Typography Education as a Tool to Potentiate Art Nouveau Museums

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Abstract
This article results from a masterclass given to *European Réseau Art Nouveau Network* technicians. Its main objectives were to raise awareness of the potential of Art Nouveau museum collections of the different cities aggregated to the Art Nouveau network, in contemporary typographic development and the implementation of museographic practices involving different audiences for this thematic. Art Nouveau acquired very different typographic expressions in each of the regions where it appeared. Austria's style differs from Scotland's, and Belgium's differs from Catalonia's. Starting from a brief historical context, supported by the observation of several specimens (two-dimensional and three-dimensional) from the 1880s to the 1920s, it was intended to foster interest and critical discussion on the morphological differences between the design of the letters (micro-typography) and its use in different contexts (macro-typography). By presenting some Art Nouveau typographic case studies (original fonts, revivalist types, or new creations inspired by Art Nouveau), the theme of design and creation of typographic fonts was approached, anticipating possibilities for future development in this area of activity. From this masterclass emerged a set of potential actions that not only promote the specific area of Typography (such as the creation of fonts from the graphic collection of these museums) but also integrate it as a museological practice, namely through actions of investigation of the local Art Nouveau typographic heritage and its use in the design of specific activities of museums and their respective educational services.

Keywords: Typography, Art Nouveau Museum, Type Design

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Introduction

It is imperative to create strong connections between Academy and the community. In an attempt to bring these two worlds closer together, the masterclass that gave rise to this article explores Typography as a discipline and its potential for application in contexts and communities that do not yet recognize its value. This article presents a masterclass given to technicians from the European Réseau Art Nouveau Network, making the connection between Typography and Art Nouveau and foreseeing possible paths of exploration in the museum context.

The masterclass was organized by topics to enlighten the participants about the Typography discipline in which they had no previous knowledge. This allowed for navigation through new content and relating it to the participant's field of expertise (Art Nouveau).

Type and Lettering: possibilities and limitations

The term typography applies to a couple of complementary areas. It is the name given to the printing technique with movable type invented by Gutenberg and it's the activity of drawing and building letters. We will center our attention on this last idea of creating letters or better said, of developing a system of forms and motifs that are repeated and can be used over and over again, to compose different words, phrases, or various compositions, without ever having to change any of the letter drawings.

As for lettering, it doesn't need to respond to this idea of adaptability and reconfiguration, just fulfilling the requirements of a specific application. In lettering, it's all about designing a solution to a specific problem, being, in a large part of the situations, designed from scratch.

However, typography can also be used as a starting point, adjusting the letters to a specific situation and transforming it into lettering.
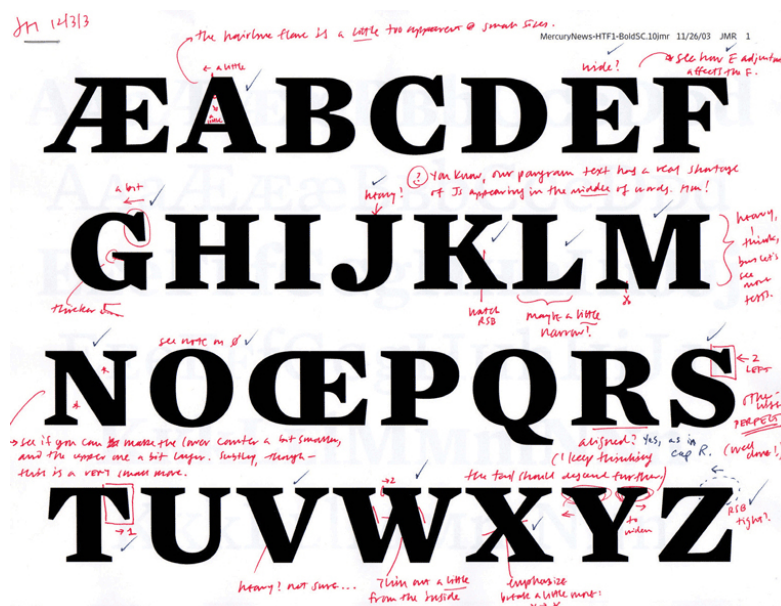

