

ALTITUDE

ALTITUDE

Contemporary Swiss Graphic Design

Edited by **Robert Klanten, Nicolas Bourquin, Claudia Mareis**

—
All texts written by **Claudia Mareis** for dgv

Layout and design by **Nicolas Bourquin** for dgv

Slipcase and cover design by **Sabrina Grill** for dgv

Art direction by **Robert Klanten**

Body typeface: "La Police" by **François Rappo**

Display typeface: "Gravur Condensed" by **Cornel Windlin**

Slipcase photography by **Joël Tettamanti/écal (2001)**

"Untitled", from the series "Cols alpins"

—
Production management by **Janni Miltrey** for dgv

Translations by **Pat Mehnert, Deidre Wilson, Gabriele Zoth**

French proofreading by **Cathy Larqué**

Printed by **Graphicom Srl., Italy**

—
Published by **Die Gestalten Verlag, Berlin 2006**

2nd edition 2007

ISBN: 978-3-89955-160-0

© dgv - Die Gestalten Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin 2006

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy or any storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

—
Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek. The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

None of the content in this book was published in exchange for payment by commercial parties or designers; dgv selected all included work based solely on its artistic merit.

For more information please check: www.die-gestalten.de

☞ Respect Copyright - encourage creativity!

4

Introduction

6

Einleitung

7

Préface

8

– Going Public –

52

– Come Together –

74

– Swiss Made –

102

– Editorial Design –

152

– Authorship and Practice –

172

– Experimental Systems –

206

– Foreign Affairs –

222

Deutsche Texte

229

Textes français

236

Index

240

Imprint

ALTITUDE

4

Introduction

6

Einleitung

7

Préface

8

– Going Public –

52

– Come Together –

74

– Swiss Made –

102

– Editorial Design –

152

– Authorship and Practice –

172

– Experimental Systems –

206

– Foreign Affairs –

222

Deutsche Texte

229

Textes français

236

Index

240

Imprint

Introduction

The current publication is an invitation to take an Alpine flight over the contemporary Swiss graphics¹ landscape. And this flight almost even has a tradition of its own: Die Gestalten Publishing House had already published the book *Swiss Graphic Design* in 1999, which had a permanent effect on Swiss graphics and above all on its altered perception in an international context. While the rise and restructuring of the traditional Swiss Style is specifically documented therein, *ALTITUDE* also illustrates the well defined outlines of a new design identity in Switzerland. On the one hand, *ALTITUDE* illustrates the development of recent years by presenting exceptional projects and protagonists. On the other hand, new trends of the discipline as well as promising young designers are introduced.

¹ Hereafter, the terms graphics, graphic design, visual communication and visual design are synonymously used to a great extent. This usage does not serve to negate the different meanings of these terms in any way, but rather is a consequence of their colloquial usage.

The selection of the works presented is by no means complete, nor is it representative. However, the selected material reveals exemplarily relevant aspects of current design practice in Switzerland, as well as its effectuality beyond the Helvetic country borders. The title *ALTITUDE* stands thereby for both a “topographic” navigation through the “landscape” of graphic design, and also for the deeply-rooted Swiss requirement for high quality in design.

— Practical Categories —

The structure of this book does not follow any “classical” categorization – for example, illustration, typography, poster design, etc. This type of structure would only limitedly comply with the work shown and its artistic context. On the contrary, innovative work processes and strategies are manifested in the positions presented themselves, which are not able to be comprehended with any limiting term in regard to discipline or medium. The approach that we have chosen tries, however, to open up new, practical categories that orientate themselves particularly on the effective and current artistic strategies of Swiss graphic design with the use of key thematic aspects. So, not only are the aesthetic and stylistic phenomena of interest, but also the multiple, oftentimes even interdisciplinary work processes of the designers.

