINT RUN: 89 copies / PRICE: CHF 2000.–
Awarded in 1985

Ennetna, voisinage technologique
Patrick Monnier, Violène Pont

École cantonale d'art de Lausanne, Lausanne
DESIGN: Happypets Products (Patrick Monnier,
  Violène Pont)
PRINTING: Print on demand / PRICE: user-
  determined
Awarded in 2000

*Fahrenheit 451. The Temperature at Which
Books Burn*
Ray Bradbury

Bookhorse, Zürich
DESIGN: Aude Lehmann, Lex Trüb
PRINTING: Aude Lehmann, Lex Trüb, New York
PRINT RUN: 40 copies / PRICE: CHF 450.–
Awarded in 2009

Title
Ramaya Tegegne

Ramaya Tegegne, Genève
DESIGN: Ramaya Tegegne
PRINTING: Extrapool, Nijmegen (NL)
PRINT RUN: 200 copies / PRICE: CHF 40.–
Awarded in 2010

*A Pocket Companion to Books from
'The Simpsons' in Alphabetical Order*
Olivier Lebrun

Rollo Press, Zürich
DESIGN: Olivier Lebrun, Urs Lehni
PRINTING: Tallinna Raamatutrükikoda,
  Tallinn (EE)
PRINT RUN: 500 copies / PRICE: CHF 12.–
Awarded in 2012

NOIR SUR NOIR
Che Huber

Noir sur Noir édition, Les Acacias
DESIGN: Vincent Devaud, Che Huber
PRINTING: Noir sur Noir impression,
  Les Acacias
PRINT RUN: 180 copies / PRICE: CHF 300.–
Awarded in 2021

*Armorial du Jura. Canton du Jura. Jura
bernois, Bienne, Birseck, Laufonnais.
XIIIe siècle–1815*
Nicolas Vernot

Société jurassienne d'émulation, Porrentruy,
  Archives cantonales jurassiennes, Porrentruy
DESIGN: Dimitri Jeannottat
PRINTING: Courvoisier-Gassmann, Biel/Bienne
PRINT RUN: 500 copies / PRICE: CHF 150.–
Awarded in 2022

After Modernism

DIMITRI BRUNI and Manuel Krebs founded
Norm in Zurich in 1999, and they were
joined by Ludovic Varone in 2005. Their
focus is on designing and publishing
books and typefaces.

ALEXIS HOMINAL lives and works in Geneva,
Switzerland. He obtained a bachelor's
in graphic design at the École cantonale
d'art de Lausanne (ECAL) in 2016 and
is active in the fields of typography,
editorial design, research and teaching.

GEOFF HAN is a New York-based independent
graphic designer and educator working
in the cultural field. He received an MFA
in graphic design from Yale University.

GAILE PRANCKUNAITE is a Vilnius-based
graphic designer with a focus on experi-
mental typography. She graduated from
the graphic design department at Gerrit
Rietveld Academie (Amsterdam) in 2013 and
works mostly on commissioned projects
and collaborations with artists, writers,
art/film institutions, museums and univer-
sities.

The first decades of the competition over-
lapped with (but didn't fully mirror) the rise
and international fame of modernist 'Swiss
Style' graphic design. Yet the decades
following the 1980s brought about a prolifer-
ation of design approaches that in many ways
challenged established modernist paradigms,
bearing key phrases such as 'Social Design',
'Postmodernism', 'Desktop Publishing',
'Critical Design', 'Identity Politics',
'Designer as Author', 'Design Research',
'Decolonising Design', to name a few. At the
same time, the 'Swiss' legacies of modernism
lived on in various transformations, adap-
tations and disguises, not least in the
somewhat 'gated community' provided by the
Most Beautiful Swiss Books competition.
When Swiss publisher Lionel Bovier proclaimed
a new era of 'neo-neo-modernism' in the cata-
logue for the iteration of 2007, this raised
the question as to what extent a renewed
interest in modernism would be a circular
or even paradoxical movement in an environment
that possibly never fully freed itself from
the manifold legacies of the 'Swiss Style'.
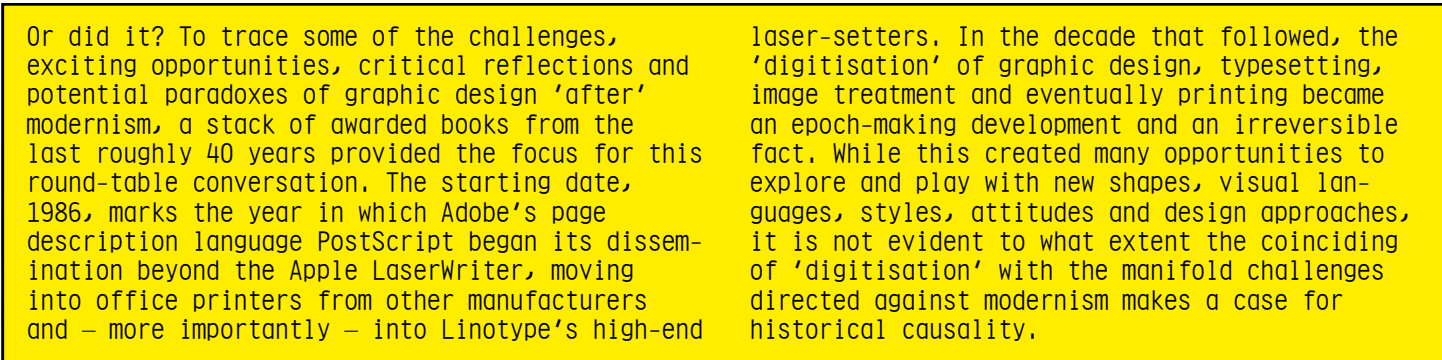
Or did it? To trace some of the challenges,
exciting opportunities, critical reflections and
potential paradoxes of graphic design 'after'
modernism, a stack of awarded books from the
last roughly 40 years provided the focus for this
round-table conversation. The starting date,
1986, marks the year in which Adobe's page
description language PostScript began its dissem-
ination beyond the Apple LaserWriter, moving
into office printers from other manufacturers
and – more importantly – into Linotype's high-end
laser-setters. In the decade that followed, the
'digitisation' of graphic design, typesetting,
image treatment and eventually printing became
an epoch-making development and an irreversible
fact. While this created many opportunities to
explore and play with new shapes, visual lan-
guages, styles, attitudes and design approaches,
it is not evident to what extent the coinciding
of 'digitisation' with the manifold challenges
directed against modernism makes a case for
historical causality.

Any rumination about such a question will
presuppose a certain understanding of concepts
including 'historical causality', 'historical
development', 'historical shift' or 'histor-
ical era', meandering into the rather remote
territory of the philosophy of history.
Can a sample of 20 books tell anything about
a history of 40 years at all? And if so, to
what extent can certain books represent some
turns and twists in that history, mark certain
memorable moments, or even be indicative of
an epoch? Is there such a thing as a timeless
book? And how does all of this relate to
the aspirations of the modernist 'Swiss Style'
as well as to some of the challenges and
critical objections brought against it?
Not shy of debating such matters, GEOFF HAN
(New York), ALEXIS HOMINAL (Geneva) and
GAILE PRANCKUNAITE (Vilnius) joined Norm's
DIMITRI BRUNI in Zurich.

GEOFF HAN: When you have a grouping of books like this on a table, which are some highlights from the awarded design books in Switzerland over the past 40 years, you inevitably start to try to find patterns in them or to think about what stands out. This is very different from a situation where you just walk into a room with a bookshelf and pull something out. You will probably have very different criteria for how you look at these books or how you talk about them. I wonder if the four of us were in a different situation, would we gravitate towards the same books? Are we looking for certain things here because of the context of our conversation?

ALEXIS HOMINAL: The status of a book and its autonomy within the socio-cultural field generally depend on our ability to consume it at different periods of time. The context will surely impact how we perceive a book.

GAILE PRANCKUNAITE: To me, the oldest book, *Swissair, Flugzeuge über fünf Jahrzehnte* (1986), stands out among the others on our table. It is unusually large and very technical. I find it a rather unlikely award winner from today's point of view, and I was wondering what some of the reasons might have been for it to be selected at that time.

DIMITRI BRUNI: I agree. This book appears like a remnant from an era which we are separated from by a large gap. I suppose it has to do with the definition of what a 'most beautiful Swiss book' is. At the time, the production and the physicality of books were probably given more weight than today. The *Swissair* book clearly represents an industrial production, which is combined with a somewhat modernist set-up of type and a generally straightforward design.

AH: In this selection it is the only proper industrial book, while most of the others are cultural publications. The main focus of the competition shifted towards cultural publications in the late 1990s. But the history of modernism, despite its beginning in the arts and culture, only came to its full development in the realm of industry. To me this book testifies to that development, since it presents a chronology of modernist design in terms of both the aeroplanes and corporate identity of the airline. It's a history of modernist graphic design in the public realm, embedded in a history of technology and industry. And since it covers the very decades when the new expressions in Swiss modernist graphic design took shape, following the 1930s, I find it quite a fascinating book. You can observe evolutions from the 1930s to the 1960s, for example, or distinguish the era before and after Gerstner's reworking of the Swissair identity. To me this book provides a surprising view on what was at stake, on a national level, in these kind of evolutions in graphic design.

GH: It can also be seen as a bridge between, let's say, the 1960s and the 1990s, which ultimately witnessed various reactions against this kind of modernist tradition. I wonder if around 1986, when this book came out, the Swiss started to

somewhat mythologise their recent history of modernist design, which might have contributed to the triggering of some reactions against it.

GP: I understand the point with industry and modernism. I can imagine that this book made an important contribution to showcase some of the achievements of that industry. But I don't find it very approachable. It's so monumental, as if it was meant as a present for the CEO of the airline. I wonder who it was intended for and who had access to it.

DB: I would guess that the book was addressed to plane lovers? I find it generally easier to judge things that were made at a distant time, since one can try to embed them in certain mindsets from back then. But I have to admit that, even from today's point of view, I find the illustrations of the airplanes quite impressive in this book. It must have been a lot of work to airbrush this, and the results are quite convincing. I also find it interesting to compare the _Swissair_ book to a more recent archive book about a subject related to the industry, namely _Gestaltung Werk Gesellschaft. 100 Jahre Schweizerischer Werkbund_ (2013). This one is much more complex, and the material is treated with much more care, but it might indicate that such books are not necessarily outdated.

GH: When you all talk about how the industrial condition shaped this book, this reminds me of how I perceived some of the more recent books on the table. Even though they are from different periods, I found that many of them reflected a lot of the conditions in which they were made — be they industrial, cultural or economic conditions. To me this is one way of defining a modernist approach: making transparent the conditions in which something is made. And I often had the impression that in book design from Switzerland that connection is made more honestly than in the United States, for example. In the US it's more common to try to hide those conditions or export them somewhere else. This results more frequently in a gap between how something is made and what is being made.

DB: A rather early book with which I was familiar when it appeared is _Universal_ (1996). It was only ten years after the _Swissair_ book, but it came out when Manuel Krebs and I were about to finish our graphic design studies at the school in Biel. At the time, we were keenly following the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, where the team around director Martin Heller

proposed a lot of interesting thematic shows. They often worked with graphic designer Cornel Windlin for posters, catalogues and other printed matter. I remember very well that Manuel and I absolutely loved the _Universal_ catalogue when it appeared, but when I discovered it this morning at the library in our studio, I was totally surprised by how it looked. It

testifies to a very strong will to create not just a book, but an object. It's not so much an expression of good design or bad design, but of an attitude of creativity and of not following any specific rules, flirting with both good and bad taste. Of course, it is in a way overdesigned, but I still appreciate it. I doubt that 'postmodernism' is an apt term to describe it, but this book is the best example of a turning point in Swiss graphic design history that I find on the table. The other book that has a similar attitude of 'I can do even more' is _Kiosk. Modes of Multiplication_ (2008).
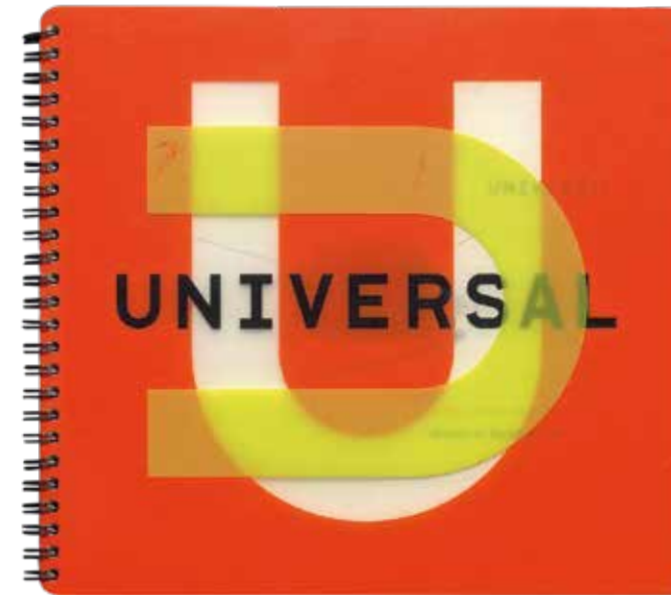
GP: On every page I open in the _Universal_ book, I am stunned and overwhelmed. But I can imagine that this wasn't judged so favourably maybe 10 years ago. One might have said, 'there are too many layers, too many effects', and in terms of digital technology it might have appeared outdated, not sufficiently refined. But I agree that it looks cool again today. This makes me wonder if a similar re-appreciation might eventually happen with the _Swissair_ book. Maybe in two years we will say, out of a certain nostalgia, 'look, how cool that was in 1986'.

AH: This brings to mind the dialectics between the modernist idea that everything should be timeless on the one hand, and the idea that something can incarnate its period on the other. I would say that one can find both ideas in the *Universal* book. Or let's say it is questioning the relationship between these two options.

GP: I would say that the *Universal* book becomes timeless precisely because it is very specifically about 1996. This makes it survive the passage of time. So timelessness is not necessarily the opposite of incarnating a period. Something can indeed become timeless because it is fully embedded in its time and comes to represent this moment in history. And this can happen to other books as well. If I look at the table, I would say that *Klick* (1991) could also be considered timeless in the sense that it will always stand for its time. I find it great. The uneven form that is not rectangular does something very strange to you when you open it.

DB: Would you really consider this an example of a timeless book? I have to admit I find it difficult to adopt that point of view.

GH: Maybe we would have to define, as a group, what timelessness is. Is it something that is starting a new movement or has a similar effect? Or is it something that's inoffensive, a bit invisible and you can put it on a bookshelf and not be embarrassed by it at any time? Another question might be whether timelessness is aesthetic or conceptual.

DB: To me timelessness is not related to a style. The best definition for it I came across only recently. We were working on a series of three books called 'Meanwhile in Japan' with the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), and on the back cover of one of these books, the architect Hiroshi Hara is quoted saying that anything less than a radical vision would not stand the test of time. When I read this it made 'click' in my head. This is a quite pointed definition of timelessness. It means it doesn't matter at all what it is, or how it is done. It's just about a radical vision. And, to be honest, the *Klick* book is not radical enough for me to be considered timeless.

