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Swiss typography in general, and the typography of the Basel school, played an important international role from the fifties until the end of the sixties. Its development, however, was on the threshold of stagnation; it became sterile and anonymous. My vision, fundamentally compatible with our school's philosophy, was to breathe new life into the teaching of typography by re-examining the assumed principles of its current practice.

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My way to break typographic rules was to know them. I acquired this advantage during my apprenticeship as I became expert in letterpress printing. I assigned my students exercises that not only addressed basic design relationships with type placement, size, and weight, but also encouraged them to critically analyze letterspacing to experiment with the limits of readability.

We discovered as increased space was inserted between letters, the words or word groups became graphic in expression, and that understanding the message was less dependent upon reading than we had supposed.

Our activities challenged the viewpoint of Emil Ruder and his followers. In the mid-sixties he wrote a succinct manifesto, a part of which I typographically interpreted for the cover of Typographische Monatsblätter, Number 5/1973:

'Typography has one plain duty before it and that is to convey information in writing. No argument or consideration can absolve typography from this duty.'

A printed work which cannot be read becomes a product without purpose. More than graphic design, typography is an expression of technology, precision and good order.'

WOLFGANG WEINGART (c2000).
My Way to Typography, 269-270.

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My Way to Typography
WOLFGANG WEINGART
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swiss typography.

wolfgang weingart my way to typography

IN GENERAL, AND THE TYPOGRAPHY OF THE BASEL SCHOOL, PLAYED AN IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL ROLE FROM THE FIFTIES UNTIL THE END OF THE SIXTIES. ITS DEVELOPMENT, HOWEVER, WAS ON THE THRESHOLD OF STAGNATION; IT BECAME STERILE AND ANONYMOUS. MY VISION, FUNDAMENTALLY COMPATIBLE WITH OUR SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHY, WAS TO BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO THE TEACHING OF TYPOGRAPHY BY REEXAMINING THE ASSUMED PRINCIPLES OF ITS CURRENT PRACTICE. THE ONLY WAY TO BREAK TYPOGRAPHIC RULES WAS TO KNOW THEM. I ACQUIRED THIS ADVANTAGE DURING MY APPRENTICESHIP AS I BECAME EXPERT IN LETTERPRESS PRINTING. I ASSIGNED MY STUDENTS EXERCISES THAT NOT ONLY ADDRESSED BASIC DESIGN RELATIONSHIPS WITH TYPE PLACEMENT, SIZE, AND WEIGHT, BUT ALSO ENCOURAGED THEM TO CRITICALLY ANALYZE LETTERSPACING TO EXPERIMENT WITH THE LIMITS OF READABILITY. WE DISCOVERED AS INCREASED SPACE WAS INSERTED BETWEEN LETTERS, THE WORDS OR WORD GROUPS BECAME GRAPHIC IN EXPRESSION, AND THAT UNDERSTANDING THE MESSAGE WAS LESS DEPENDENT UPON READING THAN WE HAD SUPPOSED. OUR ACTIVITIES CHALLENGED THE VIEWPOINT OF EMIL RUDER AND HIS FOLLOWERS. IN THE MID-SIXTIES HE WROTE A SUCCINCT MANIFESTO, A PORT OF WHICH I TYPOGRAPHICALLY INTERPRETED FOR THE COVER OF TYPOGRAPHISCHE MONATSBLÄTTER, NUMBER 5/1973: 'TYPOGRAPHY HAS ONE PLAIN DUTY BEFORE IT AND THAT IS TO CONVEY INFORMATION IN WRITING. NO ARGUMENT OR CONSIDERATION CAN ABSOLVE TYPOGRAPHY FROM THIS DUTY. A PRINTED WORK WHICH CANNOT BE READ BECOMES A PRODUCT WITHOUT PURPOSE. MORE THAN GRAPHIC DESIGN, TYPOGRAPHY IS AN EXPRESSION OF TECHNOLOGY, PRECISION AND GOOD ORDER.'