The key thematic aspects, that are hereafter presented on both a visual level as also in the accompanying texts, contain extensive reflections on the design practice. The issue of the status of authorship in applied design is pertinent here, as well as the issues concerning innovative interdisciplinary and collaborative work practices. The borders of the discipline graphic design are not only becoming increasingly hazy – they have already disappeared in many places. Thus, new formations are permanently established from a hybrid and yet strongly tradition-linked practice that lies somewhere between artistic obstinacy and the mission to achieve high-impact (public) communication.

Design-historical references can thereby help assign the current changes and trends in Swiss graphic design to a specific, appropriate position. Attention is specifically directed here to Swiss Style, the prominent Swiss graphics of the 1950s. The severe artistic maxims of Swiss Style, for example in association with typography, raster or photography, characterize both Swiss and international graphic design right up to the present. Some of these traces will be followed up on in the accompanying texts. But above all, they manifest themselves in the current works on a visual level – whether as an artistic quotation or a radical break with tradition. After all, graphic design as a pioneering practice is a key

thematic aspect of this publication. The growing quantities of information and data require effective methods of structuring and conveying of knowledge. The systematic work methods in visual communication which can, for example, offer guidance in the form of infographics or cartographical systems, fulfill this request.

Considering the heterogeneous aspects, influences and issues which characterize the contemporary design practice, it becomes quickly evident: A deepened and revised observation of the phenomenon Swiss graphic design can be achieved only in interaction between an expressive picture archive and its theoretical contextualization. The following publication contributes to achieve this end.

Our special thanks for interviews and conversations go to: Nik Thönen and Maia Gusberti, Jimmy Schmid, Lukas Marti, Barbara Hahn and Christine Zimmermann.

Einleitung

Die vorliegende Publikation lädt zu einem Alpenflug über die zeitgemäße Schweizer Grafik¹ ein. Und dieser Flug hat fast schon Tradition: Bereits 1999 hat der Gestalten-Verlag mit

¹ Im Folgenden werden die Begriffe Grafik, Grafikdesign, Visuelle Kommunikation und Visuelle Gestaltung weitgehend synonym verwendet. Diese Handhabung will keineswegs die unterschiedlichen Bedeutungen dieser Begriffe negieren, sondern folgt deren umgangssprachlicher Verwendung.

Swiss Graphic Design ein Buch herausgegeben, das nicht ohne Einfluss auf die Schweizer Grafik und vor allem deren veränderte Wahrnehmung im internationalen Kontext geblieben ist. Während darin insbesondere die Öffnung und Restrukturierung des traditionellen

Swiss Style dokumentiert wurde, zeichnet ALTITUDE nunmehr klare Umrisse eines neuen gestalterischen Selbstverständnisses in der Schweiz. ALTITUDE veranschaulicht einerseits die Entwicklung, welche das Schweizer Grafikdesign in den letzten Jahren durchlaufen hat anhand herausragender Projekte und Protagonisten. Andererseits werden neue Tendenzen der Disziplin sowie vielversprechende junge Gestalterinnen und Gestalter vorgestellt.

Die Auswahl der gezeigten Arbeiten ist keineswegs vollständig, noch will sie repräsentativ sein. Dennoch lassen sich anhand des ausgewählten Materials exemplarisch relevante Aspekte der aktuellen gestalterischen Praxis in der Schweiz aufzeigen, ebenso wie deren Wirkungskraft über die helvetischen Landesgrenzen hinaus. Der Titel ALTITUDE steht dabei sowohl für eine „topografische“ Navigation durch die „Landschaft“ Grafikdesign, als auch für einen, in der Schweiz fest verwurzelten, hohen Qualitätsanspruch im Design.

— Praxisnahe Kategorien —

Die Gliederung dieses Buches folgt keinem „klassischen“ Ordnungsschema – etwa in Illustration, Typografie, Plakatgestaltung etc. Eine solche Gliederung würde den gezeigten Arbeiten sowie deren gestalterischem Kontext nur bedingt entsprechen. Vielmehr manifestieren sich gerade in den vorgestellten Positionen innovative Arbeitsweisen und Strategien, die mit einem engen Disziplin- und Medienbegriff nicht mehr zu erfassen sind. Die von uns gewählte Herangehensweise versucht dem hingegen, mittels thematischen Schwerpunkten neue, praxisnahe Kategorien zu eröffnen, die sich vor allem an den effektiven und aktuellen gestalterischen Strategien des Schweizer Grafikdesigns orientieren. Von Interesse sind

also nicht nur ästhetische und stilistische Phänomene, sondern auch die multiplen, oftmals auch interdisziplinären Arbeitsweisen der Gestalterinnen und Gestalter.