Figure 1: Example of typography. Retrieved from *Thinking with Type* (Lupton, 2004, p. 48)

Figure 2: Example of lettering. Retrieved from *Lettering & Type* (Willen & Strals, 2009, p. 74)

Figure 3: Example of typography manipulated, where several letters are merged and
adjusted to a specific composition (lettering). Retrieved from *Lettering & Type*
(Willen & Strals, 2009, p. 83)

O Democrata is an Aveiro newspaper published in the early 20th century, where it can be
found typography and lettering working together in the same graphic object. Typography that
already shows some signs of Art Nouveau aesthetics, by incorporating curvilinear details and
lettering in the headline of the newspaper with different solutions for the letter A or a special
design of the letter C, in a clear adaptation to the graphic needs in the composition.

Figure 4: Front page of O Democrata newspaper. Made available by
Aveiro's Art Nouveau Museum

Letters in the context of Art Nouveau

For over 400 years, typography dictated the aesthetics of compositions. Composing with movable type brought some limitations to graphic composition and this cycle was only interrupted by artists who took advantage of (the new) lithographic printing techniques creating new approaches to type design and letter use.

Based on the writings of Meggs (2012), Hollis (2000), Hauffe (1998), and Julier (1997), a selection of authors and works in the Art Nouveau movement was made to contextualize the movement and illustrate the typographic presence in the various productions of that time.

Figure 5: Some of the images presented in the masterclass illustrated the historical context.
Retrieved from various sources

Two of the most important graphic artists in the transition from the Victorian era to the Art Nouveau aesthetic were Jules Cherét and Eugène Grasset. Note the contrasting approaches in the visual languages explored by each of these artists, Cherét with a more exuberant one, using color, with condensed letters and diagonal or arched lettering compositions. And Grasset with a much modest approach, with images that project a more mythical and ethereal feel, using classic and traditional typography to complement the composition.

Lithography allowed a creative exploration hitherto unthinkable and Toulouse Lautrec was one of the artists who knew how to take advantage of this technology to develop numerous advertising posters visually influenced by Japanese Art, Impressionism, and Degas' outline drawings. In his works, sans serif and condensed letters, which emerged precisely in the last half of the nineteenth century, can be found as well as letters, drawn in contour and with shapes in a close relationship with the rest of the compositions.

For the masterclass, different examples were presented illustrating the variety of approaches that numerous artists from different locations had taken.

Téophile Alexandre Steinler did a lot of advertising work and book covers and one of his recurrent themes was cats, one of his great passions. In his body of work, Japanese influences can be seen, through the use of oriental motifs and the use of large patches of color that become the focal point of the composition. From a typographic point of view, Steiner is quite eclectic, drawing letters to fit de composition and reinforce the narrative or using calligraphic letters to emphasize the tenderness of the portrayed scene.

In Mucha's work, the dominant theme was the female figure surrounded by stylized forms derived from natural motifs, Moravian folk art, and Byzantine mosaics. Exploring the use of medieval-inspired lettering, geometric ornaments, and the organic and stylized forms of the female figures' hair he also explored ornamental patterns and the relationship between illustration and text areas, promoting the perfect dialogue between them.

In the United States, Art Nouveau specimens can also be found, initially created by French and British artists. Grasset, for example, designed several covers for Harper magazine, and Louis Rhead produced a vast array of posters, magazine covers, and assorted illustrations. Using the French poster as a model and, in particular, the work of Grasset, figures of slender maidens were portraited by Rhead, always preferring the use of vibrant and unexpected colors. He used a wide range of inspirations in his projects, from Victorian decorative ornaments to Arts and Crafts movement inspired shapes and curved and abstract linear patterns. In the letters that he draws, the warmest and most ornamental presence of French inspiration can be felt.