GP: But then again, what I like about the idea of representing a certain time is that it means something mustn't necessarily be timeless right away. It can take time to become timeless. Maybe you can't even know something will eventually become timeless. Certain things are hated by people, and then suddenly they are loved, and then people start hating them again. This might also play a role in whether something becomes timeless or not.
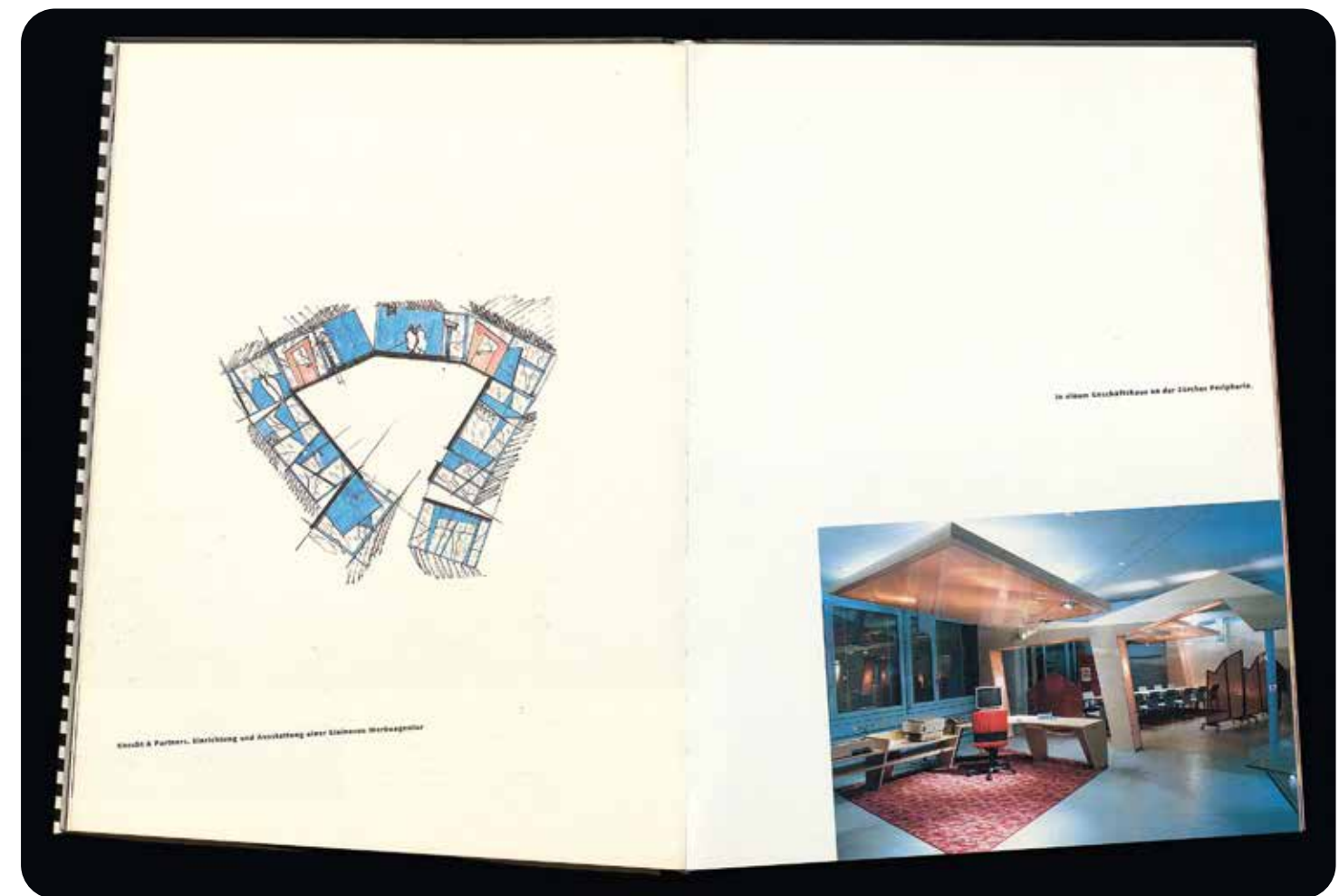
GH: Trying to think about representing a very specific period of time, I find the late 1990s and early 2000s quite fascinating, and I wonder how the perception of these years changed over time. For example, I can see a lot of influences from the *Universal* book in later work on the table, such as *Ein Tag im Leben von* (2007), *Learning from Warsaw* (2013), *Revelo № 1. Chroniques de chantier. Transformation de la Gare* (2020). The influence might come from certain approaches to image editing, to sequencing, to reappropriation of pop culture. But I'm also trying to ask myself what other designers made influential work back in the later 1990s. Who would that be? Next to Cornel Windlin, you might think of David Carson, Neville Brody, The Designer's Republic, M/M (Paris) or Mevis & van Deursen, for example.
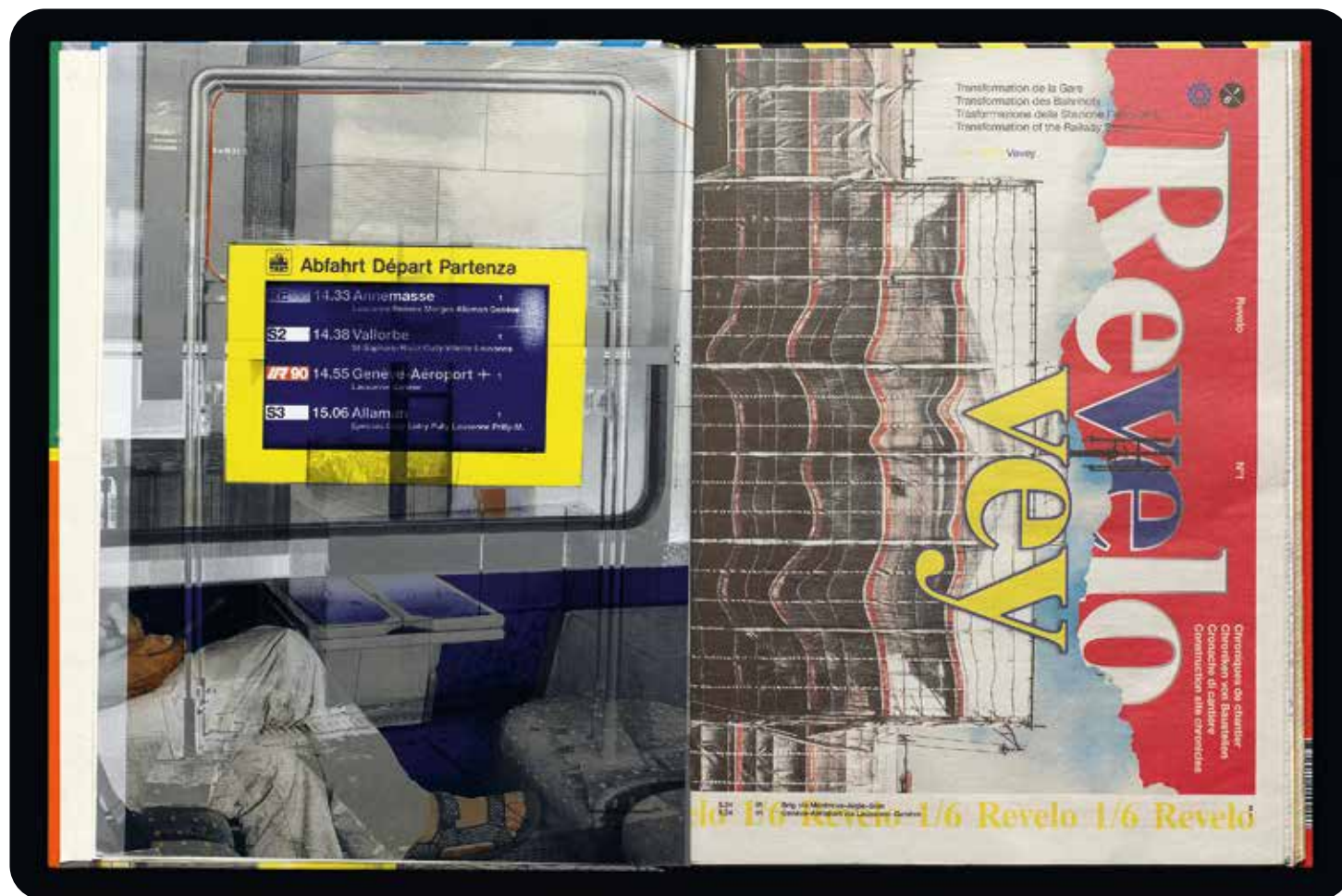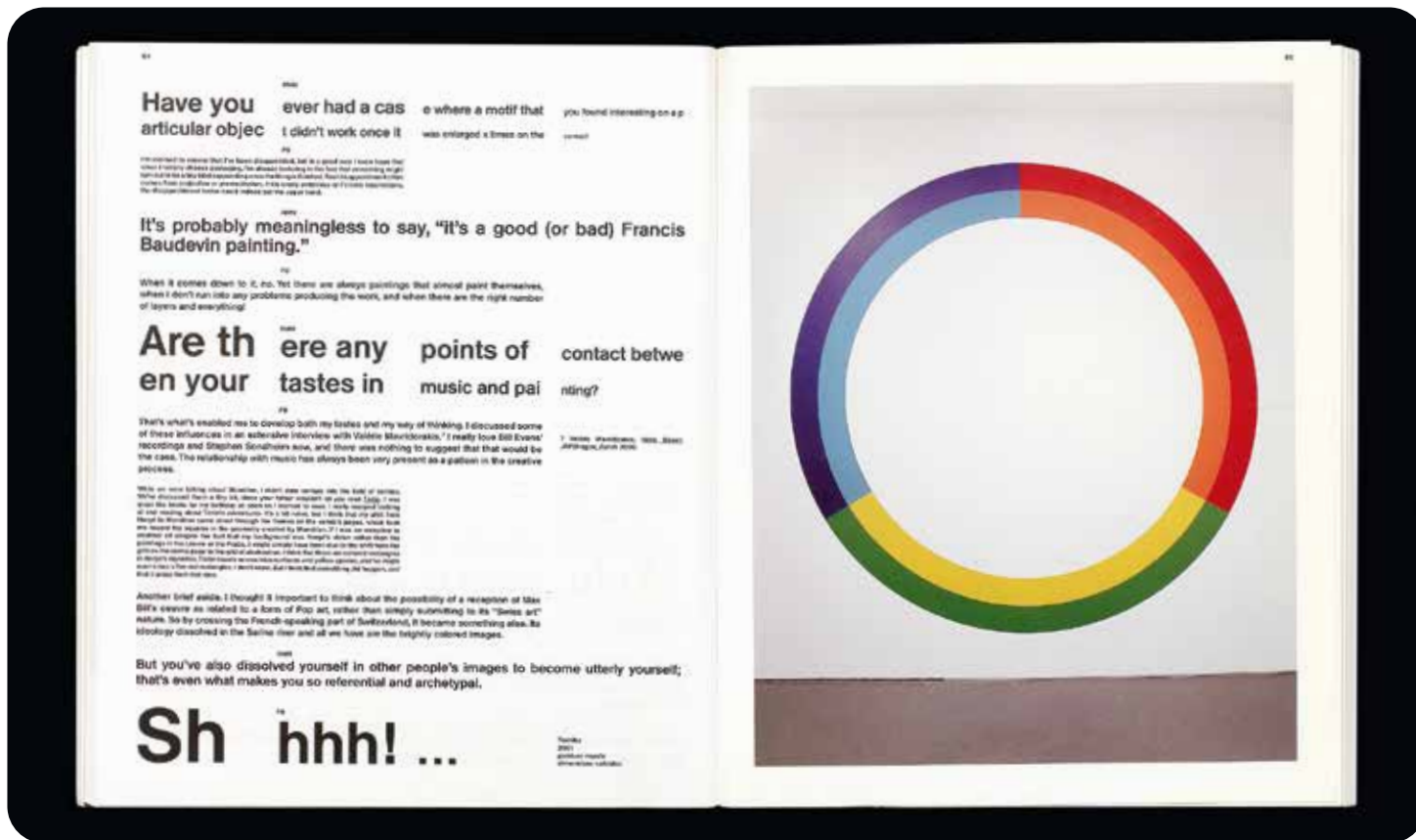
DB: I find it important to reflect on what exactly we are comparing in such a group of designers. Visual comparisons don't lead very far in my view. It's more important to compare the attitudes of the designers, the way they approached design. And there are really big differences in that regard. Yet many of these designers influenced and inspired Manuel and me in various ways at the time when we finished school. Carson, in particular, showed us a way of working which we absolutely wanted to avoid, and we are still grateful to him for this today.
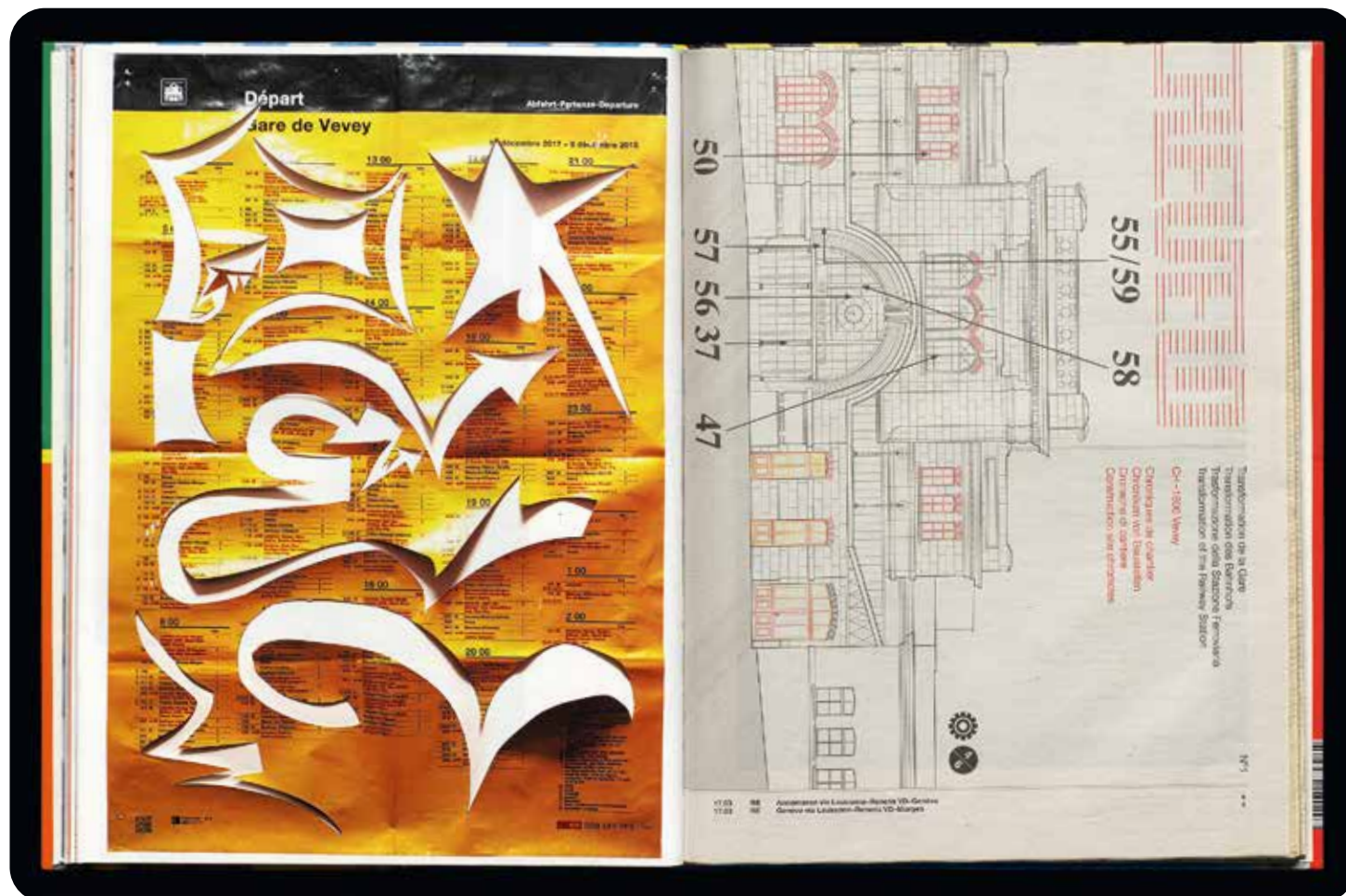
AH: I might be running the risk of causing a generational shock for you, but the one book on the table that was an epiphany for me when it appeared is _Francis Baudevin, Miscellaneous Abstract_ (2009). When I was 16 years old, in 2010, some of my friends from Geneva went to the Open Days at ECAL, and they brought back a book that provided an overview of the type design activities at the school, called _Types We Can Make_. It blew me away to see how a tradition of Swiss modernism, with which I had familiarised myself to some degree, was repurposed in a new way. I remember it as if it was yesterday, and I soon discovered five or six other books that have come to incarnate this period sometimes called neo-modernism to me, including this _Baudevin_ book. To me these examples from around 2009–10 represent a generation of designers in Switzerland who used the new digital tools to reconsider and rework values from earlier generations. It appeared like particles colliding at first, but eventually my friends and me — and many others as well — came to recognise this as a new paradigm. It became so important that even today I don't find it easy to shift and evolve.