Die thematischen Schwerpunkte, die im Folgenden sowohl auf visueller Ebene, als auch in den begleitenden Texten vorgestellt werden, beinhalten weitreichende Reflexionen zur gestalterischen Praxis. Dazu gehört die Frage nach dem Status von Autorschaft im angewandten Design ebenso jene nach innovativen interdisziplinären und kollaborativen Arbeitspraxen. Die Grenzen der Disziplin Grafikdesign weichen nicht nur zunehmend auf – an vielen Stellen sind sie längst durchlässig geworden. Zwischen künstlerischem Eigensinn und dem Auftrag zur wirkungsmächtigen (öffentlichen) Kommunikation bilden sich so immer neue Formationen einer hybriden und dennoch stark traditionsverbundenen Praxis.

Designhistorische Bezüge können dabei helfen, die aktuellen Veränderungen und Tendenzen im Schweizer Grafikdesign sinnvoll zu verorten. Die Aufmerksamkeit gilt hier insbesondere dem Swiss Style, der prominenten Schweizer Grafik der 1950er Jahre. Die strengen gestalterischen Maxime des Swiss Style, etwa im Umgang mit Typographie, Raster oder Fotografie, prägen sowohl das schweizerische, als auch das internationale Grafikdesign bis in

die Gegenwart. Einigen dieser Spuren wird in den begleitenden Texten nachgegangen. Vor allem aber manifestieren sie sich in den aktuellen Arbeiten auf visueller Ebene – sei es als gestalterisches Zitat oder aber als radikaler Bruch mit der Tradition. Schließlich ist Grafikdesign als forschende Praxis ein thematischer Schwerpunkt dieser Publikation. Wachsende Informations- und Datenmengen verlangen nach leistungsfähigen Methoden zur Strukturierung und Vermittlung von Wissen. Diesem Wunsch entsprechen in der visuellen Kommunikation systematisierte Arbeitsmethoden, die zum Beispiel in Form von Infografiken oder kartografischen Systemen Orientierungshilfe bieten können.

In Anbetracht der heterogenen Aspekte, Einflüsse und Fragestellungen, welche die zeitgemäße gestalterische Praxis prägen, wird rasch deutlich: Eine vertiefte und aktualisierte Betrachtung des Phänomens Schweizer Grafikdesign kann erst im Zusammenspiel von einem aussagekräftigen Bildarchiv und dessen theoretischer Kontextualisierung gelingen. Die vorliegende Publikation trägt ihren Teil dazu bei.

Besonderer Dank für Interviews und Gespräche gelten: Nik Thönen und Maïa Gusberti, Jimmy Schmid, Lukas Marti, Barbara Hahn und Christine Zimmermann.

Préface

La présente publication invite le lecteur à un survol du graphisme suisse contemporain.¹ En 1999, la maison d'édition Die Gestalten avait déjà édité le livre *Swiss Graphic Design*, qui n'est pas resté sans effet sur le graphisme suisse et sa perception dans le contexte international. Tandis que cet ouvrage traitait essentiellement de l'ouverture et de la restructuration du *Swiss Style* traditionnel, *ALTITUDE* trace quant à lui les lignes claires d'une nouvelle notion créative suisse. D'une part, *ALTITUDE* illustre, grâce à des projets et des protagonistes exceptionnels, le développement du graphisme suisse durant ces dernières années. L'ouvrage présente d'autre part les nouvelles tendances de la discipline et les travaux de jeunes créateurs prometteurs.