Another name in the US scene was Will Bradley. Influenced by English examples, he explored the technical limits of photomechanics to produce, repeat, overlap, and invert images. One of Bradley's most iconic projects is the American Chap-Book collection, comprising 12 small books that would become reference objects for many designers, not only for the general approach to editorial design but also, for the detailed use of type and the creation and use of new ornaments.

Undulating illustrations with symbolic shapes and colors accompanied by some organic and some geometric letters make up the set developed by Henri van de Velde for the Troppon brand. In addition to the well-known poster, several labels and advertisements were produced

by the author, always preferring to involve the spectator with symbolic references rather than providing them with the information in a very exhaustive way.

In 1908 van de Velde designed Thus Spoke Zarathustra, one of the most beautiful Art Nouveau books, teemed with vigorous shapes that, for example, fill the front pages of the core of the book. This project uses George Lemmen's typography, designed specifically for this project. This publication combines gold and dark red or black in unusual compositions. Gold ornaments that crown the column of text, chapters starting in the center of the page, or sections included in the text and marked by visual layouts are some examples of the unusual approach to page design in a book.

In the Netherlands it was the Art Nouveau movement that sowed the seeds of the future De Stijl and Art Deco movements, with book design being one of its main means of expression, promoting eccentricity and innovation. Strongly influenced by its colonies, the East Indies, Dutch artists integrated techniques (e.g., batik) and assimilated motifs (abstract shapes based on nature, linked to mathematics and geometry) that came from those faraway places. Groot and Chris Lebeau were two reference artists in the Dutch Art Nouveau scene.

In Germany designs that combined curvy styling with traditional realism is easy to find. Slightly inspired by French art nouveau, letters mimicked the fluidity and sweetness of the forms, set in pages with creative natural motifs.

In addition to Japanese and the Arts and Crafts movement inspirations, Art Nouveau in England also had its roots in Gothic Art, and it was with the inaugural publication of The Studio magazine that there was an opening towards a more international style.

Charles Ricketts, a specialist in woodcuts and typography, combined in his creations a meticulous knowledge of the Graphic Arts. He approached the book as a total entity, concentrating on the harmony between all the parts that compose it: text, image, and all graphic paratexts (binding, guard sheets, cover sheet, typography, and ornaments). In, The Sphinx, one of the most important works of his career, the text is set in small caps, printed in two colors (rust orange and olive green), and the composition, full of white spaces, is unprecedented.

From Scotland, a mention of the Glasgow School and some typographic examples created by Mackintosh, McNair, and the Macdonald sisters are characterized by lyrical originality and symbolic complexity, exploring a more geometric line of work, populated by floral and curvilinear elements with a strong straight structure.

Many others were influenced by The Four, and Talwin Morris was one of them. He became Art Director at Blackie and Sons, where he developed many books combining typographic and illustration approaches.

To finish the brief contextualization and display of Art Nouveau typographic examples, a reference to Koloman Moser and Alfred Roller and the posters created for the exhibition of the Viennese Secession, that show two very different approaches. One with a non-serif and more geometric font, printed in two colors on yellow paper, the other circumscribed in rectangles and whose typographic forms appear due to their minimal counter form, drawn only with fine lines.

Typefaces in the Art Nouveau Epoch

As seen in some of the previous examples, there were several typographic fonts developed between 1890 and 1920. We get to know them, not only from graphic objects where they were used but also, from the catalogs that type foundries printed to promote their creations.

At that time, those catalogs did not contain typographic specimens exclusively of Art Nouveau as they were collections that compiled several different styles and aesthetics. The main purpose of those catalogs was to feed the needs of the market and by so, they had a lot of different possibilities to choose from. However, it is possible to find many examples like the ones presented in Figure 6 and Figure 7, that fulfill the requirements of the Art Nouveau ideals. The first with a more expressive and decorative type, the second balancing typography and composition in a way closer to some Art Nouveau aesthetics and ideals.