GP: As a designer coming from a rather different cultural background, I sometimes wonder if I recognise the 'Swiss Style' more or less easily than Swiss people do. If you are very familiar with the various generations of designers, you must be able to detect many different levels of execution. For me it has rather merged into one tradition, which I identify rather simply, if I just see that there is no crazy typography, for example. So I will be missing a lot of nuances. But I understand that for people who grow up and study in Switzerland it must be quite natural to repurpose work from older generations, some of which might have been their teachers, or their teachers' teachers. At the same time, the 'Swiss Style' has been used quite universally. Even in Lithuania, you will easily find 100 designers who are trying to do 'Swiss Style' today. Some do it better, some do it worse. I am not sure if this is good or bad, but it seems that it is how things developed.
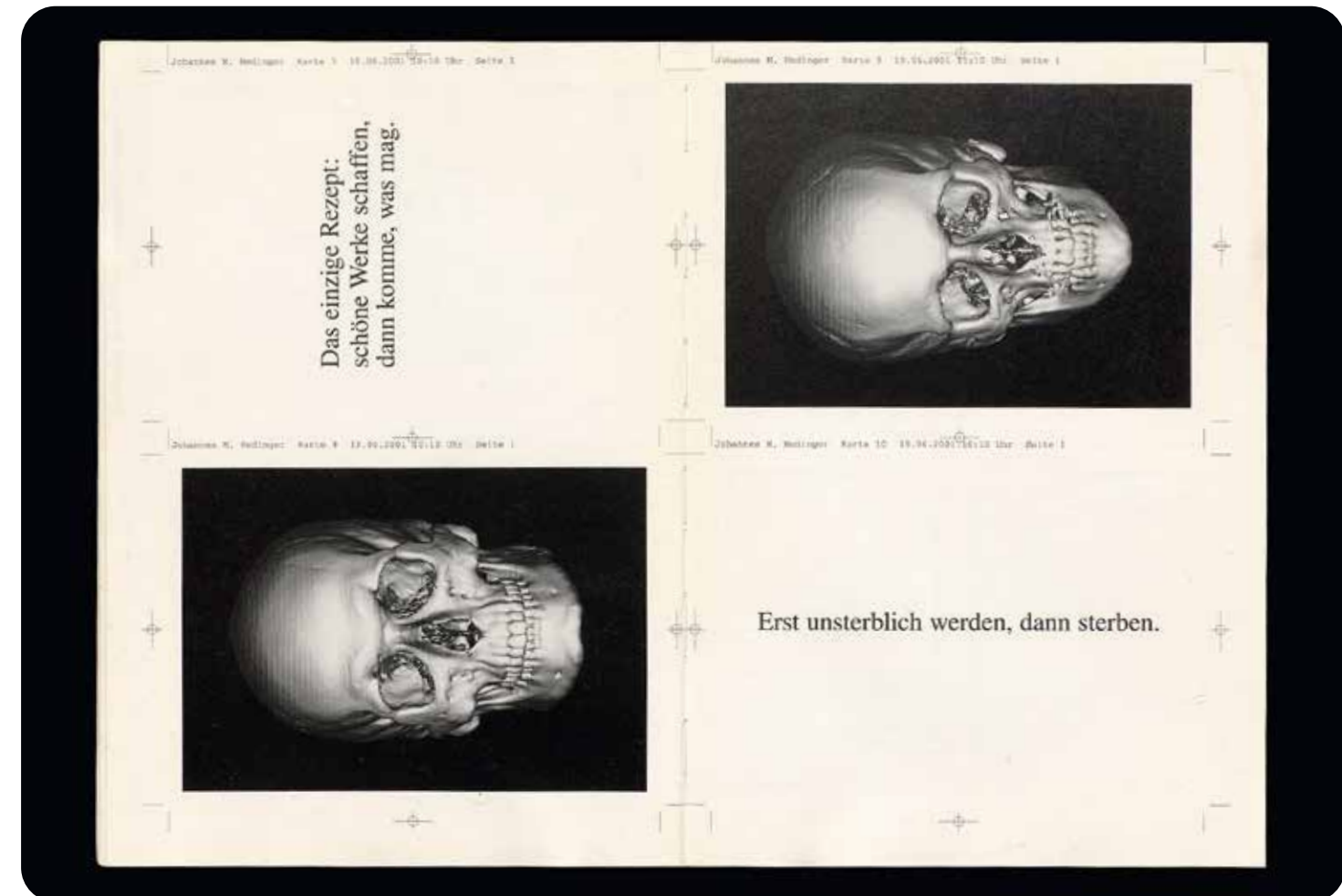
AH: I like to distinguish the methodological reflection and the attitude from the 'Swiss Style' years from the more proper style in terms of aesthetics. It is rather obvious to me that the reflections that started with this generation became a foundational paradigm for the profession of graphic design in general, which, after all, took shape only in the 1950s. In that regard, many of the modernist reflections are still relevant for the profession to this very day. Meanwhile, the style and the aesthetics at some point became somewhat independent from the reflections. The look of the 'Swiss Style' became more of a matter of taste. This probably contributed to more and more people reacting against it. I would say that the return to Swiss modernism among a younger generation in the late 2000s partly signalled a renewed interest in the methodologies and attitudes instead of the aesthetics.
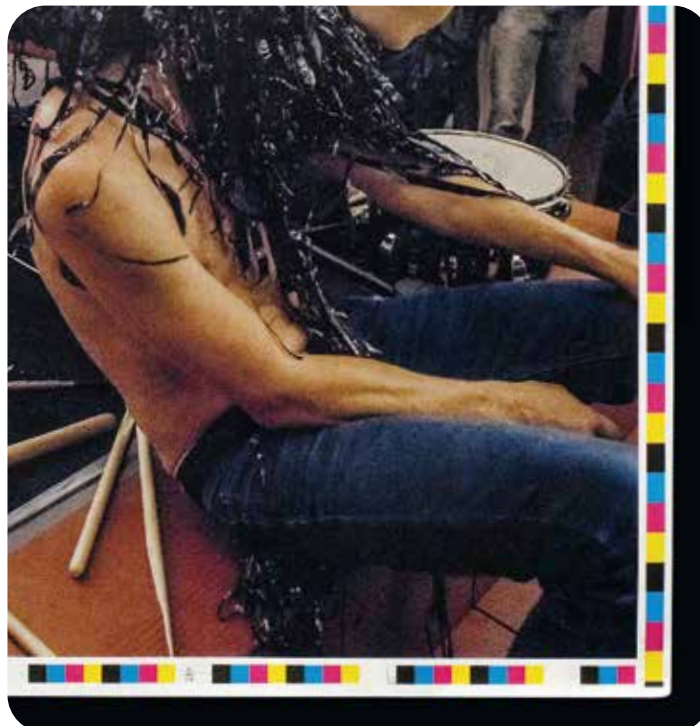
GH: To me the legacy of Swiss modernism in more recent work has to do with the ethos I invoked a moment ago, namely that you try to reveal the conditions of your production. The _Universal_ book, for example, makes explicit the kind of software that was used, which to me aligns it to some degree with work of some US designers experimenting with desktop publishing at the time, such as Carson or people from CalArts. I see the same ethos at work in _Learning from Warsaw_, where the printing process is exposed, or in the way that _Albert Oehlen. In der Wohnung_ (2016) showcases the architectural software that was used and the pixelation resulting from zooming into certain images. _Revelo № 1_ also fits into that ethos, which recycles used printing plates in new combinations and binds them into the book.

GP: I enjoyed _Revelo № 1_ a lot, because it makes very explicit that the designers appreciate the art of printing. At the same time, they experiment with many styles and take a lot of aesthetic decisions. It's also a book that relates to the Swiss industry, in that case the railway company with their expansive network of train stations. I would love to know more about how the designers worked with the train company, how they first made the newspapers and then collected more material for the book. They apparently had access to construction sites at train stations, which is amazing. I find this a very beautiful book in many regards.

AH: In terms of revealing the conditions of production, I was surprised to see _Diplompublikation 2001_, by the fine arts department at HGKZ in Zurich, which I didn't know before. The way it exposes the spine and uses the means of production as a source of design is quite common today, but this is more than 20 years ago, which I find very early. The _Oehlen_ book stands out to me for the way it attempts to transpose a three-dimensional

architectural space into the two-dimensional object of the page. A very different approach to this problem is provided in _WIR SPIELEN (WE PLAY)_ (2013). This presents transcriptions of performance art pieces that were modelled after an experimental theatre play written in 1968. The three-dimensional space explored by the performances is transposed into the written text on the pages.

DB: I find *WIR SPIELEN* a good example for radicality in book design. The reduction to black-and-white typography, with only a little bit of colour in the letters on the silver cover, raises a lot of interesting questions. How exactly do you typeset this phrase, or that one? How do you repurpose a form of a theatre play from almost 50 years ago, how do you access the 1960s? What do you quote stylistically or aesthetically? Many references come to my mind. It is a complex book, but it also makes clear that it demands your full attention. Given that it lacks any images, you don't have any option other than reading, at any point in the book. You have to make a certain effort to access it, but you are also not disturbed by anything. That's why I see this as quite radical.