¹ Par la suite, les termes graphisme, design graphique, communication visuelle et création visuelle sont utilisés de manière synonyme. Ceci n'est nullement destiné à occulter les significations différentes de ces termes, mais correspond à leur utilisation courante.

La sélection d'œuvres présentées n'est ni exhaustive, ni représentative. Malgré cela, les matériels choisis permettent d'illustrer explicitement des aspects significatifs de la pratique créative, ainsi que leur influence au-delà des frontières helvétiques. Le titre *ALTITUDE* indique dans ce contexte à la fois la navigation «topographique» à travers le «paysage» du graphisme, et la prétention profondément enracinée à une qualité élevée des créations suisses.

— Catégories proches de la pratique —

La structure de cet ouvrage ne suit pas de classement «classique» par thèmes, tels que l'illustration, la typographie, la création d'affiches, etc. Une telle structuration ne correspondrait pas réellement aux œuvres présentées ni à leurs contextes créatifs. Les positions présentées s'attachent davantage à des modes opératoires innovants et des stratégies nouvelles qui ne peuvent désormais être intégrés dans la notion étroite de discipline et de média. Notre démarche tente quant à elle de présenter, à l'aide de chapitres thématiques, des catégories nouvelles et proches de la pratique, qui s'orientent surtout vers les stratégies créatives efficaces et actuelles du graphisme suisse. Notre intérêt ne se porte donc pas uniquement sur les phénomènes esthétiques et de stylistiques, mais également sur les modes opératoires interdisciplinaires des créateurs.

Les chapitres thématiques présentés par la suite, tant de façon visuelle qu'à l'aide des textes joints, abordent des réflexions complexes sur la pratique créative. Nous y traitons de la question concernant le statut d'auteur dans le design appliqué, ainsi que de celle relative aux modes opératoires interdisciplinaires et collaboratifs innovants. Les limites de la discipline du design graphique ne se contentent pas de devenir de plus en plus floues. En de nombreux points elles ont déjà disparu. De nouvelles formes d'une pratique hybride — qui reste malgré tout fortement liée aux traditions — voient le jour entre l'individualisme artistique et la commande, générant une communication (publique) efficace.

Des références issues de l'histoire du design peuvent aider à comprendre les actuelles évolutions et tendances au sein du graphisme suisse. Dans ce contexte, l'attention se porte spécifiquement sur le *Swiss Style*, le fameux graphisme suisses des années 1950. Les principes créatifs sévères du *Swiss Style*, ceux par exemple relatifs à l'application de la typographie, des grilles ou de la photographie, influencent le graphisme suisse et international aujourd'hui encore. Certaines de ces influences sont analysées dans les textes qui accompagnent les illustrations. Mais elles se manifestent surtout au niveau visuel dans les œuvres

actuelles — que ce soit en tant que citation créative ou en tant que rupture radicale avec la tradition. Enfin, le graphisme, en tant que pratique liée à la recherche, constitue le thème principal de la présente publication. Des quantités croissantes d'informations et de données exigent des méthodes performantes pour la structuration et la transmission des connaissances. Dans le contexte de la communication visuelle, cette demande est satisfaite par des modes opératoires systématisés, qui fournissent par exemple des aides à l'orientation sous forme de graphiques, d'info-graphiques ou de systèmes cartographiques.

Compte tenu des aspects, des influences et des questions hétérogènes qui influencent la pratique créative contemporaine, on s'aperçoit rapidement qu'une observation approfondie et actualisée du phénomène du graphisme suisse ne peut réussir qu'à travers l'interaction d'archives picturales expressives et de leur mise en contexte théorique. La présente publication est destinée à y contribuer.

Nous tenons à remercier tout particulièrement pour leur participation dans le cadre d'interviews et de discussions : Nik Thönen, Maia Gusberti, Jimmy Schmid, Lukas Marti, Barbara Hahn et Christine Zimmermann.

