# 1959
# THE TYPOGRAPHY OF ORDER
*Emil Ruder*

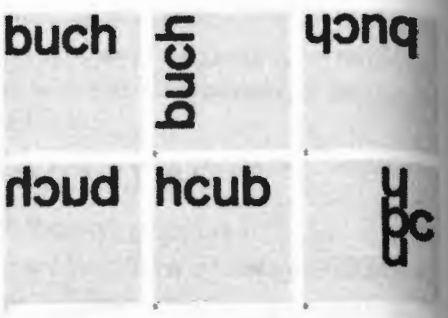
THE INTERNATIONAL TYPOGRAPHIC STYLE *(also known as Swiss Typography and* Neue Grafik*), which was launched immediately after World War II and was based on Bauhaus teachings, was a progressive movement that employed the grid as the foundation for clarity and efficiency. One of the leading proponents was Emil Ruder (1914–70) who taught at both the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich and the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule in Basel. In 1967, Ruder authored* Typographie*, a design manual that demonstrated that the systematic application of type and image based on the grid and sans-serif type was essential to clear communications—its impact was considerable and the book remains in print. Ruder developed an internationally influential method of teaching Swiss modernist design, and more than any other designer in the 1950s, he realized the creative implications of the Univers system of twenty-one related fonts. Both he and his students (including Wolfgang Weingart) showed how to use this visual vocabulary in semantically and syntactically innovative ways. Although* Graphis *had previously featured articles on Max Bill, Armin Hofmann, and Josef Müller-Brockmann, Ruder's illustrated essay provided the first overview of Swiss typography for the magazine's international readership.—SH*

Typography is regarded primarily as a means of ordering the various constituents of a layout. Exacting artistic postulates or creations are no longer involved; the endeavor is simply to find a formally and functionally satisfactory answer to daily requirements. The rule that a text should be easily readable is an unconditional one. The amount of text set on any one page should not be more than the reader can readily cope with; lines that are over sixty letters are considered difficult to read; word and line spacing are closely interrelated and have a most important influence on effortless reading. It is only when these elementary stipulations have been fulfilled that the question of form arises. These rules, however, do not by any means imply any restriction of artistic freedom for the sake of an inflexible system.

Typography, which is characterized by the mechanical manufacture of typefaces and composition to exact dimensions in a rectangular pattern, calls for clear type structures with orderly disposition and terse, compact formulation. The free, untrammeled line of an illustration—a hair or a coil of rope—will then provide the strongest possible contrast to it.

All attempts to infringe these rules are detrimental to good typography. Irregularities in the forms of characters, or alternative letters introduced to give variety to a single typeface, though sometimes excused by citing the 'handicraft' element in typography, are foreign intrusions that have really come in from other reproduction techniques. Typography, perhaps even more than graphic design, is an expression of our own age of technical order and precision.

**Interrelation of Function and Form.** When letters are used to build up words, lines, and type areas, problems of function and form arise. We shall explain them here with reference to the German word "buch."



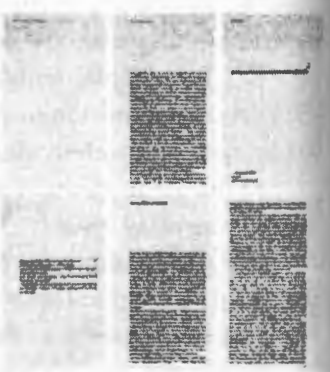

In figure 1, we first read "buch," while the graphic pattern is a secondary matter. Legibility is thus assured as a first essential. Typography is good when this end is attained by formally unexceptional means, which is here no doubt the case. In figure 2, the line is stood on end; legibility is now impaired, while emphasis is placed on the pattern; form thus comes from function. In figure 3, the inverted line makes an almost pure pattern of very doubtful legibility. The mirror reflection (figure 4) though familiar to the compositor, is likewise illegible to the layman and is seen only as a pattern. By rearranging the letters (figure 5), a pattern of some beauty may be created, but the word is now quite illegible (a proof that the formal qualities of a typeface are more easily recognized in a strange language). In figure 6, the letters are completely reorganized. Straight lines and curves constitute an interplay of graphic forms without any communication: typography has lost its purpose.

It is by no means an easy matter to strike the correct balance between function and form, because even a slight weakening of one may result in its being overrun by the other.