GP: I also consider it a good case for a radical book since it displays a very different kind of radicality than *Universal* or *Revelo Nº 1*, for example. It's very conceptual, and the way in which it is constructed directly influences your reading practice. The design forces you to read it in a very particular way.
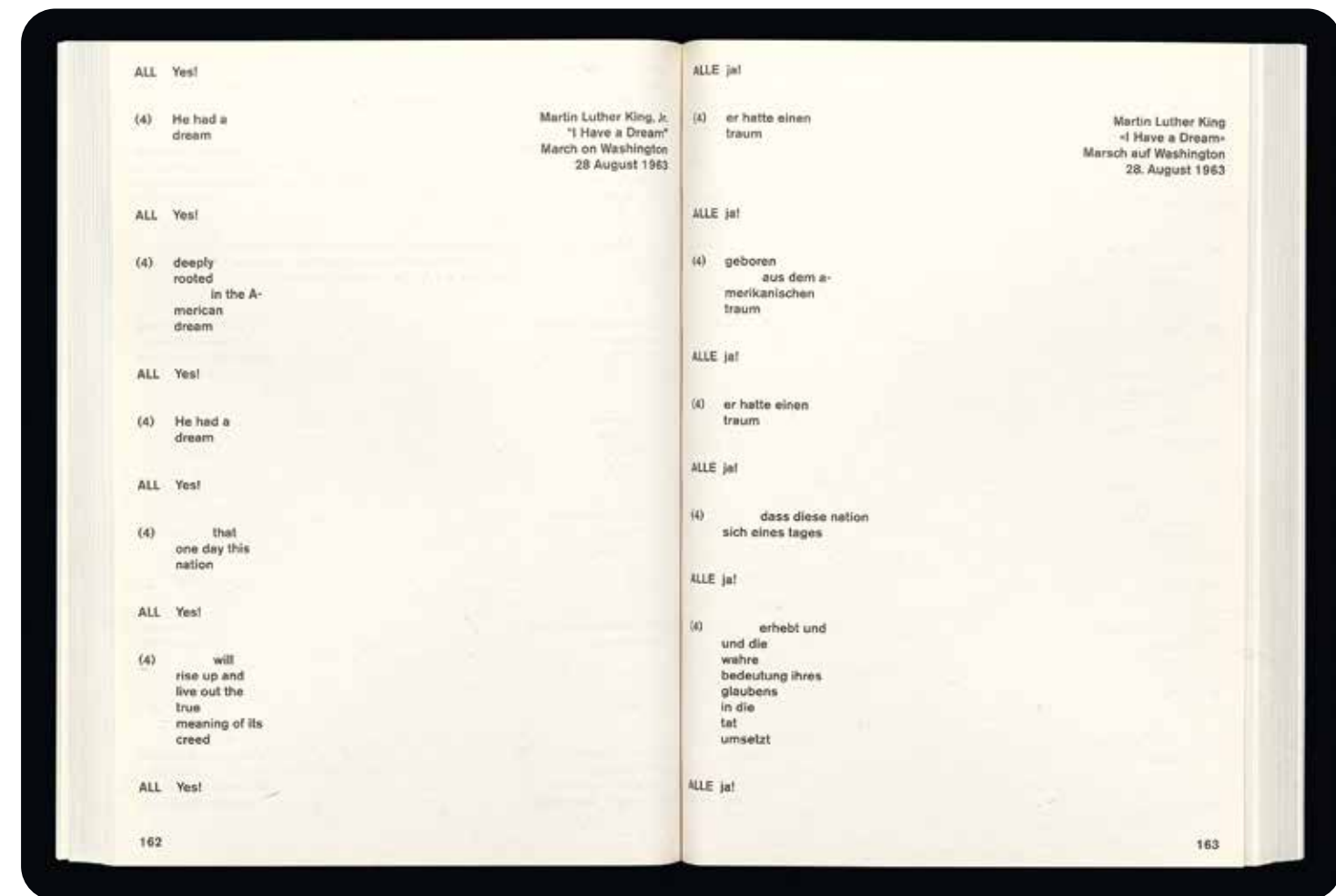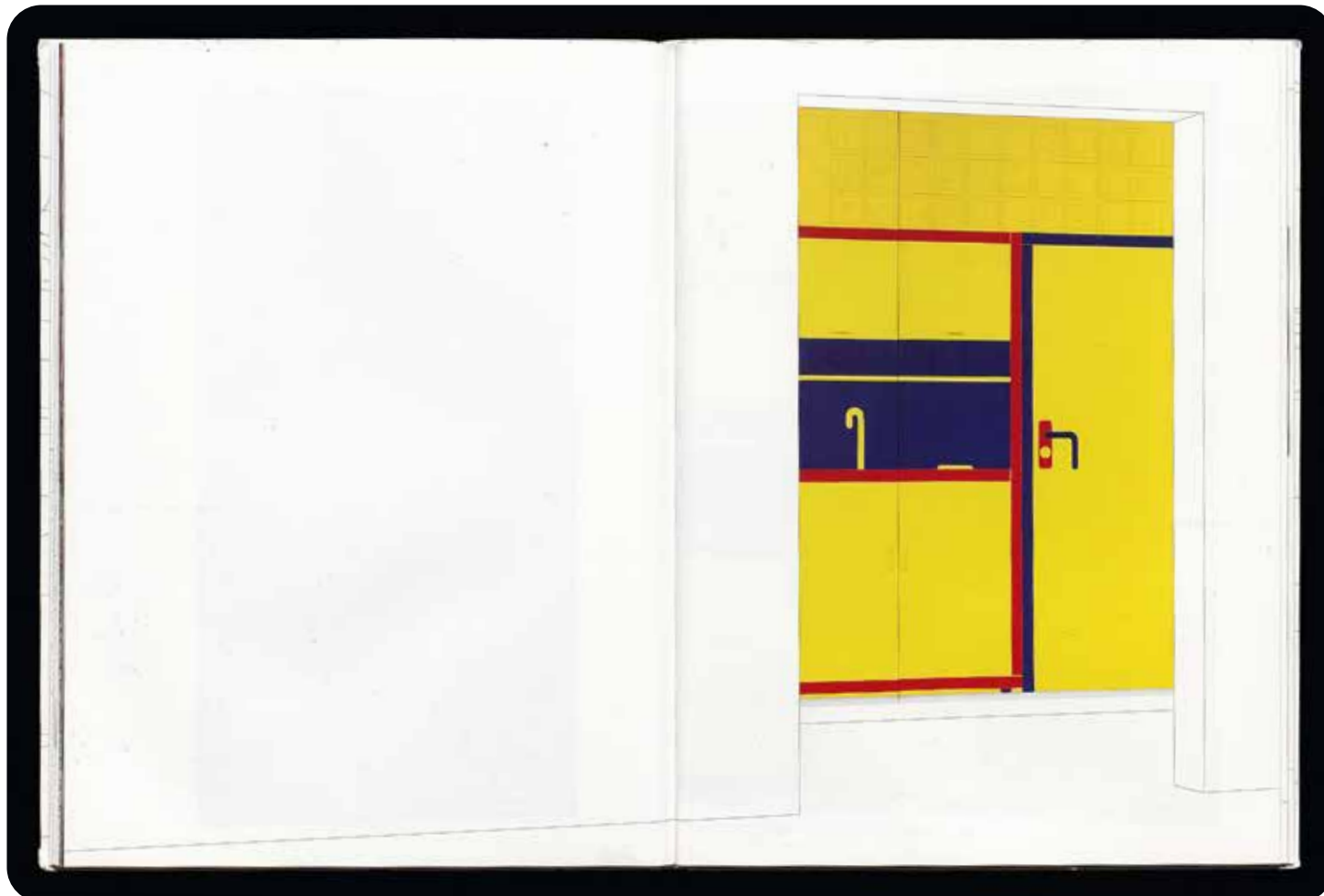
DB: We might compare *WIR SPIELEN* with the second book on our table that has a silver cover, namely *#Ingrid* (2022). While *WIR SPIELEN* only contains text, *#Ingrid* is basically just images. It documents the attempt of social media users to fight back against pictures of a femicide that were illegally leaked online by the Mexican police. The users started to flood the platforms with very different images mostly depicting plants and scenes from nature. So it's both very political and very contemporary. But as a formal object and in its design attitude, I have to say that it comes quite close to the 1999 artist's book *Flowers and Mushrooms* by Fischli/Weiss, although this was obviously addressing an entirely different content.
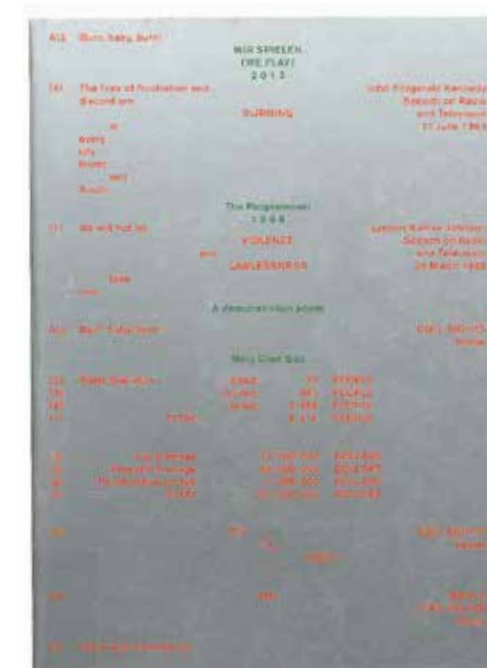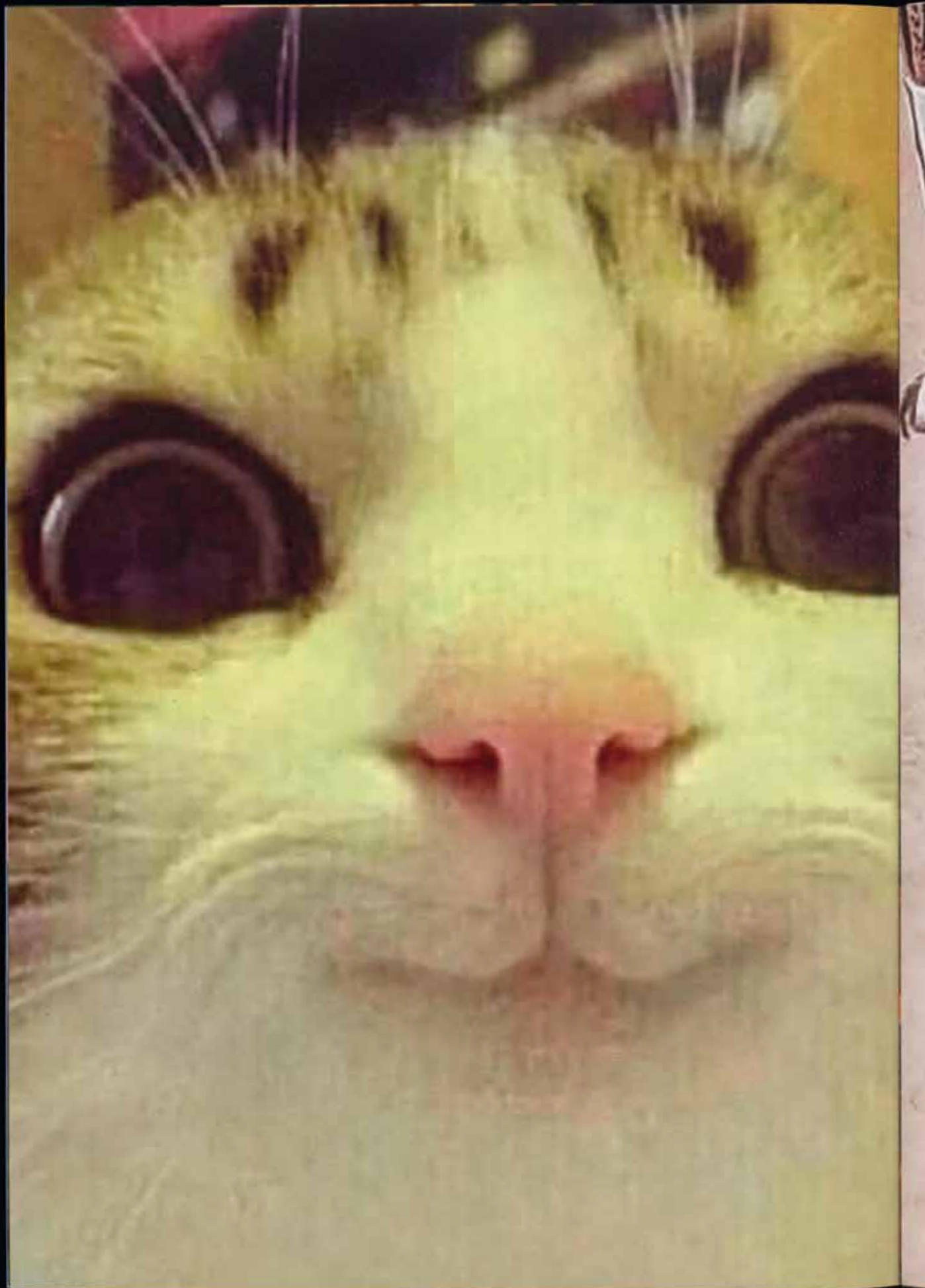
GH: We haven't talked about social media yet. These days, so much graphic design is not actually about what we have physically on the table here in front of us, but more about what is represented online through JPEGs or videos. So for me another question is whether this competition accurately reflects the current moment. I was going to make a joke about a competition of the 'Most Beautiful Swiss Posts'. Because as I said before, most designers today make posts of books, and they spend more time, energy and money making them than on making the books themselves.

AH: But don't you think that the ubiquitous presence of digital media will allow the book to relate even more strongly to its role, providing possibilities to 'freeze' meanings within today's liquid information flows?

GH: I'm not so sure I see that, but maybe this is due to the American context. I don't know if some of you share this experience, but I find that if I walk into a bookstore these days, there's nothing really interesting there. I don't know if it's also like that in Switzerland though.
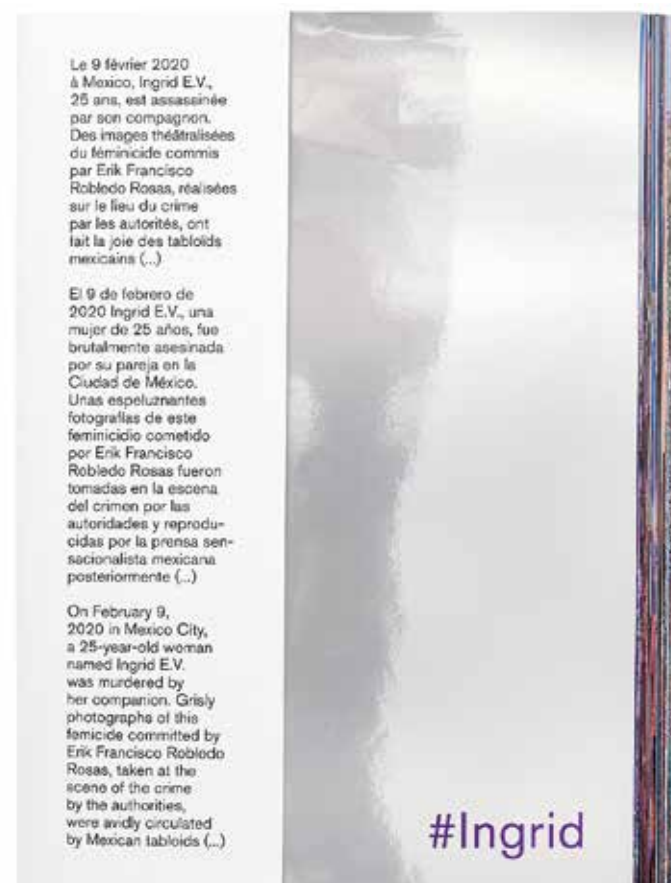
DB: I'm personally not spending much time on Instagram, but thanks to my younger generation at home, social media are also not entirely unfamiliar to me. I have to say that in my view digital content is really made for quick consummation. You hit it and then you zip to the next piece of content. I am honestly wondering what the state of that content is. What is it that I see, swipe over, consume, read, even if it's just a piece of digital text? And how long is it living? If you design a poster and you take a picture once it's up in the streets, you can easily cut it out and put it on Instagram; it's basically copy and paste. And the presentation will be completely fluid. My generation of designers was trained to work with a given format and some rules, but on the web it's more challenging and complex to control the format, or even the grid. It's all constantly changing depending on the media environment of the end user. To me it's like a moving cage.

GP: Do you then think that the book is richer, or is it richer on the web? Or is this not a fair question? I would say that the book is obviously richer if it's here on the table rather than if I see three images of it on the web. But then there are so many other things starting to happen on the web. The #Ingrid book is a good example of this. And it might also provide a good example for the coexistence of books with the web, because this particular content exists in both media.

DB: I still wonder if the living dead on the table in front of us might have a chance of living a bit longer. They are materialised and they are physical. As objects they are frozen in time. They can't move anymore. They can't be variable. What changes over time is only the perception of them, which determines their shifting meaning and their status.

GH: Certain books have become memes — having a book in your hand has become an indication of a certain status on social media. The book takes on an entirely different function, as there seems to be value in buying it and posting it. Maybe that's part of the new role of a book. As is generally the case with social

media, such posts accelerate the image of the book, the designer and their friends. This can sometimes affect the vibration of a work of the designers, or how a work is perceived. I often wonder if in these conditions it is still possible to create new paradigms with a work. What do the internet, social media and algorithms do to criticism? Is it still possible to create radical work in this context today? How do you see this in Swiss design and culture?

AH: I find that it has become very difficult to be radical or to introduce a new paradigm in terms of aesthetics. In theory, or to judge from history, we would expect the younger to react to the older, but this is not really happening. I would say that instead of such a linear orientation, we rather live with a 360-degree view today, which demands novel ways of interaction to produce new values. And it's not specific to book design or graphic design, it's much more generally the case in the cultural industry. This also makes criticism complex to develop, which is quite paradoxical given how important criticism was for the historical development of the visual and applied arts.

GP: As a woman, and as a feminist, I would say that the gender imbalance in modernism is the elephant in the room. The modernist paradigms were created by men, they were understood and received by men, and they were recreated by men. Today women have finally gained a similar kind of access to the graphic design field, and so I wonder if it is on the shoulders of women to question the modernist paradigms and react against them. In any case, I hope that the questioning can continue in some way. It's also necessary to decolonise modernism, for example. We all have to basically decolonise our brains. This is not an easy task, and we might not yet know how to approach it. But maybe it will happen eventually.

STACK OF BOOKS FOR THE ROUND TABLE
'AFTER MODERNISM'

Swissair. Flugzeuge über fünf Jahrzehne
Bert Diener, ed.

Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau
DESIGN: Stephan Bundi, Roland Eichenberger, Fritz Girardin, Richard Schilliger
PRINTING: Sauerländer, Aarau
Awarded in 1986

Schattenschlag
Peter Uhlmann

Kranich-Verlag, Zollikon
DESIGN: Kaspar Mühlemann
PRINTING: Wolfau-Druck Rudolf Mühlemann, Weinfelden
Awarded in 1989

Klick
Erich Grasdorf

Edition A, Zürich
DESIGN: André Hefti
PRINTING: J. E. Wolfensberger, Zürich
Awarded in 1991

Bruno Munari. Die Luft sichtbar machen.
Far vedere l'aria. Ein visuelles Lesebuch
zu Bruno Munari
Claude Lichtenstein, Alfredo W. Häberli

Lars Müller, Baden
DESIGN: Atelier Lars Müller
PRINTING: Waser Druck, Buchs (ZH)
Awarded in 1995

Face to Face
François Robert, Jean Robert

Lars Müller, Baden
DESIGN: Robert + Durrer, Zürich
PRINTING: Waser Druck, Buchs (ZH)
Awarded in 1995

Universal. Überall — immer — alles
Martin Heller, Cornel Windlin, eds.

Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich
DESIGN: Cornel Windlin
PRINTING: J. E. Wolfensberger, Zürich, Atelier Lorenz Boegli, Zürich
Awarded in 1996

Diplompublikation 2001
Studiengang Bildende Kunst HGKZ Zürich

edition fink, Verlag für zeitgenössische Kunst, Zürich
DESIGN: Georg Rutishauser in collaboration with students from HGKZ, Zürich
PRINTING: Druckerei Odermatt, Dallenwil
Awarded in 2001

Fink Forward — The Collection / Connection
Various

edition fink, Verlag für zeitgenössische Kunst, Zürich
DESIGN: Georg Rutishauser, Iza Hren
PRINTING: Lichtdruck, Dielsdorf
Awarded in 2003

Gary Hume. American Tan
White Cube, London, ed.

White Cube, London (UK)
DESIGN: Laurent Benner, Jonathan Hares
PRINTING: Druckerei Odermatt, Dallenwil
Awarded in 2007

Arosa. Die Moderne in den Bergen
Marcel Just, Christof Kübler, Matthias Noell, Renzo Semadeni, eds.

gta Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Prill & Vieceli (Tania Prill, Alberto Vieceli), Cornelia Diethelm, Ruth Amstutz
PRINTING: Merkur Druck, Langenthal
Awarded in 2007

Ein Tag im Leben von. Portraits aus über zwanzig Jahren, ausgewählt von Walter Keller
Das Magazin, ed.

Salis Verlag, Zürich
DESIGN: Elektrosmog (Valentin Hindermann, Marco Walser, Simone Koller)
PRINTING: Offsetdruckerei Karl Grammlich, Pliezhausen (DE)
Awarded in 2007

Kiosk. Modes of Multiplication
Christoph Keller, Michael Lailach, eds.

JRP|Ringier, Zürich
DESIGN: Müller & Wesse (Stephan Müller, Tanja Wesse), Noël Leu, Stephanie Rudolph
PRINTING: Messedruck Leipzig, Leipzig (DE)
Awarded in 2008

Francis Baudevin. Miscellaneous Abstract
Lionel Bovier, ed.