— Going Public —

In the “New Business jargon” Going Public describes the transformation of a company into an incorporated company, whose share certificates are traded on the stock market for the first time. So, it is an act of initiation in publicity. This “first time” can be seen repeatedly when it comes to graphic design. On the one side, publicity is a constitutive element of this discipline: Knowledge and contemplation are transformed into visible signs, messages are evident and make the world and the image open for public viewing.¹ On the other side, stepping out into public with artistic works is an act of constant exposing and revealing. Publishing means, in this sense, a passage of transition – from the protective sphere of privacy into the arena of attention.

1 HEIZ, ANDRÉ VLADIMIR and RÄZ, FRANZISKA Konzeptpapier des Studiengangs Visuelle Kommunikation, HKB – Hochschule der Künste Bern.

Hereafter, publicity should be treated above all as a category in the economy of visibility and attention. This reading assumes that visibility (especially) is not simply given within visual communication, but is constructed, can be constructed. Visibility is therefore indispensably linked to the act of visualization. Consequently, the issue concerning the visible is equally concerned with the invisible. And likewise, publicity is not a constant factor, rather it must be newly established for each new occasion, for every new situation.²

The significance and the modus of Going Public in regard to graphic design can vary according to context, which is apparent when viewing contemporary artistic works. On the one hand, it can mean effective “public relations” on one’s own account. The spectrum of a self-promotion of this type can range from uploading a personal website to public activities involving flyers and posters. Even self-initiated publications as well as exhibition projects count as strategies of Going Public.

On the other hand, publicity can be understood as a medial element of artistic strategies, like in the usage of a space as a three dimensional application area. Or in the transliteration of public urban space through (sub) cultural practices. The city is thereby conceived of as a place

of communication with the goal being to code and beset it with a constant stream of new personal messages. Examples of this can be found in movements like Street Art, Writing (graffiti art) or Cultural Jamming. The credo here, is that the public space has transformed itself from a public place of political exchange to a hyper-aesthetical place of consumption.³ Subversive artistic-creative strategies should be used to intervene against the visual occupation of the space. The tools for this are spray paint, stencils, chalk and stickers. It remains questionable, in how far these creative interventions can develop socio-political effectiveness. As long as the protest only moves along the formal-aesthetical level, the effectiveness will most likely not transcend this stage. It becomes evident here, that as a place of socio-critical interchange, publicity should, however, also be occupied by aspects of creative practice.

— Design is Orientation —

Public effectiveness, yet in another sense, is an essential aspect of their practice for many designers. Associated therewith, is the conviction that graphic design should have a socio-relevant aspect beyond its formal-aesthetic and practical functions. Here, design is understood as a practice that is able to make a responsible contribution in all areas of publicity, be it in

the social, cultural or political arenas. For example, as a socially competent moderation in the net of relations between customer requirement, technology and design.

Design is orientation, declares Beat Schneider from Swiss Design Network. Design has the power of interpretation and achieves “visual accordance in the active process between individual and collective human protagonists, so that communication first becomes possible”.⁴ Schneider also sees the political moment of design therein: “Information is configured in such a manner, that it leads to communication and action, more precisely, to visual mass communication. Insofar, design is highly political and it could develop into a leading discipline of the information society.”⁵ Although the term information society is not uncontested, this theory is also supported from a scientific viewpoint. According to this, the problems are not to be found on the level of the allocation of

2 As per **WALTER LIPPMANN** and **JOHN DEWEY**, cit. in: *Making Things Public. Atmosphären der Demokratie*. Curated by **BRUNO LATOUR** and **PETER WEIBEL**. Exhibition text: <http://makingthingspublic.zkm.de>

3 Cf.: **WELSCH, WOLFGANG** *Ästhetisches Denken* (1990) Stuttgart.

4 **SCHNEIDER, BEAT** *Design – Eine Einführung* (2005) Basel/Boston/Berlin, p. 197

5 **SCHNEIDER, BEAT** *Design als demokratische Orientierungshilfe* (May 2006) in: “Du”, magazine for culture: Design. Was den Alltag formt. No. 4, p. 58

information, but more so in their transformation into knowledge. The latter is, in contrast to information, always oriented to significance, action and context.⁶ This assessment affirms that graphic design can make a helpful contribution to the contextualization and transfer of knowledge in public discourses beyond just being a visual guide.