Figure 6: A collection of Book Plate Designs by Louis Rhead. Retrieved from
https://archive.org/details/collectionofbook00rheaiala
(*A Collection of Book Plate Designs: Rhead, Louis, 1857-1926*, n.d.)
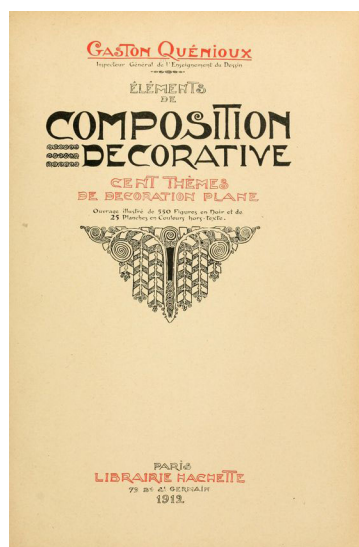
Figure 7: Composition Decorative. Retrieved from
https://archive.org/details/lmentsdecomposit00quni/page/n5/mode/2up (*Éléments de Composition Décorative; Cent Thêmes de Décoration Plane: Quénioux, Gaston*, n.d.)

In Portugal, many foundries approached the market this same way. In the pages of the Fundição Tipográfica Portugueza catalog, examples can be identified where the Art Nouveau spirit is present, and the drawings explore a more organic and undulating feature of the letters or mix visual references of Roman and Gothic letters.
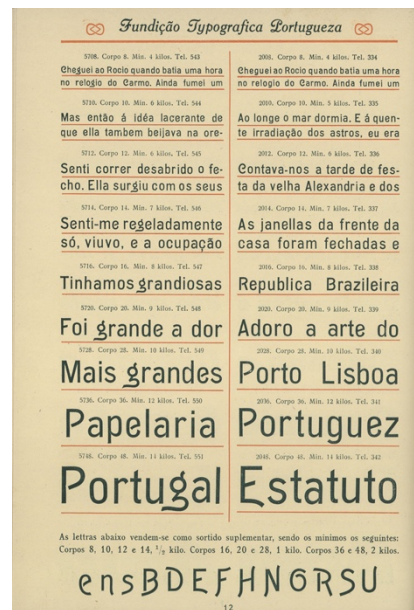

Figure 8: Fundição Tipográfica Portugueza catalog, page 12. Retrieved from https://purl.pt/39322 (*Biblioteca Nacional Digital*, n.d.)
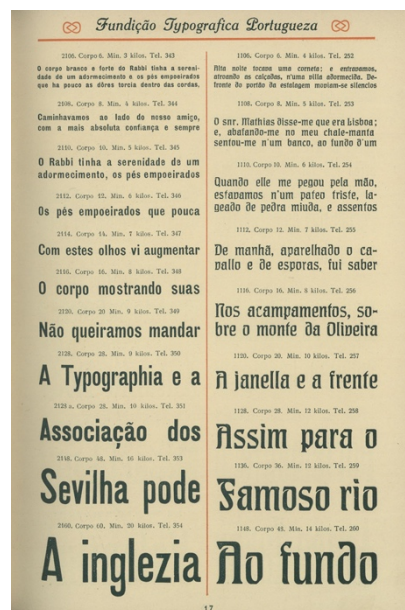
Figure 9: Fundição Tipográfica Portugueza catalog, page 17. Retrievied from https://purl.pt/39322 (*Biblioteca Nacional Digital*, n.d.)