JRP|Ringier, Zürich
DESIGN: Gavillet & Rust (Gilles Gavillet, David Rust), Nicolas Eigenheer
PRINTING: Musumeci, Quart (IT)
Awarded in 2009

Gestaltung Werk Gesellschaft. 100 Jahre Schweizerischer Werkbund SWB
Thomas Gnägi, Bernd Nicolai, Jasmine Wohlwend Piai, eds.

Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, Zürich
DESIGN: Simone Koller
PRINTING: DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg, Altenburg (DE)
Awarded in 2013

Learning from Warsaw
Nele Dechmann, Nicola Ruffo, Agnieszka Sosnowska, eds.

Kodoji Press, Baden; Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art; Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, Warszawa (PL)
DESIGN: Atlas Studio (Martin Andereggen, Claudio Gasser, Jonas Wandeler)
PRINTING: Drukarnia Argraf, Warszawa (PL)
Awarded in 2013

WIR SPIELEN (WE PLAY)
Mary Ellen Solt, Freja Bäckman, Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst

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Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin (DE)
DESIGN: Vela Arbutina
PRINTING: Druckerei Conrad, Berlin (DE)
Awarded in 2013

Albert Oehlen. In der Wohnung
Fredi Fischli, Niels Olsen, eds.

Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich; STUDIOLO, Zürich
DESIGN: Teo Schifferli, Daniel Hättenschwiller
PRINTING: DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg, Altenburg (DE)
Awarded in 2015

Donatella Bernardi. Into Your Solar Plexus
Kunsthalle Bern, ed.

Humboldt Books, Milano (IT)
DESIGN: Noémie Gygax
PRINTING: Musumeci, Quart (IT)
Awarded in 2016

Vierzig Jahre Gegenwart. Die Galerie Wilma Lock in St. Gallen
Gerhard Mack, ed.

Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, Zürich
DESIGN: Samuel Bänziger, Rosario Florio, Larissa Kasper
PRINTING: DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg, Altenburg (DE)
Awarded in 2017

Edition Digital Culture
Dominik Landwehr, ed.

Christoph Merian Verlag, Basel
DESIGN: Huber/Sterzinger (Gregor Huber, Ivan Sterzinger)
PRINTING: Kösel, Altusried-Krugzell (DE)
Awarded in 2019

Revelo №1. Chroniques de chantier. Transformation de la Gare, CH-1800 Vevey.
Association Amaretto, ed.

Association Amaretto, Lausanne
DESIGN: Eurostandard (Pierrick Brégeon, Clément Rouzaud)
PRINTING: Tamedia—CIL, Bussigny
Awarded in 2020

#Ingrid
Zoé Aubry

RVB Books, Paris (FR)
DESIGN: Zoé Aubry
PRINTING: Musumeci, Quart (IT)
Awarded in 2022

The Weight of Images

AKOSUA VIKTORIA ADU-SANYAH is a German-Ghanaian artist based in Zurich. She examines the relationship between photographic materiality and the human condition through process-oriented and iterative methods. Her installations have been shown in several art and photography institutions internationally. *ROUGH TIDE,* her first monograph, crafted in a colour darkroom, was published with edition fink in 2024.

ÉMILIE FERRAT is an independent graphic designer based in Paris specialising in editorial design, lettering and visual identity development. After graduating from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 2015, she co-founded the graphic design studio and exhibition space Espace Ness as well as the publishing house Ness Books with Julie Héneault and Sophie Rentien Lando (2018). She currently teaches editorial design at ENSBA Lyon.

MARC ROIG BLESA and ROGIER DELFOS initiated the art collective WERKER in Amsterdam in 2009, releasing ten issues of a publication called *Werker Magazine.* Since then, Werker collective have explored a variety of media, including installation, performance, video, textile and more, while also holding community projects, reading groups and workshops. They maintain an archive of 3,000+ historical and contemporary documents related to the legacy of self-organised radical documentary practices.

In the 1950s, some of the annual catalogues of the competition discussed the ratio of 'optical books' among the awarded publications. Primarily designating 'photography books' and 'art books', the term potentially included all types of publications beyond simple books of text. This was at a time when the limitations of metal type made it a constant challenge to integrate high-quality images in a book, which were frequently printed on separate sheets. With phototypesetting and offset printing, it became easier to combine text and images, and digitally produced documents have integrated them seamlessly from rather early on. Over time, these technological developments contributed to making the 'optical book' a much larger and more diverse group. They also had the effect that 'optical books' (if this is still an apt term today) have more recently constituted the absolute majority of publications that are awarded in the competition.

At the same time, the field of 'photography' has evolved considerably in terms of technology, aesthetics, approaches, institutional affiliations, critical discourses and more. A particular trajectory – encompassing several of these dimensions – has led photography to be accepted into the ranks of the 'high' visual arts, after many decades in which it had been confined to the 'lower' realms of journalism, documentation or similar. This is reflected in the fact that photography books from the first decades of the Swiss competition mostly presented 'applied' photography, including journalistic reports, travel photography and documentation of architecture, sculpture or other objects. In the most recent decades, many awarded books have featured work from visual artists that include photography in their often multi-media practices.

Given the richness and complexity of the discourse on 'photography' alone, chronicling and reflecting on some of the transformations of photography books is not the lightest of undertakings. While the interpretation of the photographic material is often controversial enough, the way it is selected, edited and presented in the form of a book raises another set of questions, including some concerning the production and materiality of photo books. WERKER (MARC ROIG BLESA & ROGIER DELFOS, Amsterdam) agreed to test the waters with ÉMILIE FERRAT (Paris) and AKOSUA VIKTORIA ADU-SANYAH (Zurich).

MARC ROIG BLESA: The first books that you selected for this round table, the ones from the 1950s by René Gardi, Emil Schulthess and Henriette Grindat, remind me of the 1955 *Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, organised by Edward Steichen. The exhibition presented a strong idea of a humanist photo narrative that aligned with propaganda for the Western world following the Second World War. It's interesting to see how the earliest books on the table relate to that tradition. But then we also have a book on the work of August Sander, *Menschen ohne Maske* (1971), with some pictures dating back to the Weimar Republic. Sander can be seen as one of the beginnings of conceptual photography. His attempt at making a catalogue of professions and his investigation into how making an image could inform the identity of the person, takes a much more visionary position within photography than many books from the 1950s, which are more inclined towards romanticised or folkloric ideas of human beings. And moving to the more contemporary positions represented in this selection, there are various kinds of vernacular imagery, while other books address how new media and the internet are changing the circulation of images.

MENSCHEN OHNE MASKE
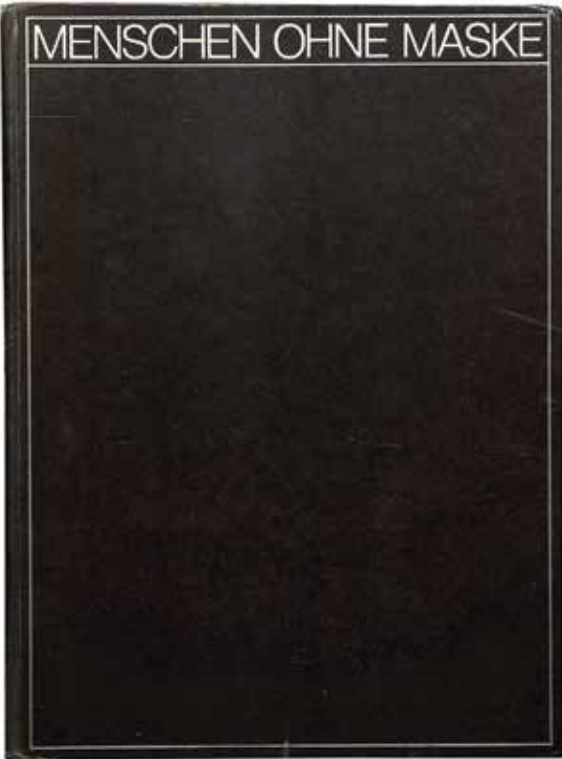
ROGIER DELFOS: It is a beautiful selection that touches upon many different ways of image-making and many different discourses related to photographic practices of the last 80 years. Apparently many of these developments in photography were reflected in the Swiss selection to some degree.

AKOSUA VIKTORIA ADU-SANYAH: I really love August Sander and even own a couple of pieces. In 2022, the Sander estate became the first to make its archive available as NFTs, and it was free apart from the Ethereum transaction fees. Ten thousand scans of contact prints were released, and each wallet could own a maximum of five. It was a novel way to make estates accessible to the public. But to talk more specifically about the book from 1971, there are two design ideas that I find particularly moving. The first are certain pages that present Sander's large photos in small sizes in a layout that makes them look like contact prints, with short descriptions underneath. Sander worked with large-format photography, so you don't print contact sheets like the ones you'd make when you work with a roll of film. The large-format prints sometimes tend to emphasise the monumentality of portraits, which can almost appear iconic, and I find that the design of this imitated contact sheet page works against this tendency. The second design decision that caught my attention was the inversion of black and white for the background of the photos. Using blackness where there is traditionally whiteness in the photographic process is something I pursue a lot in my own work. I was wondering how they did it in the book. It seems to be more a book black than a photographically exposed black, but it creates a kind of illusion of an inverted light table. So these are two aspects of photographic materiality that I find addressed in remarkable ways in the design of this book.


ÉMILIE FERRAT: The Sander book is also one that I find beautiful in terms of layout. I am not as familiar as you are with the practice and technique of photography, and for that reason I enjoy listening to you talking about certain editorial decisions, deciphered from your perspective, while I am looking at the publications from the point of view of a book designer. I found many spreads really strong in this book, although this is also tied to the quality and depth of Sander's work. And what you are describing about these references to contact sheets in the layout resonated with me quite strongly. Because often when making publications, people have their contact sheets or visual material ready, with their own notes scribbled beneath each image, and

the challenge for the designer is how to translate that it into a publication. How do you attribute the work properly? How do you move from one's personal approach of archiving to a more mechanical or practical gesture? These are important questions, and your remarks help me better understand some of the choices made by the designers of the Sander book.
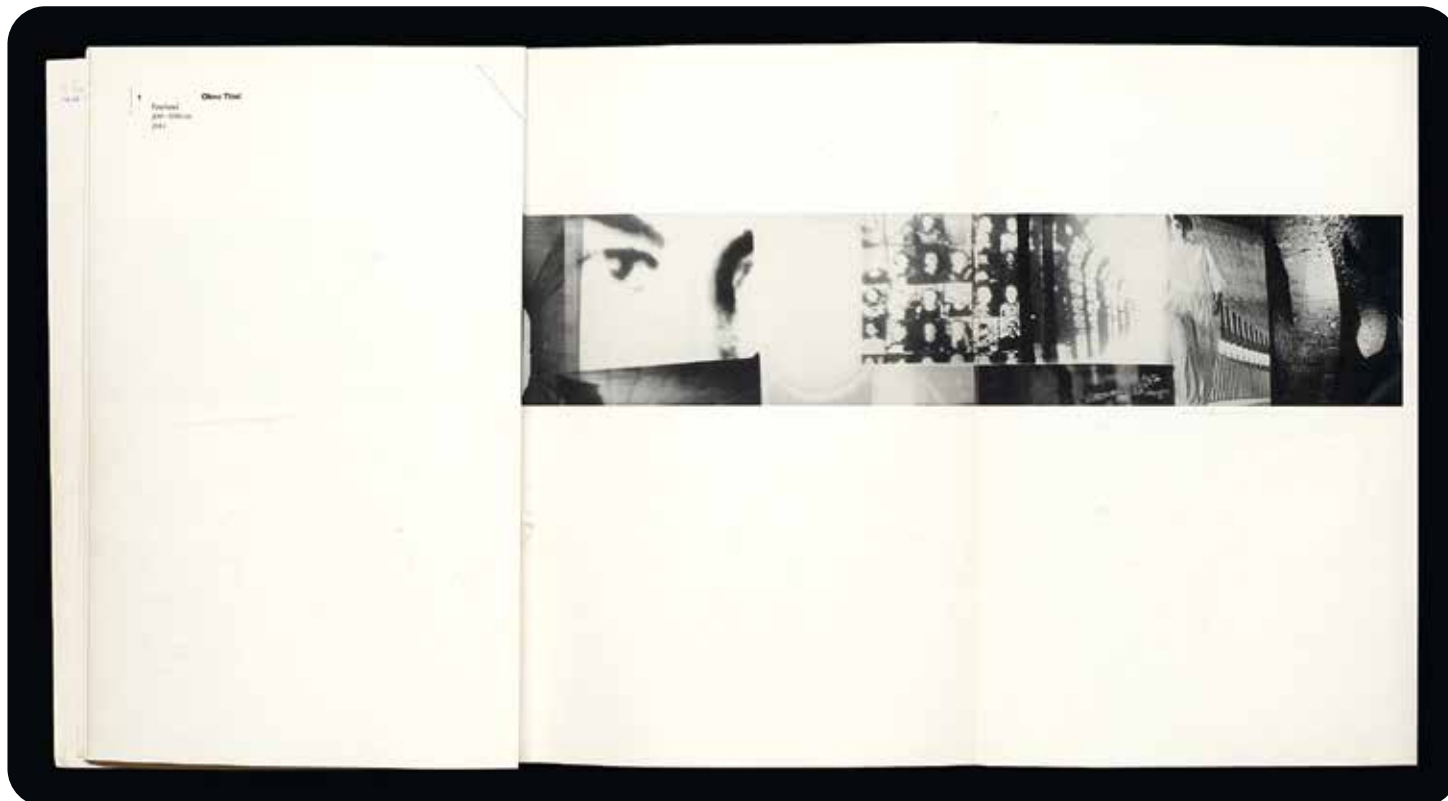

AVA-S: My other two favourite books in this selection are from the 1990s: _Cécile Wick. Fotoarbeiten_ (1990), and _Annelies Štrba. Shades of Time_ (1997). I didn't know these two and I was surprised to see them. The first thing that struck me was how the Wick book addresses the issue of scale in photography. I guess there is a limit to how large a book can be, although Katja Jug's _Frozen Unfrozen_ (2021) indicates that some people are questioning this. But let's say there is a somewhat standard size that a book usually has. Meanwhile, photographs can have many different scales, and some are really large, addressing the idea that the viewer actually encounters a photograph versus perceiving a photograph mostly as representative of something. Two images made from the same negative are entirely different images if one has the size of a small screen and the other is larger than life-size, and the latter also cannot just be randomly reproduced, it becomes a unique object. Some of Cécile Wick's photographs were such large, unique objects; there is a work here from 1984 that was one by ten metres. To make such a work you must be very aware of the relationship between the image and the human body. And it stunned me to see how the designer succeeded in manifesting that awareness on the much smaller scale of the book, almost replicating that moment of encounter with a photograph. He solved it by utilising a lot of negative space and by assigning the photograph a very peculiar position on the spread. This has the effect of creating a new space in the book, instead of just trying to replicate an exhibition. I find this a very early example for such a concern about the encounter with photography, and it gives the work a lot of dignity.