The trend towards social consciousness in design is nothing new. However, presently it is being positively emphasized once more. In his laudation at the Swiss sponsorship prize dns award Jimmy Schmid from the design network switzerland acknowledged the interest of young designers to deal with socially and politically relevant topics. The award-winning works would “fathom the new forms of communication, examine the significance of gestures in different cultural spheres, stage preventative campaigns, chronicle urban infrastructures, interpret and present etymological phenomena, detect the requirements of the disabled, analyze and interpret perceptual phenomena...”⁷ However, in general, one can’t presently speak of a greater interest in socio-political topics, Schmid added. Moreover, the parameters of the educational structures had been modified in that respect, that such topics could be handled there increasingly.

The assumption remains, that socio-political activity in design (at least partially) has a performative significance. According to this, the aesthetic staging of criticism would have become an obligatory element of creative self-portrayal in the portfolio, just like style and creative competence.

— Making Things Public —

To clarify: Design is neither politics, nor can the design practice replace political practices. And yet it is evident, according to the above described examples, that the range of the protagonists involved in public discourses has expanded considerably. The parameters for negotiation for socio-political interventions are not only to be found in the predefined areas of politics, but also in the most diverse forms of public assemblages. This includes the supermarket as well as a billboard, an exhibition, a publication or the Internet. The attention should, as is repeatedly demanded, be given to the new atmospheric requirements, the new representations, mediations, technologies, interfaces, networks and platforms, with whose help things can be made public.⁸ A demand from which even design can not withdraw itself.

Parallel to the discourses of a (medial) extended publicity, the sphere of the non-public, the pri-

vate and intimate, are gaining in importance. In regard to graphic design, the question is, which contribution can visual creativity make in the differentiation or mediation between the private and public spheres.⁹ Going public and going private are perhaps only different standpoints in the same discourse.

⁶ **BONSS, WOLFGANG** *Riskantes Wissen?* Zur Rolle der Wissenschaft in der Risikogesellschaft, in: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (Ed.): *Gut zu Wissen – Links zur Wissensgesellschaft*, Publishers Westfälisches Dampfboot (2002)

⁷ **SCHMID, JIMMY** *DNS Award 2006* “design network switzerland” Zurich, p. 5

⁸ **LATOUR, BRUNO; WEIBEL, PETER** ZKM (Ed.): *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005) Cambridge. Cit. from: http://makingthingspublic.zkm.de/fa/dings/politik_publications_de.htm

⁹ **SCHNEIDER, BEAT** *Design als demokratische Orientierungshilfe* (May 2006) in: “Du”, magazine for culture: Design. Was den Alltag formt. No. 4, p. 59



FEDERAL STUDIO Théâtre du Grütli (2006)
Action for the new season of the experimental theatre of Geneva.



1

1 **GUILLAUME MOJON** *As Long As It Lasts* (2005)

-> pages: 204 | Biography of Lawrence Weiner, series of 5 posters.