**Unprinted Spaces.** The white spaces within a character have an important bearing on its form, and the spacing of words and lines greatly affects the looks and legibility of a text. Similarly, an optical impression may very largely depend on the unprinted spaces.

Our example shows white spaces of various sizes and with distinct optical values, as they appear when three letters are set up. The spaces between letters are narrow and therefore intensely bright; the white inside the *o* is somewhat milder, while the white above the *o* is weakest. Taken together, the three letters produce a lively and forceful white pattern. The unprinted space accordingly has a value of its own of which deliberate use is made in typography.

**"Overall" Design.** All publications that are made up of a number of pages, such as catalogs, brochures, magazines, and books, require systematic 'overall' designing. This is not to be limited to any single page but must run through the whole publication, and it consequently calls for logical thinking and planning on the part of the typographer.



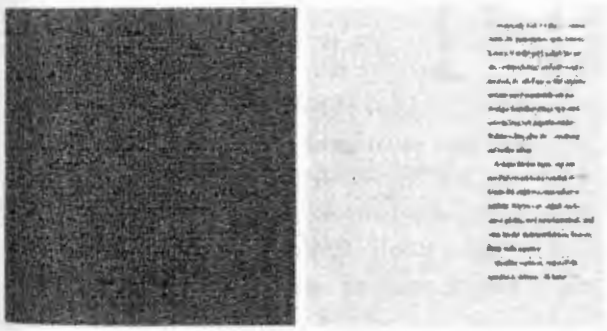
The decline of typography about the turn of the century manifested itself in the failure to create any formal bond unifying all the pages of a printed production. One of the precepts with which typography has rehabilitated itself since the time of William Morris has been that the lines on the front and back of a leaf should exactly register.

In contemporary typography the very close interconnection of all the parts of a printed production of several pages has come to be taken for granted. If a book is to be furnished with illustrations, these are not to be placed arbitrarily, but in accordance with a quite definite plan. The accompanying six illustrations show a number of single pages taken from a very carefully designed book: (from left to right): bastard title, introduction, principal title page, copyright note, section heading and one standard page of text. The top of the text on the pages with headings has been accepted as a key line throughout the whole book and it is visible also in the principal title page.

A firm's stationery is designed to give the same unified effect. The starting-point here is the sheet of normal letter paper, to which all other stationery, such as invoices and forms, memos, business reply cards and envelopes, are subordinate.

**Grid.** In printed matter with frequent variations of text, captions and illustrations of differing sizes, the design can be based on the division of a grid. Uncompromising acceptance of the sizes dictated by this grid results in a correct and consistent overall design. The small and more numerous the divisions of the grid, the greater are the possibilities it offers.

The left-hand example shows a grid consisting of thirty-six squares as a basis for a complex pattern of text and illustration. This grid allows of about seventy different illustration sizes and thus gives ample scope for variety in the composition of the page. The right-hand example shows how material consisting of two photographs of different sizes together with accompanying text and subtitle was laid on a page using this grid. [. . .]



**Written and Printed Texts.** Writing and printing are two fundamentally different techniques which should always be clearly distinguished.

The written character is personal, spontaneous and unique. The printed character, cast in large numbers from the same mould, repeats itself indefinitely in exactly identical form and is therefore universal and impersonal. Its neutral and reserved nature permits the typographer or designer to use it in many new forms of composition. Any attempt to attain the spontaneity of handwriting with printed characters (more particularly with script types) is doomed to failure, for the two are incompatible.

The two illustrations show a letter from Paul Klee to the art dealer Hermann Rupf written during the war years, expressing his fears and concern for artist friends in France. The agitation of the writer is clearly visible in the hand. The same text composed in type evokes a completely different atmosphere; the communication has become factual and documentary.

**Typography in Pictorial Work.** In the art of the Far East picture and text form an indivisible whole. Forms are decided in both cases by the brush technique in painting and by the graver in graphic reproduction. Our own position is much less fortunate, and it is often a difficult matter to combine picture and typography. For this reason the achievement of harmony in this respect is one of the preeminent tasks of the contemporary typographer.

Thus the lettering may make contact with a line drawing by using lines of the same thickness, or the shape of an area of type matter may connect up to some portion of the picture. It is also quite possible to let the picture and the lettering form a contrast with each other, as when the fine gray of type matter is set against the forceful black of the picture.

The example shows how typography makes contact with the pictorial content. The vertical dominant in the left-hand third of the picture is taken up by the two areas of type matter above and below.

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