MRB: The book by Cécile Wick also proposes a kind of alternative temporality with the different exposures overlapping. It's rather typical for experimental photography from the 1990s, which was very interested in grasping how the processes of inscription and of memory function in photography, sometimes going back to the camera obscura and pinhole cameras. In comparison, the books on the table from the 1950s are trying to be more assertive about what they show. They are saying: 'Here you can see how humans live or how a landscape looks at a certain place on Earth.' In the Wick book, representation is much more complex and multi-layered. But I also like the book by Annelies Štrba that you only briefly mentioned. To me this book addresses what I would call the politics of the family album. We are born with a picture, and with a gender, and then all these constructions of identity and class ensue, often with photography playing an important part. So to me Štrba's project is to take control of the family album. I was reminded of Jo Spence, a British photographer from the 1970s, who made a work series called _Beyond the Family Album_ (1979). Finally, I would like to highlight the book _Swiss Life_ by Luc Chessex (1987), which is also very aware of how images punctuate our lives in general and the urban space in particular. It's a meta-book about images, including symbols and icons. For example, how can the idea of 'I love Switzerland' be such a simple icon as the one Chessex photographed? How is national identity a process of representation, something that is performed and expressed through image-making?
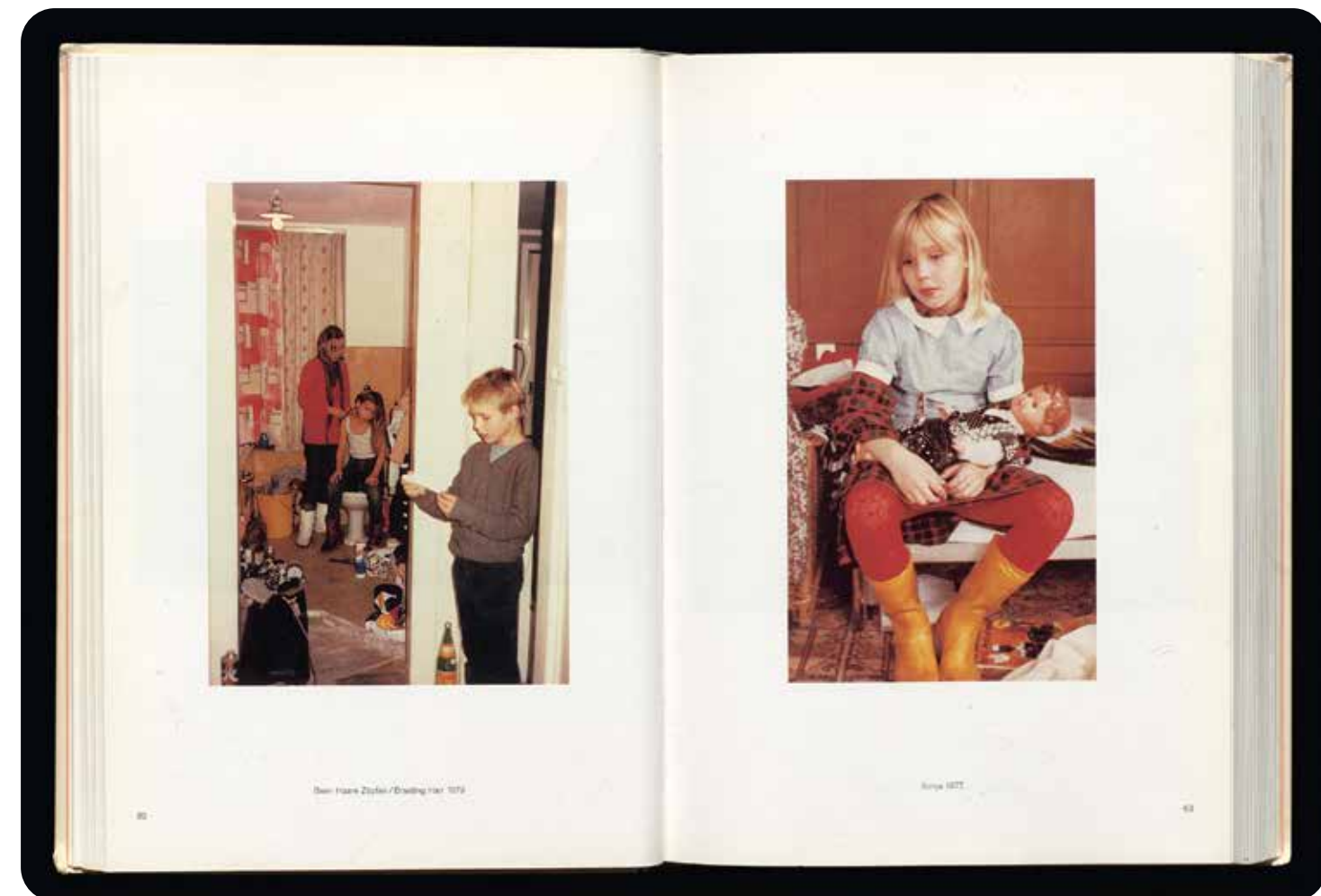
ÉF: The photographer wrote texts to accompany these images, and in the book's introduction he explains that he is from Lausanne and returned to Switzerland after living and working abroad for several years. First in Cuba, where he became a photojournalist for the official state news agency Prensa Latina in the 1960s, and then on the African continent, reporting for the International Committee of the Red Cross. Chessex states that he felt a strong disconnect with Switzerland upon return, and that he had difficulties relating to his home country's mentality

and 'coldness'. I find that the distance and this stepping-back is clearly perceptible in these images. He seems to have had a kind of anti-gaze on his own country, lacking any affective or even inherited relationship. There are very few persons in the photos, and instead we see a lot of written messages, urban infrastructures, typographical signs, and so on.

MRB: There is a little bit of American street photography involved, but a more materialistic approach can also be felt, such as Allan Sekula's, for example. I would say that there are some evocative or emotional moments in the book, but many images are lacking depth and are instead examining surfaces: a broken window, the metro, more windows, glass, escalators.
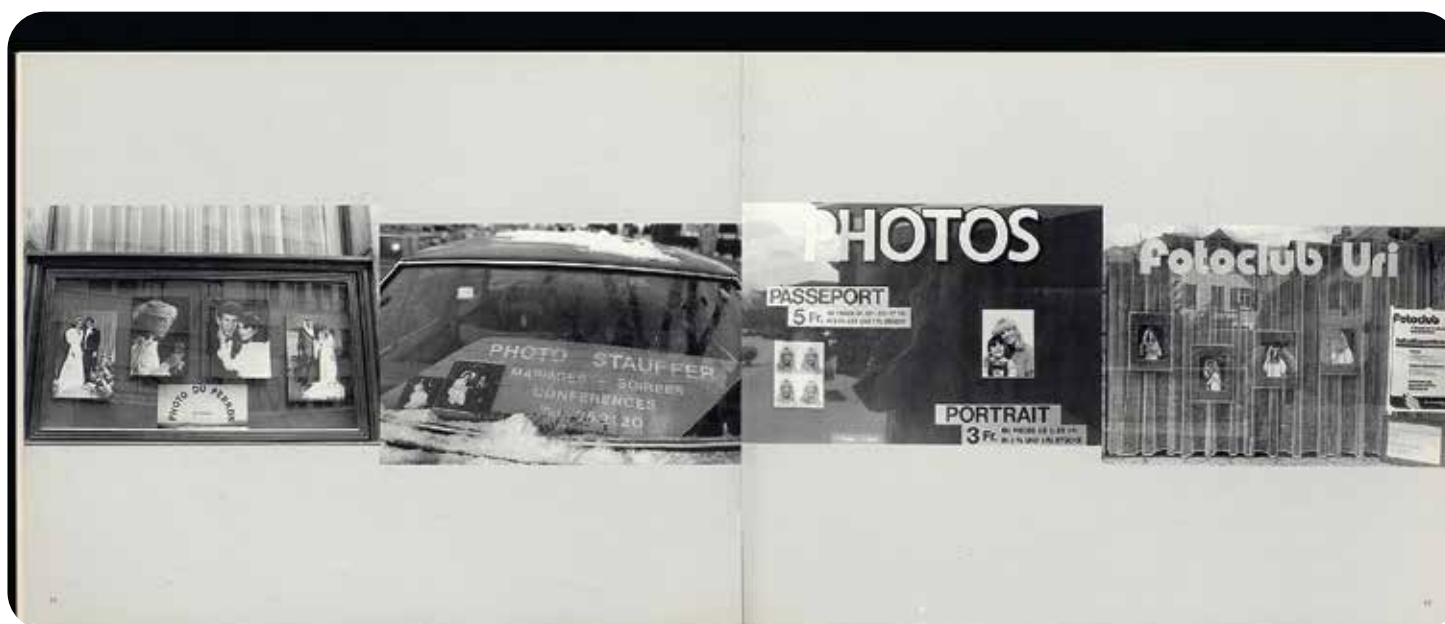
AVA-S: I don't want to be cynical, but I am genuinely wondering whether this whole contemporary critique of the so-called gaze, which was alluded to, actually implies that a certain gaze should consequently be censored or replaced? Because what other gaze could you potentially have but your own? For example, I assume that the 1954 book by René Gardi, *Der schwarze Hephästus*, would be the first that we criticise for its gaze. It's a Swiss photographer's gaze on northern Cameroon, and the accompanying German text uses the N-word throughout, as was common at the time. I have no intention to defend this work, but still I would say that the book testifies to an attempt to make accessible the level of sophistication in the craftsmanship of this particular people. Which tools they are using, who is involved in the work, and so on. I wonder what other gaze would have been possible, and so I find the book an important testimony to have. I recommend reading Olivette Otele's book *African Europeans* (2020), which goes rather far back in time and which documents, among other things, the amazement of white people and Europeans travelling to African countries and discovering and respecting things that they weren't yet able to do. It's a time before the collective

pain and trauma of colonialism that today we greatly emphasise in the relationship between Africans and Europeans.

RD: I agree that historical documents like this are very relevant for us to have. It's how we deal in the Werker Collective with photographic documents, which we consider relevant tools to look at history. We are trying to read from them what was happening at a certain time, what was common, and how we can look at those documents from a distance today.
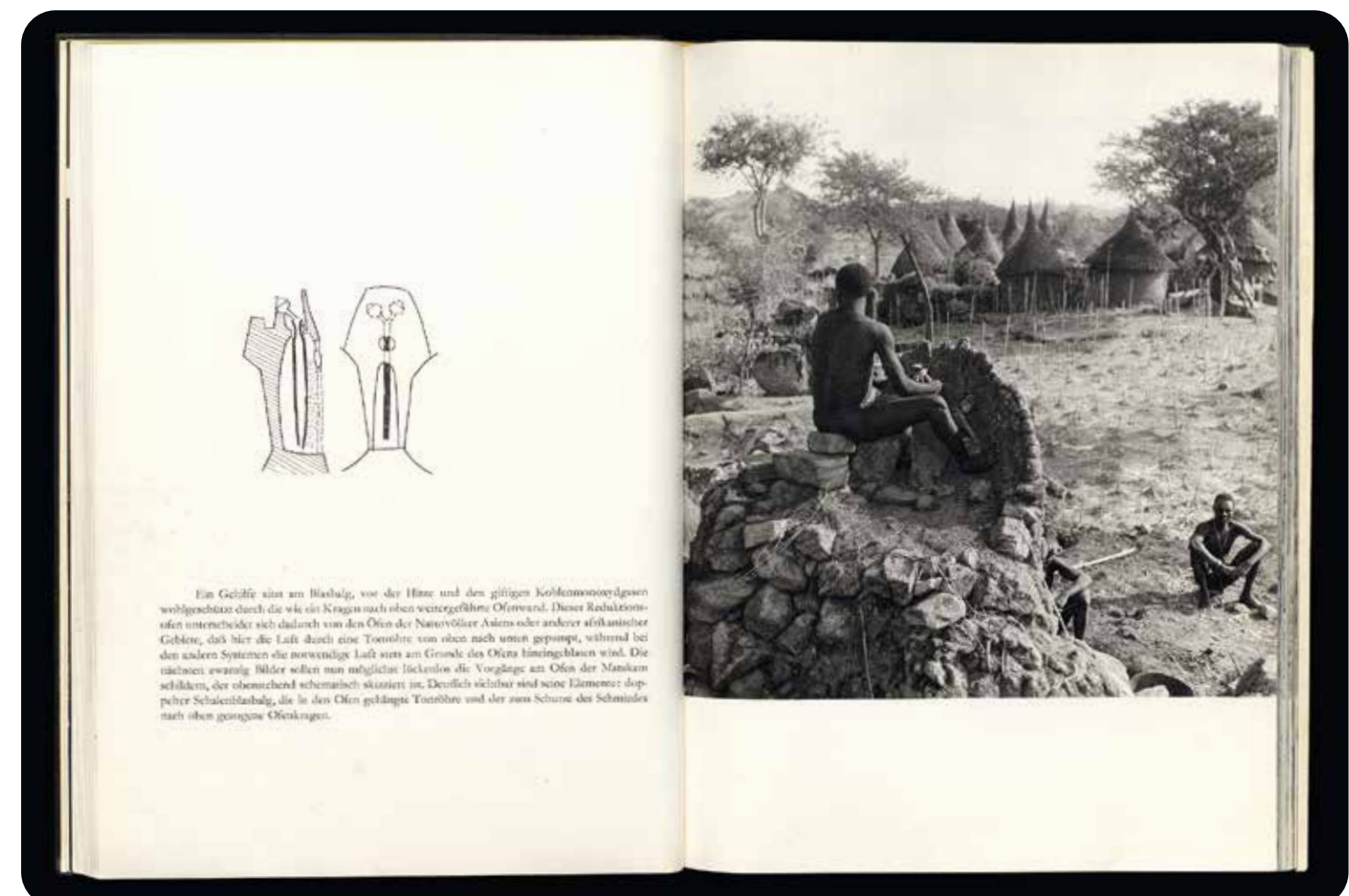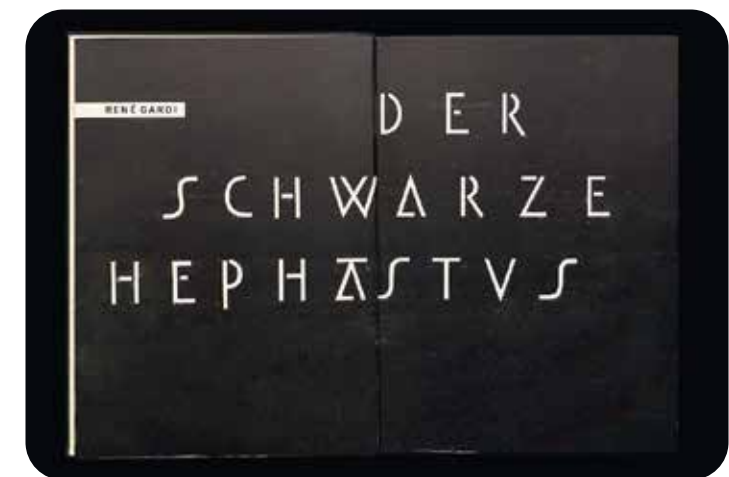
ÉF: What struck me as well about Gardi's book was the title alluding to Greek mythology, thus relating northern Cameroonian blacksmiths' ancient art of extracting and transforming iron to the symbolism associated with the figure of Hephaestus. In that sense the book goes beyond the idea of photographing people from another culture — it's transposing a third culture and discursive order onto the other, by seizing mythology's evocative power. The typeface used for the title supports this analogy, with some letters formally referencing either ancient Greek or Old Latin characters. I'm not quite sure how to formulate this properly, but I find it very awkward and inappropriate to decontextualise an ancient African tradition by applying a very different ancient and mythological language, as if to emphasise that what one sees is really rooted culturally and is almost magical or divine. It reminds me of Pier Paolo Pasolini's documentary film from 1970, *Notes Towards an African Orestes*. The film shows how Pasolini planned to transpose Aeschylus's tragedy *The Oresteia* into contemporary Africa. He went location scouting in Uganda and Tanzania (if I'm not mistaken) and looked for local actors that could embody the various characters, gestures and attitudes. The movie *African Orestes* was never produced in the end, and it is actually implied in the documentary that Pasolini started to have doubts about the project following a review session with a group of African students from the University of Rome. The students politely but clearly tell Pasolini that the primeval African continent he imagined and romanticised had little to do with the complex, diverse realities of African countries, and that treating them as primal settings for an ancient European story was foolish. Compared to Gardi's book from 15 years earlier, Pasolini's approach is a bit broader and more self-reflective, but it is very similar in that he also tries to make elaborations about ancient African cultures via Greek mythology. In comparison, the other 1950s book about an African country, Henriette Grindat's <u>Algérie</u> (1956), is rather different. It follows something closer to an archival approach, which seems to have been a more typical and normalised gesture for white researchers trying to document foreign countries at the time.

L'homme et son éventail chasse-mouches. C'est l'image de sa dignité : il se repose, sirote son thé, somnolant au long du jour en égrenant son chapelet. Sa prière tient en un seul mot murmuré dans un souffle : « Allah, Allah... »
Les enfants traversent l'enfer blanc, où les palmiers flambent, pour faire la corvée d'eau.