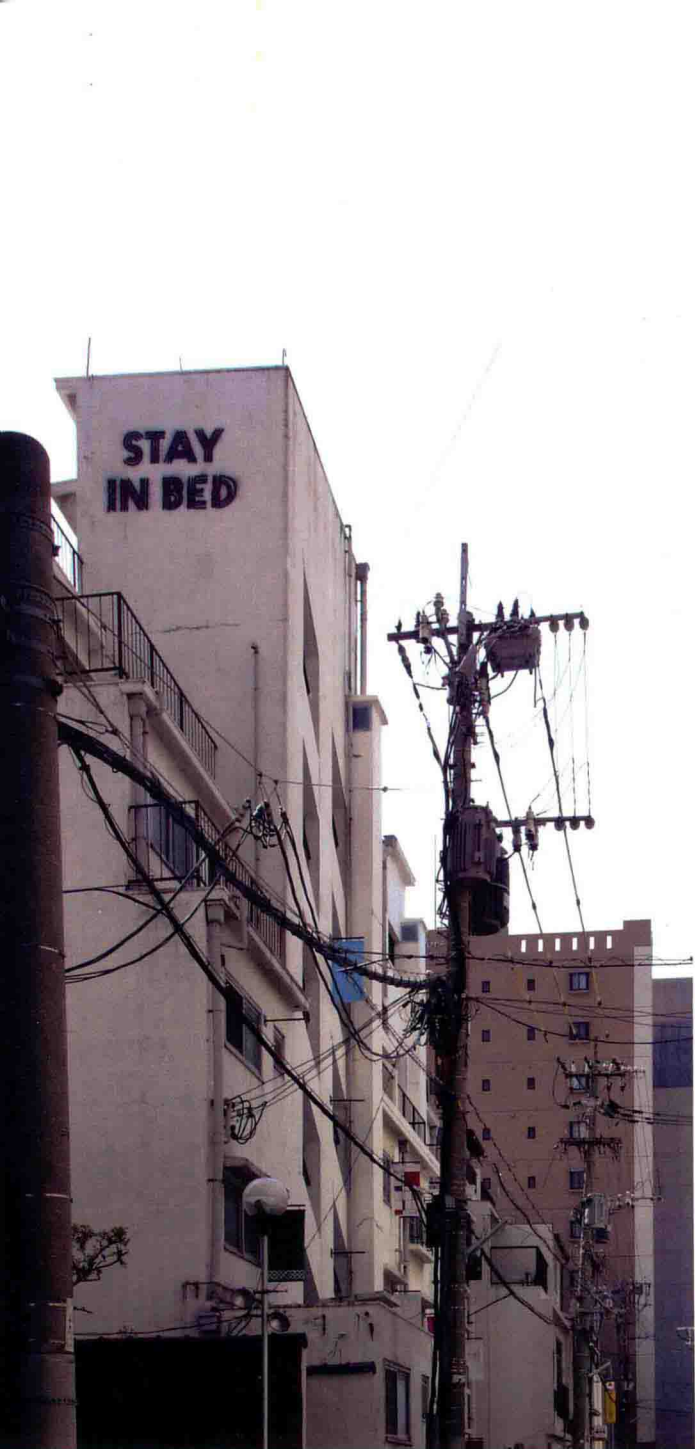
2-4 **JÜRIG LEHNI** *Hektor* (Fukuoka, JP, 2006)

Landscape / Portrait; Hektor & Alex Rich (Field Trip); By Trico. During three days in Fukuoka, Hektor was offering a poster and portrait printing service to the visitors of the By Trico store in Fukuoka. The service was accompanied by two text wall paintings, one indoors, and one as Hektor's first outdoor roof-top piece.

Hektor is a portable Spray-paint Output Device for laptop computers. It was created in close collaboration with engineer Uli Franke for Jürg Lehni's diploma project at écal (école cantonale d'art de Lausanne) in 2002. Hektor's light and fragile installation consists only of two motors, toothed

belts and a can holder that handles regular spray cans. The can is moved along drawing paths just as the human hand or old plotters would. During operation, the mechanism sometimes trembles and wobbles, and the paint often drips. The contrasts between these low-tech aspects and the high-tech touch of the construction hold ambiguous and poetic qualities and make Hektor enjoyable to watch in action. Hektor was used for many projects in different contexts, often in collaboration with other designers and artists.

Hektor was created with a certain attitude towards design and the use of tools. Intuition played an important role in the search for a new output device that goes beyond the limitations of today's clean computer, screen and vector-graphic based design and



2

conveys the abstract geometries contained in these graphics in a different way than normal printers do.

The aim was to make a statement about design by providing a new tool to other designers and artists to experiment with, a tool with an inherently particular and distinctive aesthetic. Hektor is controlled directly from Adobe Illustrator, by the use of Scriptographer, -> pages: 184, 215 | which calculates Hektor's motion paths and talks to the hardware through the serial port.



3