Ornaments also played a very important role in the compositions of Art Nouveau publications, being made available by the foundries showing how they could be used in the composition of the page itself.
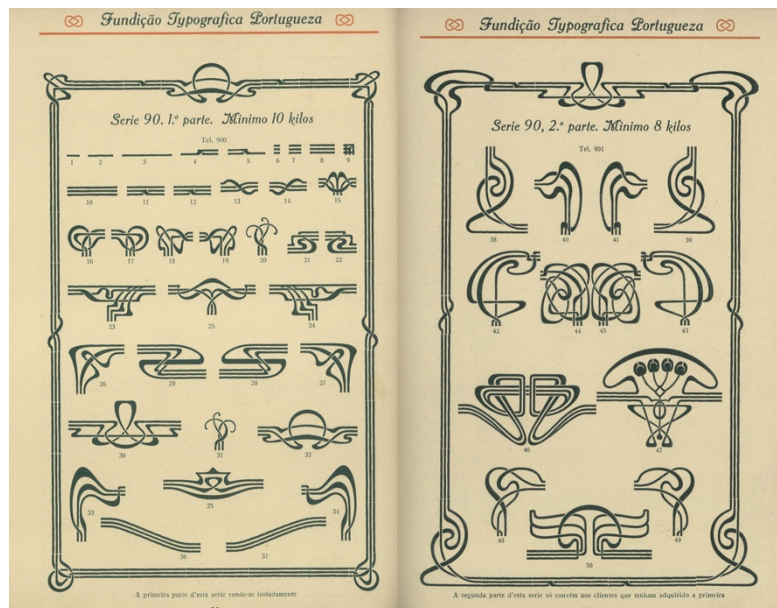
Figure 10: Fundição Tipográfica Portugueza catalog, page 39 and 39a. Retrieved from https://purl.pt/39322 (*Biblioteca Nacional Digital*, n.d.)

The existence of this activity of type design and casting leads to another possibility in the contemporary typographic scene which is typefaces revivals.

Art Nouveau revivals in digital type

As Quelhas et all (2021) referred "type revival is defined as the practice of taking a historical artifact as a reference in order to reproduce it, or reinterpret it, transforming it into something new, capturing its essence, but reinventing its shapes or in-use possibilities, adding something new and unique to the project".

In this specific case of Art Nouveau, revivals can be seen as just the digitization of a specimen that already existed and that is transferred to digital format and made available on our computers. However, the idea of a more interventionist and creative posture in which the author is not only inspired by something but also reinterprets it in the light of his own experience is equally interesting and explored by some Type designers.

Another possibility is that "many Projects are not revivals of historical typefaces in themselves, but of letterforms, labels, lettering or calligraphic specimens, among other ephemera" (Quelhas et all, 2021).

Once again, several examples were presented to make the participants aware of the variety and richness of typefaces that meet these requirements and can be called revivalists, and that came from different approaches.

Figure 11: Some of the images presented in the masterclass illustrated the typefaces revivals. Retrieved from various sources

Arnold Böcklin is a typeface for display use that was released in 1904 by Otto Weisert foundry and named after the Swiss Artist who died in 1901. It´s probably one of the best-known Art Nouveau typefaces that had a renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the general Art Nouveau revival in popular design.

Traces of the floral forms of the Jugendstil can be recognized in this typeface that was used mainly for larger point sizes and for that reason used on many posters. This is a font that explores a more decorative feeling rather than legibility.

Today many digital versions of this typeface can be found with slight differences, published by different type foundries. It's a heavily pirated font with many free versions available online.

This is something transversal to most of the typefaces that will be presented in this paper. However, it´s important to note that these free versions don´t always have all the necessary characters to write in a certain writing system. They often don´t include, for example, accents, diacritics, or specific glyphs that are more unusual but needed for writing in some specific language.

Eckmann is a typeface that Otto Eckmann developed as a typographer in 1899. It was cast for the first time in 1900 (by the Rudhard'schen GieBerei foundry) and the drawings of the letters were strongly influenced by Japanese calligraphy. In this typeface, it is quite visible how the use of a specific tool (in this case the brush) formally influences the final result of the typeface.