MRB: Grindat gives a romanticising, orientalist representation of the countryside of Algeria, which is particularly strange given that the war of independence started shortly before the book came out, in 1954. There seems to be no space in the book for any kind of representation of the anti-colonial emancipation. And, interestingly, it's presented solely from the eyes of European people, not in an exchange or collaboration with the local population.

ÉF: It is true when it comes to the images that we see at first glance, but the more subtle relation of the book to the war of independence can't be clearly determined in my view. When the leader of the National Liberation Front (FLN) was arrested in 1955, his successor re-established the FLN in the capital by creating the Autonomous Zone of Algiers (ZAA). He also intensified the insurgency, with more than a hundred major attacks between June and September 1956, in an attempt to bring more international attention to Algeria's struggle for emancipation and autonomy. The fact that the pictures in this book were taken right before these significant events indicates that the political tension couldn't have been ignored by anyone present in the country at that time. That's why I wonder if it

wasn't actually important to have such a document of that precise moment available. If you think of the movie *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), where you see women hiding bombs and weapons under their white dresses or in their baskets, then you might start seeing the photographs in the book differently as well. In reverse, the book also made me think that some scenes from *The Battle of Algiers*, which can be perceived as rather stylised or romantic now, might actually have been quite accurate. By the way, the writer of the book's introduction, Jean Amrouche, was in close communication with the FLN at the time and publicly advocated for the independence of Algeria. So we can presume that the conversations surrounding the making of the book did not completely ignore the war.

RD: But even though this writer was affiliated with the FLN, it is still a selection of images that is made to tell a particular story. I agree that there are a lot of similarities to *The Battle of Algiers*, but the film was much more about constructing a cinematic narrative of resistance.

MRB: The book is showing neither the occupation of Algeria by the French military nor the cohabitation of the French colons and the Algerians. In the film you see how the French police is patrolling the streets, and you see that there is resistance to that. It's a militant film about independence.

ÉF: But timing is a factor to consider, too. *The Battle of Algiers* was released 10 years after this book was published, after Algerian independence. History as much as present times make it very clear that the same story isn't narrated or addressed the same way depending on the political climate in which it is embedded.

AVA-S: And isn't the fulfilment of your expectation of what a book is supposed to be the exact way to romanticise a certain subject? Because there's always more going on than just war, but we are always so hungry to see war. And that is mostly
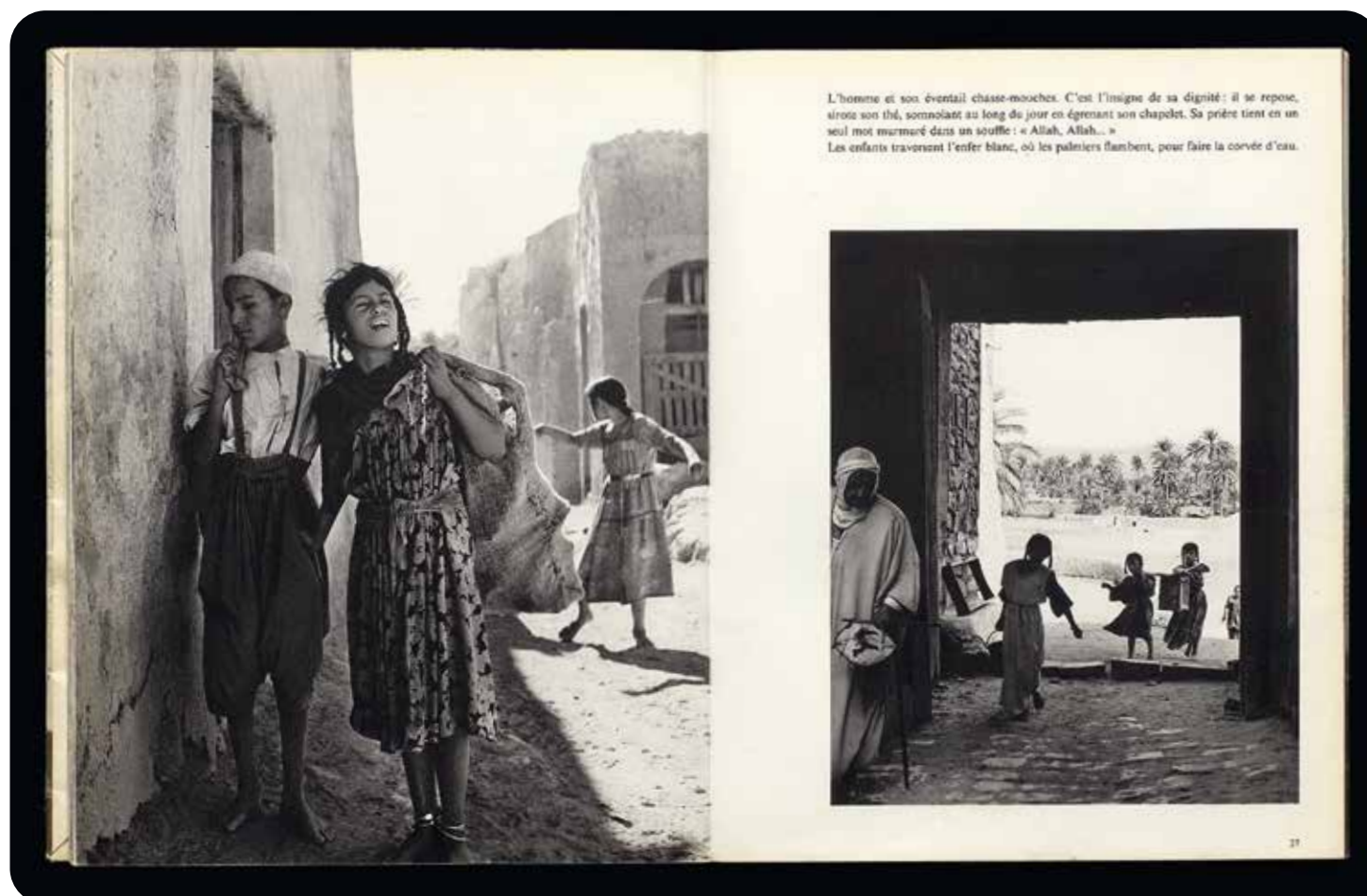
because we haven't been in it. This distance is one of the core aspects of my criticism of many postcolonial or decolonial discourses, which are currently so trendy and selling so well. I do wonder who profits in the end, from what perspective and with what kind of distance to whatever is being exploited again. I found myself rereading *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) by Susan Sontag only two weeks ago, and I was surprised by my own emotional response to the book. Because I think we are experiencing what Sontag describes again these very days, being such active consumers of images of war, from a distance, and then trying to find moral justification for it.

RD: I notice since the beginning of our discussion that with some of the books it is really necessary to go into the content right away. But I would also be interested in the way some of these books were produced, what they were intended for, and how they withstood the test of time or didn't. Perhaps it's also worth considering the notion of the coffee table book that is sometimes related to photo books. What is a coffee table book? Does it have to be big? And does it have to have large images for us to be able to have a quotidian conversation, while drinking coffee, and just look randomly through some pictures? I wonder if, in some sense, all of these books might have fulfilled that purpose at the time when they came out.

AVA-S: Regarding durability and the desire to have a substantial book, *Shirana Shahbazi, First Things First* (2017) is an interesting case. As you mentioned a moment ago, before we started recording the conversation, it's basically a very slim magazine that, however, is given a hardcover and therefore transformed.

RD: I thought that it was probably the thinnest hardcover I've ever seen. This becomes a kind of coffee table book simply because of the way it's produced, without it being a coffee table book in itself. But then, I also find *USA* by Emil Schulthess (1955) remarkable in terms

ÉF: It's a slightly different angle, but regarding the role or validity of documents, I recommend reading Hannah Arendt's article 'Truth and Politics', first published in 1967. According to Arendt, it is in the nature of the political realm to be at war with truth in all its forms. The reason why we tend to call something true is only because a large group of people agreed on something based on their perceptions that are shaped and constrained by politics. While truth is portrayed as vulnerable and endangered, politics is understood as a powerful and aggressive way of making you look at facts and agreeing on or conceding something being true because of certain materials that seem to prove it. We seem to know it's there, because it's documented, and we don't allow ourselves to question the understanding of the situation, although the political discourse may well be manipulated.

of production. In the way it combines images and typography it almost looks like it comes from the 1980s, but the photography and the image editing testify to the humanist approach typical of the 1950s. The depictions of subjects and the alignment of pictures in the book seems to say 'we are all the same',


no matter whether it's a Native American, a US artist or a bird from the region. But then there are lots of little gimmicks that are very experimental for bookmaking at that time, in particular the many different kinds of eclectic fold-outs. Certain flaps show the continuation of the image, others are black, and there is even a vertical fold-out depicting a skyscraper. It's an entire book-folding apparatus, you might say. But it's also an amazing exhibition in book form.

MRB: Again, all of this is very much related to the *Family of Man* exhibition at MoMA. This exhibition was presented as an expanded space where images were coming from the ceiling, from the walls, from the sides, and the viewer was supposed to be completely immersed. I assume that it has to do with the rise of television in the early 1950s. These kinds of books are the last ones that were made under the condition that printed matter was the only way for images to get into a household. The images were still, but then those flaps were a way of actually putting them in motion, almost like in cinema.
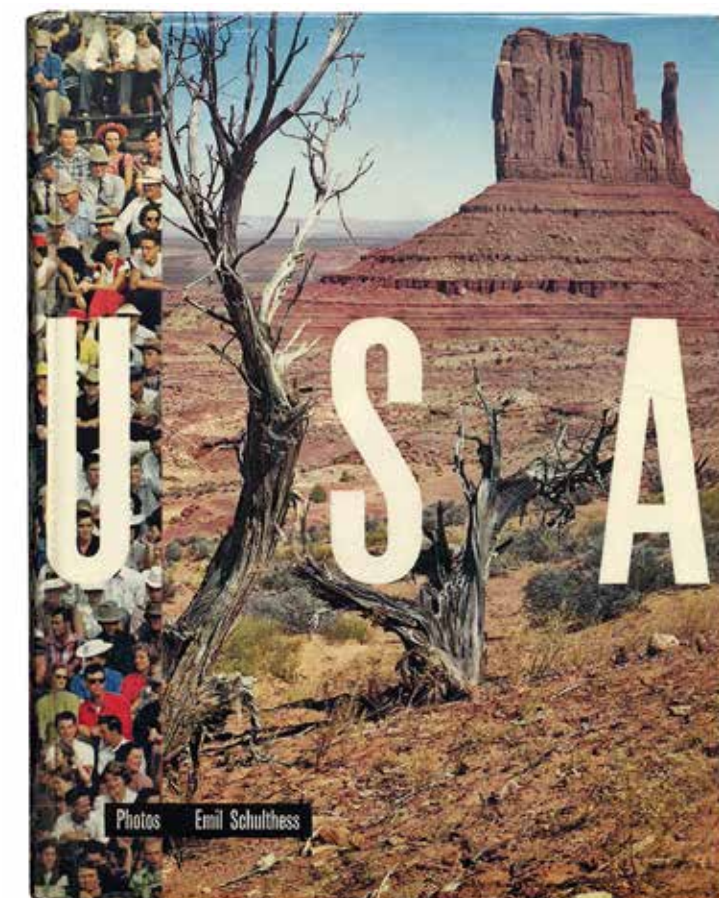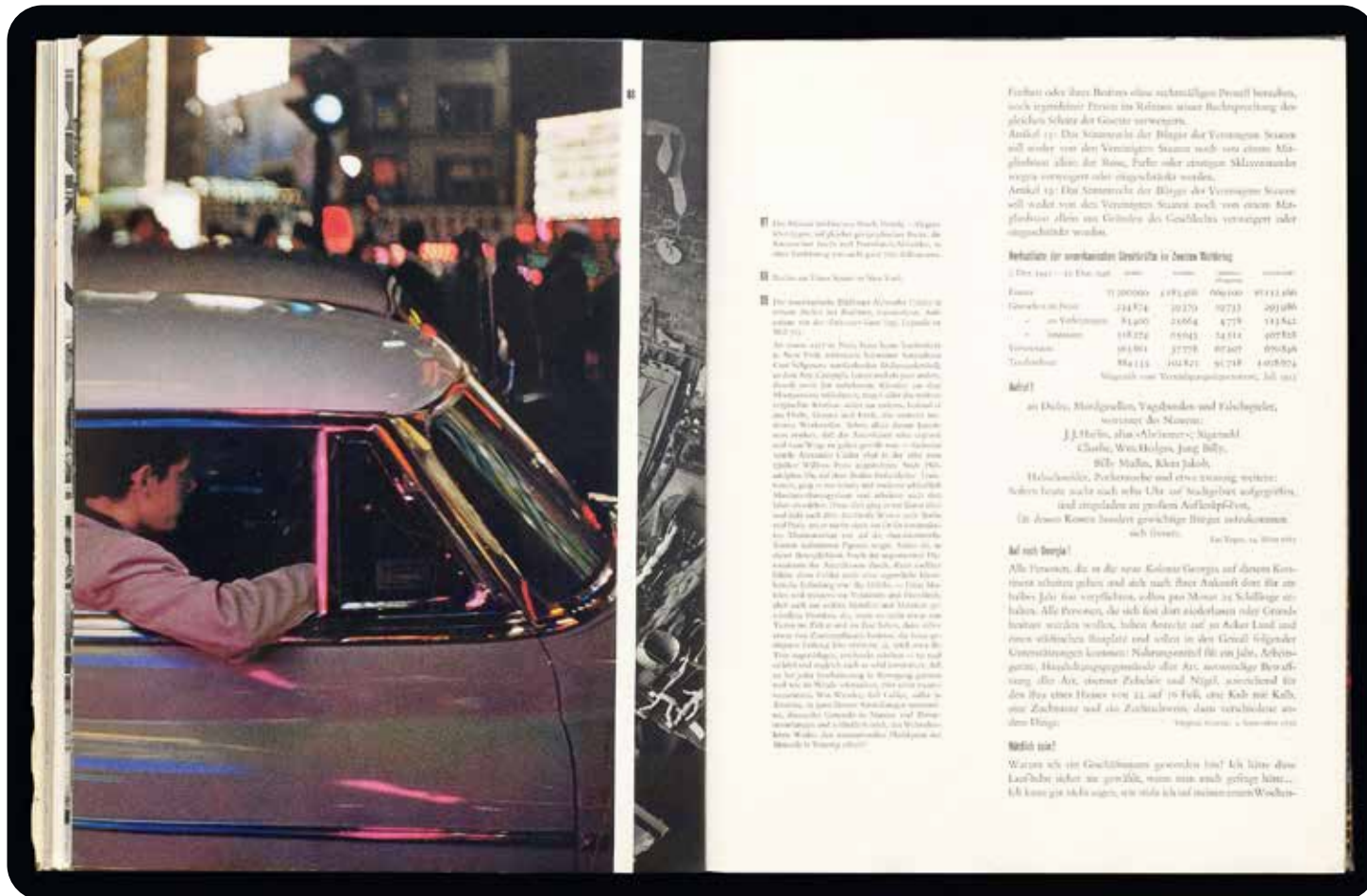
AVA-S: I agree that the movements with the many different kinds of flaps are fulfilling the function of motion, but they also make you aware of your own decision to determine the actual frame. I find it stunning that this is presented in such an open, conscious way, given that even today many books try to assume that the frame is the reality. In the _USA_ book it becomes obvious that while you are looking at the images, your choice and your background will matter and determine what the actual image is.

MRB: When you are opening pages and flaps, and make images move, you are also editing. It's as if the editing process is performed by the reader. I assume that the reading experience is much more embodied and much more engaged.

AVA-S: Another book that becomes performative through its materiality is Jiří Makovec's _From... To..._ (2019). I find it very performative because it doesn't even give you support. It doesn't have a hardcover. So all the weight of your consumption is on your own hands. I find it a very brilliant book in some way, as we are immediately confronted with our inability to engage. It's as if it is asking: 'What's the weight of images?'

RD: There are so many images, on so many pages, and almost all of them are iconic. On the one hand, they look like everyday pictures, but on the other hand they have a very clear subject or main topic that is centralised. And that times hundreds. It makes it really difficult to have the attention that we're supposed to have with each image. It's an overwhelming monotony.

ÉF: It's very, very dense, and there is also a repetitiveness in the ratio of the grid. Plus the grid itself is used very consistently, almost entirely without variations throughout the book. I agree with Akosua that there's something to the fact that you can't really consult it if you don't have something to put it on. It's literally — or ironically — a genuine 'coffee table book', since you need a table to take a longer look at this book. A typical coffee table book would hold itself, but this one doesn't, because it's too floppy and too large at the same time.

RD: I find it very interesting as well. When I look at books, I usually ask myself: 'Should this have been produced? Was it necessary to kill some trees for that and put all this ink on paper and coat the images, which is still often a relatively toxic process?' So I like to think that all these books here on the table have a reason for existing, but in this case I would almost say that the main reason is the book's performativity instead of its content. It talks about the relation of the viewer to the book, and that seems more important than the images or the discourses that it presents.

MRB: At Werker Collective we've been thinking more about paper and ink since the Covid-19 pandemic. Will we be able to keep on printing books on paper in the future? We've been making our own ink from natural resources, and we've been translating parts of our archive onto textile, questioning paper as the best material for a document. Actually, the first documents ever were made of textile, and they were mostly made by women, not men. It seems to me that the paper document is much more related to controlling or creating an attestation to hold value or hold ownership over something. And in the history of early photography the mug shots by the police play a prominent role, which are also legal documents made of paper and attesting a certain identity. So in my view

there are many reasons for questioning the role of paper — next to the ecological or financial reasons that have recently become more pertinent.

AVA-S: I agree that there are many micro-debates within the debate on paper. There are so many conflicting intentions and priorities as well. However I personally believe that the potential rarity of bookmaking makes it more urgent to keep making books as long as possible. Books are physical objects, like human bodies, and they share the origin from nature with us; they are not artificial extensions. And when it comes to the current crisis of truth and the crisis of veracity, also of photographic veracity,

I find that the physical document has a high value simply by being material and degrading over time, versus the opaque temporality of electronic documents. Just the fact that something exists on paper carries within it a certain proof that it was printed at a certain time. Whereas in the very complex world of immaterial knowledge it has become very challenging to trace a document: Where does it come from? When was it written or made? This is becoming more and more complex to reveal and decipher.

RD: For me, the reason for the book (and printed matter in general) to exist is, most importantly, the way we engage with the content that is printed. I wouldn't say that it's truer per se simply because it's printed, because every paper document also presents a narrative that has been constructed. But I find it important that we deal differently with something that is printed, as it can lead more easily into a conversation when we spend more time with it. In that sense, actually, the coffee table book has a lot of reasons to exist. I'm always criticising it, but then all of a sudden it makes a lot of sense.

MRB: I find that extra-large coffee table book _Katja Jug, Frozen Unfrozen_ (2021) really great because you can dis-assemble it and glue the resulting 30 posters on the wall. It can become an exhibition, and this strikes me as very interesting with regard to the question of how public or how intimate a book is. As an exhibition, the book has the potential of becoming a public event, you can read it together with an audience — which again relates to the _USA_ book and the multiple ways of unfolding it.

ÉF: I also am ambivalent towards coffee table books. At least, they are not the type of publications I tend to buy or gift. I'm usually more drawn to books with text-based content. But I still find it interesting to see coffee table books as conversation starters, and then to think about which theme or subject I would like to talk about with my friends, students or collaborators. It could be a conscious strategy. From this point of view, if I had to choose a conversation starter to be put on my coffee table, I would pick _147 Backcovers_ (2018) by Peter Fischli and Hilar Stadler. It makes me smile and sparks my curiosity. And since I am not from Switzerland, I am quite intrigued by these unknown traditions, environments and objects represented in the photography, such as this weird pipe with ornamented metal, for example.

AVA-S: But that's exotism right there, isn't it? So exotism seems to be okay with regard to Switzerland. I find it brilliant that you are making this point, because in my view this is a core problem of our generation. We shy away from exotism talking about Africans and their weird costumes, even though they are obviously weird to many of us here, but we find it okay to talk about weird Swiss costumes or musical instruments in a ridiculing way. I do believe that we have a problem with basic logic there, because we impose a level of victimhood onto people from Africa versus superiority onto people from Switzerland. Exotism seems to be fine with regard to Switzerland, because the Swiss are considered superior anyway, and you wouldn't assume them to be hurt by it. This is a basic problem I often have with debates around representation and the gaze: Why do we find a certain gaze acceptable if imposed on some cultures, but not if imposed on others? It's really a problem in my view that everyone assumes this imbalance to be a given.

ÉF: I wouldn't say that my appreciation of this book is fuelled by straight-up exotism, as my interest stems from a rather personal perspective. I have a friend who grew up in Appenzell, and she told me about certain objects and festivities which are very specific to these villages. She showed me her exciting belts with metal cow applications that get passed on from generation to generation, and she has weird jewellery with small bells on it which I love. Bruno Bischofberger, the founder of the art gallery that reused the photographs for advertisements, is also from this area. I also find that the photographs document much more than what you can find online, as I discovered for Appenzell's Silvesterkläuse festival. So this book really makes me curious to know more about Switzerland's rural traditions. But anyway, I just think it's a great book with a great concept.

MRB: I find it important to emphasise that the meaning of an image is never closed. Images are elastic. In that sense, any image potentially opens an endless string of readings, regardless of the view of the photographer that made it. For example, the folkloristic images from Switzerland in this book can be perceived as particular shapes from geographical or geological points of view, or you can look at them with regard to the graininess and the materiality, and much more. So the anti-colonial point of view is one among many others. But I would also like to point out that these are vernacular images from newspapers and other local sources that were later reused by the art gallery for their advertisements. The set-up is very different in the two 1950s books about Africa on our table, for example, where the photographers that documented the local communities came from abroad.

AVA-S: I see that, but I am not sure I fully agree. Then again, I don't think that agreeing is the highest priority in a discussion like this. Because respectful disagreement is one of the constructive features of actual diversity, diversity of thought rather than skin tones. In any case, I think we should be aware that the importance we give to these complicated discourses about photography, the gaze and so on, are to some degree specific to our culture. If I went to the village in Ghana where my father was born, Sanfo, people couldn't care less about my photographic practice. They already have their pride, their autonomy, their independence, and they will probably just look at me and think: 'You're not really from us, are you?' So if we talk so much about the gaze, I guess it might be useful from time to time to try to put ourselves into the shoes of someone who doesn't care at all about being photographed or not, because they have their life. They don't need our validation or our intellectual work.

ÉF: You mentioned before that you were wondering why certain gazes seem to be considered bad, or are even getting cancelled, while others are tacitly allowed. This made me think about the particular technological gaze present in _The Rendering Eye_ (2014), which displays all these images based on 3D screenshots from Apple Maps. As explained in one of the essays in the book, that software was originally developed for missile seekers, but after it was declassified Apple started using it to produce aerial photography of cities and places. I find the publication interesting in its idea of redirecting the Apple gaze towards a completely different narrative and purpose, using the technology to paint a strange yet very realistic parallel world. The deserted streets and seemingly empty buildings look almost post-apocalyptic. They are abstract and cold, and yet they are, at times, bathed in almost poetically tender colours. Coincidentally, the book was published in the same year as _Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth_, edited by Forensic Architecture. This collective also reappropriates new technologies, inverting the direction of the forensic gaze in order to detect and confront state violations or engage with specific struggles.
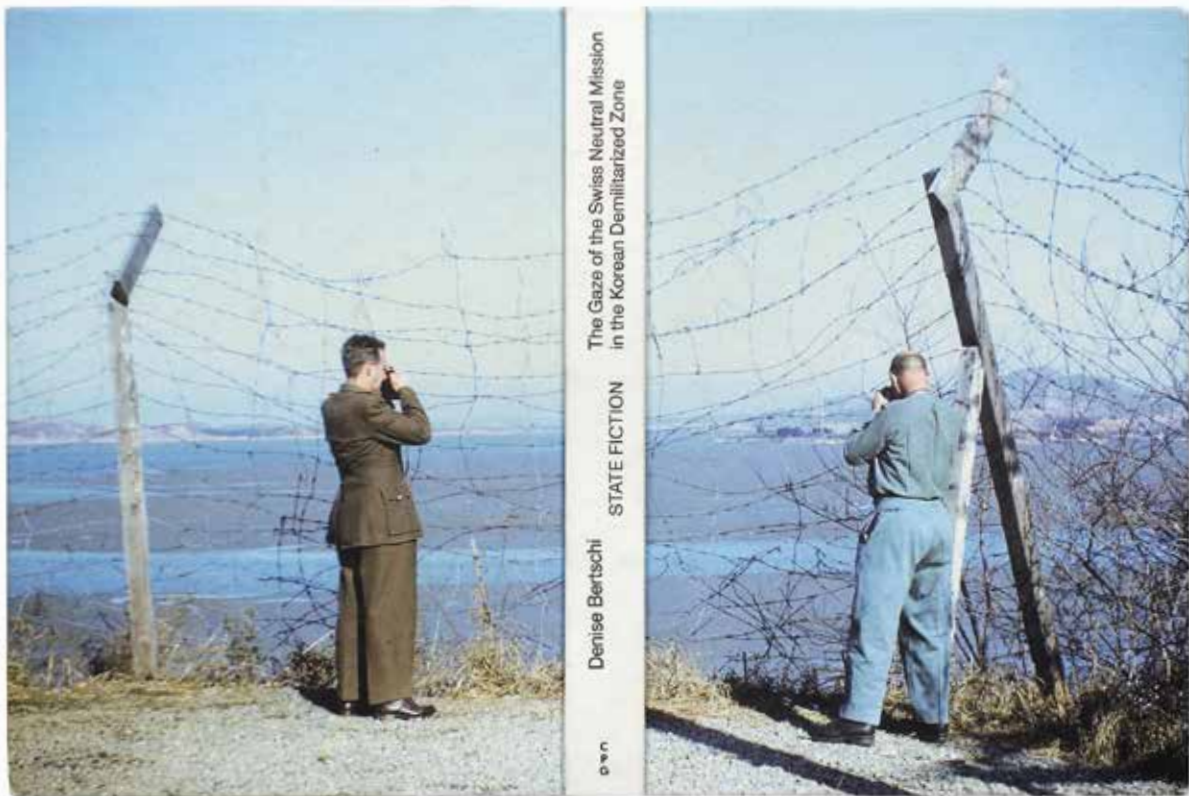
RD: I find it indeed interesting to look at *The Rendering Eye* with the idea of gaze, because it's a completely different gaze then. Most of the other books we discussed are driven by the gaze of a photographer. But here it is technology.

AVA-S: Yes, it's probably the only book with such a clear technological gaze on our table. It depends on the definition of course, but there's an extreme autonomy of the device in this case. At the same time, there is one book that carries the term 'gaze' in the subtitle, and we didn't discuss it at all: *STATE FICTION* (2021) by Denise Bertschi. I am trying to understand why no one picked that book to talk about, given that it would fit so well into our discussion about the accessibility of places, and also about the gaze of Europeans — or in this case even Swiss people — documenting foreign countries. I assume that it is just overwhelming, and hard to grasp in such a short amount of time. Which is probably why we went for the easier ones instead. In any case, I find it remarkable that the book is declared to be an 'artist's book' at the very beginning of the introduction. I don't doubt at all that this is accurate, but I find it interesting to state that so prominently, given that the subject matter could also make this book something entirely different than an artist's book.

RD: Later in the introduction there is a disclaimer saying that 'in no way does this book attempt to discuss the complex history of the Korean War and the armistice that continues to this day'. And then it is explained that the book contains photographs and stills from Super-8 film footage taken in South Korea at the DMZ, as well as in North Korea by Swiss nationals during their service there as part of the neutral military force. So indeed, it is a difficult and complex book from an artist that approached a highly political and controversial subject, namely the Swiss notion of 'neutrality', through an archive of photographs taken by others. Still, I wouldn't say that we avoided the book by going directly at the easy ones. I don't think there are any particularly easy books in that selection.

STACK OF BOOKS FOR THE ROUND TABLE
'THE WEIGHT OF IMAGES'

Der schwarze Hephästus
René Gardi

Verlag René Gardi, Bern
PHOTOGRAPHY: René Gardi
DESIGN: Hans Thöni
PRINTING: Buchdruckerei Büchler, Bern
Awarded in 1954

USA. Photos einer Reise durch die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika
Emil Schulthess

Manesse Verlag, Zürich
PHOTOGRAPHY & DESIGN: Emil Schulthess
PRINTING: Conzett & Huber, Zürich
Awarded in 1955

Algérie
Henriette Grindat

La Guilde du Livre, Éditions Clairefontaine, Lausanne
PHOTOGRAPHY: Henriette Grindat
DESIGN: Héliographia
PRINTING: Héliographia, Lausanne
Awarded in 1956

Ein Tag mit Ronchamp
Esther Merkle, Paul Merkle, Robert Th. Stoll, Hans Urs von Balthasar

Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln
PHOTOGRAPHY: Esther Merkle, Paul Merkle
DESIGN: Emil Ruder
PRINTING: Buchdruckerei VSK, Basel
Awarded in 1958

August Sander. Menschen ohne Maske
Gunther Sander, Golo Mann

C. J. Bucher Verlag, Luzern
PHOTOGRAPHY: August Sander
DESIGN: Hans Peter Renner
PRINTING: C. J. Bucher, Luzern
Awarded in 1971

Luc Chessex, Swiss Life
Kunsthaus Zürich, Musée d'arts décoratifs Lausanne, eds.

Payot, Lausanne
PHOTOGRAPHY: Luc Chessex
DESIGN: Werner Jeker
PRINTING: Jean Genoud, Le Mont-sur-Lausanne
Awarded in 1987

Cécile Wick, Fotoarbeiten
Kunstmuseum des Kantons Thurgau, Kartause Ittingen, ed.

Kunstmuseum des Kantons Thurgau, Kartause Ittingen
PHOTOGRAPHY: Cécile Wick
DESIGN: Hans Rudolf Bosshard
PRINTING: Bodmer Weber Offset, Stallikon
Awarded in 1990

Die Klasse. Studienbereich Fotografie, Schule für Gestaltung Zürich
Martin Heller, André Gelpke, Ulrich Görlich, eds.

Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich
PHOTOGRAPHY: Various
DESIGN: Cornel Windlin
PRINTING: Zürichsee Druckereien, Stäfa
Awarded in 1996

Annelies Štrba, Shades of Time

Lars Müller, Baden
PHOTOGRAPHY: Annelies Štrba
DESIGN: Lars Müller, Annelies Štrba
PRINTING: Editoriale Bortolazzi Stei, San Giovanni Lupatoto (IT)
Awarded in 1997

Walter Pfeiffer. In Love with Beauty
Martin Jaeggi, Thomas Seelig, Urs Stahel, eds.

Steidl Verlag, Göttingen (DE); Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur
PHOTOGRAPHY: Walter Pfeiffer
DESIGN: Studio Achermann
PRINTING: Steidl, Göttingen (DE)
Awarded in 2008

Taiyo Onorato, Nico Krebs. The Great Unreal

Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich
PHOTOGRAPHY: Taiyo Onorato, Nico Krebs
DESIGN: Taiyo Onorato, Nico Krebs, Hi (Megi Zumstein, Claudio Barandun)
PRINTING: Offsetdruckerei Karl Grammlich, Pliezhausen (DE)
Awarded in 2009

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Awarded in 2022

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Published by the Federal Office of Culture
   (FOC), Bern