Hohenzollern was designed by Carl Albert Fahrenwaldt and Peter Wiegel in 1902 and the last revival (digitization) released was made by Petra Heidorn in 2004. This typeface presents itself as a hybrid that combines roman and gothic forms through the language of Jugendstil and, like other fonts like this, presents a set of alternated characters. In this case the letter "T" and "H".

As in the previous example, the *Behrens Schrift* (1902) was also considered by its author, the architect and designer Peter Behrens, to be a hybrid typeface. Behrens describes the final visual solution as the result of a whole set of procedures and decisions. The use of a specific tool (feather), common to Gothic calligraphy, and the decision to follow the principles of proportions, height, width, and stroke thickness used in German letters, discarding all that was superfluous. This font was complemented with an initials and ornaments version in 1906 and a cursive version in 1907, specifically designed to work with the Behrens Schrift, featuring a design with a faster and more loose rhythm.

Abaddon is a font designed by Dave Nalle of Scriptorium Fonts, inspired by the poster lettering of Art Nouveau, Alphons Mucha. With some characteristics of gothic lettering, with pointed demi-serifs and extended, very pointy descenders, it has been a very popular and widely used font for rock bands, tattoo artists, and many in the goth culture.

Willow is a contemporary typeface released in 1990 reminiscent of the work of Mackintosh and based upon a sign for the Willow Tea Room, one of three tea rooms in Glasgow designed by the artist. The typeface is distinct for the double crossbars on the uppercase A and H, and the unusual design of the uppercase O, which is raised above the baseline, with two dots centered beneath the bowl.

With design choices inspired by the Art Nouveau era, *Bagerich* is a font designed by Reza Rasenda & Riska Candra Dewi. Having a generous x-height, and high contrast, the organic design allows for refined visual compositions. Bagerich comes with stylistic, alternates, and ligatures and supports multilingual languages.

Developed by the Portuguese Type designer Rafael Serra (Fael), *Antiga* was inspired by both Roman font and Art Nouveau. The result is a light and condensed font, that includes a set of ligatures (e.g., CH) and diacritics that explore a lot of the Art Nouveau typographic composition and aesthetics.

Created from the letters drawn by Alfred Roller, Nick Curtis released *Versacrum NF* in 2015, as a very faithful interpretation version of the original. Black blocks are carved only by thin lines that reveal the letter's counterforms. This isn't the only revival of its kind, and many more can be found through a quick online search.

Approaches, methods, and tools in contemporary type design

Throughout this paper, it was possible to grasp, just like Willen and Strals state, that "like a set of building blocks, a typeface is a kit of parts that can be reconfigured and reworked into countless forms on a moment's notice" (2009).

Centering on the process of creating digital fonts, and as Karen Cheng (2006) mentions "there is no single, 'correct' process for creating a typeface. (…) the methodologies of individual designers are as unique and varied as the designs themselves. (…)", assuming that different authors have different theories and approaches to the type design process.

However, in her book Designing Type, Cheng suggests a methodology quite close to what some professional type designers use. A set of steps where different tasks are developed, thus systematizing the act of designing typography.

Being a subtle activity, type designing needs to balance the difficulty to alter the shape of a letter without losing legibility. It is possible to experiment with structural variation and that comes from the knowledge of the variables in type design, like the x-height, the existence or not of serifs, the stress of the letter and its contrast, the weight or the set of characters made available.

The motivation behind the design of a typeface may vary and inspiration might come from different places. In this case, all the examples presented before were from Art Nouveau printed artifacts, buildings, or letters.

Type designers usually start by drawing two characters, a round letter like o and a semi-round letter like n. Beginning with lowercase letters is always better because they have greater variation in shape (with ascending and descending elements). Only with these two letters, it is possible to retain much of the font's DNA.

The process continues with de creation of a few more letters, with a more complex and unusual form. Once again letters that contain a lot of genetic information such as the g and the s and letters that had descender or ascender strokes, like the letters p or d, are preferable.

After finishing a small set of letters, it´s possible to start testing the font in small words, this being one of the most important aspects of type designing. The letters don't exist alone, they are made to walk together, forming words and sentences, being essential to test how they relate to each other in terms of thickness, shapes, and counter forms.

In the Latin alphabet, some letters formally relate to others, allowing the reuse of the shapes for the construction of other letters, making the overall work much easier and faster. However, in the final design, all letters need adjustments so that the shapes are visually balanced.
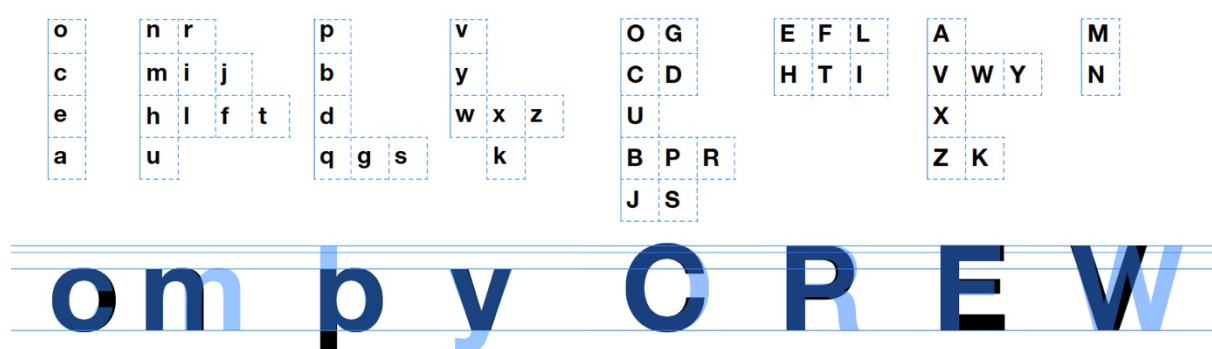

Figure 12: Formal relationship between characters

During this process, word tests should be carried out and the drawings adjusted accordingly. It is at this point that the drawings are digitized and inserted into specific software for font implementation.

There are many options available on the market, some for professional use others more amateur, some paid, and some free. In the masterclass, a paid option was presented (Fontself, a Photoshop plugin), allowing less experienced designers to take the first approach to type

design. After a brief demonstration, it was clear that it was very easy to use and the learning curve for this specific tool was almost non-existent.

Outcomes (Conclusions)

At the end of the masterclass, a short exercise was launched, to bring to the discussion everything presented. Taking as a starting point O Democrata newspaper and its typographic samples, and assuming a font based on the newspaper's headline would be developed, the audience was asked which typographic variables should be taken into account to do it. Some features were identified, and it was clear that these technicians were more sensible to typographic details than at the beginning of the session.

The approach to this masterclass was an adaptation of some contents of the Typography Curriculum taught at Aveiro University, made intelligible to people without any training in this area. By providing this new perspective on letters in Art Nouveau, it was possible to open the debate on the possibilities that each technician envisioned in the context of their museums.

They referred to the possibility of researching and studying existing materials in museums (either 2 or 3D specimens) from this new typographic perspective. Up until that moment, they weren't aware of this kind of opportunity, but with this new viewpoint, made that possibility viable.

They talked about creating oriented visits centered on Art Nouveau typography alone and developing promotional graphic materials on that behalf and mentioned the possibility of creating specific activities in the educational service, centered on observation and development of new typefaces.

As educators ourselves and part of an academic institution, we add the possibility of new connections and partnerships between museums and the Academy. Supporting research and survey of existing materials, bringing specific knowledge to the museums, and developing typographic projects that enlarge their meaning. For this matter, we foresee the creation of typographic fonts, seminars, or establishing new connections with local industries that are related to this trade.

As a final note, this master class had a great receptivity from these museum technicians, who, by knowing a little more about this very specific area, realized that they could explore it as another argument for the creative dynamization of museums.

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